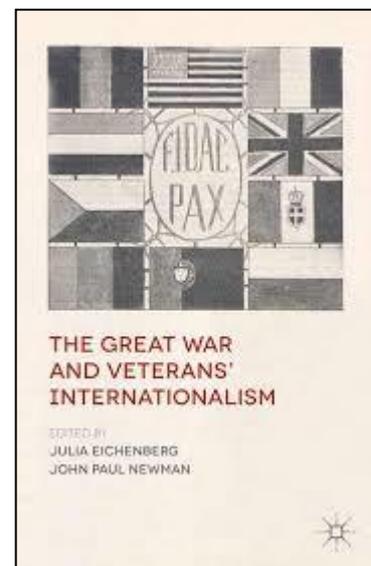


EICHENBERG, Julia y NEWMAN, John Paul (eds.): *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism*, Londres, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 248 pp.

*Alessandro Salvador
Università degli Studi di Trento*

The fighters will not fight again: World War I veterans and the struggle for a lasting peace.

Millions of ex-servicemen represented the most evident, difficult and sometimes dangerous heritage that the Great War left to Europe. In every country, the soldiers returning from the front faced the uncertainty of peace-time, struggled with their war-experience and looked after a new life. Yet, the majority of ex-servicemen simply returned to civilian life, trying to forget the war and not joining any form of organized movement or association. Even if only representing a minority of the ex-servicemen, however, veterans' organizations did play a relevant role in the inter-war period. The influence that those associations had in the politics of the respective countries as well as in violent insurgencies in the after-war period has been object of several studies and encountered great fortune.



By providing us with this book, however, Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman aimed at emphasizing the role that veterans' organizations played in prompting world peace by operating in an international and transnational context.

The ten chapters of this book provides several perspectives on the transnational dimension of national veterans' organizations as well as on the international associations of ex-servicemen, namely the Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants (FIDAC) and the Conférence Internationale des Associations de Mutilés et Anciens Combattants (CIAMAC). The first included the veterans of the Entente powers and their allied, while the second was open to all associations of ex-servicemen.

War veterans across the borders shared the common experience of the trenches and therefore considered themselves the most legitimized to talk about peace and disarmament. Despite the existence of different approaches to the memory of the war, summarized in the concepts of cultures of victory and defeat, ex-servicemen in every country organized themselves to play a role in the inter-war society in their countries and on a transnational level.

The editors also suggests that those transnational experiences for peace in the interwar period prepared the background of the peace movement after the Second World War.

This continuity is exemplified in the first essay, by Antoine Prost, focused on the life and actions of Rene Cassin. This figure was a strong supporter of the rights of ex-servicemen as well as one of the founders of the CIAMAC. Critical of League of Nations' lack of power

and of the appeasement strategies Cassin continued his activities for peace also at the end of the second conflict.

The concept of appeasement mostly represent the dark side of the veterans' struggle for peace. The essay of Niall Barr about the British Legion and its attempts to avoid a new war at all costs is very interesting in showing this paradox. Barr clearly shows how the brotherhood of the trenches, that the British Legion used to establish bridges towards the enemies, could lead to some incapability in analyzing the worst development. Then, in the continuous attempts to preserve peace with Germany, British ex-servicemen even volunteered to help with the transfer of the Sudetes to the German Reich.

Stephen R. Ortiz then, gives an interesting perspective on how some veterans' organizations intended their activism for peace and how they differed from the main pacifist movements. Two aspects of Ortiz's essay are very fascinating. First, it shows that the ex-servicemen of the American Legion, differently for the American government, strongly advocated the participation of their country to the League of Nations, opposing the mainstream isolationism. Second, this example clearly represents how veterans did not always considered disarmament as strictly connected with peace. In fact, the American Legion seemed to support military investments as a pre-condition for preserving peace.

The second group of essays presents very interesting insights on the peculiar situations that developed in the new born national States of Eastern and Southern Europe. Julia Eichenberg shows how the identity of ex-servicemen partially shaped the Polish national identity by helping to overcome the differences arose during the war, when Polish soldiers served in different and even enemies armies. A similar case is examined by John Paul Newman about the Yugoslavian ex-servicemen. Furthermore, this example shows how difficult was to synthesize the different war experiences and the memories of soldiers that fought against each other. The transnational context and organizations like the FIDAC and the CIAMAC played an important role in helping to create common veterans' identities in this peculiar cases. This worked efficiently in the Czechoslovakian case, described by Natali Stegmann, in which the international context was essential for the Czech and German ex-servicemen to unite with the common aim of achieving social rights and benefits.

Two essays are dedicated to the cultures of defeat in the transnational field. William Mulligan focused on the German *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold*. Born some years after the end of the war, the Republican association of ex-servicemen aimed at opposing the dominant nationalist and rightist monopole over the war experience. The *Reichsbanner* supported the democratic government and looked for a dialogue with the former enemies, differentiating itself from the dominant revisionist view represented by the *Stahlhelm Bund der Frontsoldaten* and, lately, by the National Socialists.

The Italian case presented by Martina Salvante is interesting as it refers to the culture of defeat of a winning country. In this example, the dichotomy between the transnational dimension focused on peace and dialogue within the FIDAC and the CIAMAC and the contradictory attitude of the expansionist and belligerent Fascist regime. As Salvante correctly stated, further research should help understand how far the transnational dimension of Italian veter-

ans was sincere or merely functional to distract the foreign powers from the aims of the regime.

In the two final essays, Thomas Richard Davies and John Horne focused on the international organizations and their results. Davies pointed out how the FIDAC and the CIAMAC joint efforts contributed to a major phenomenon of a transnational civil society that acted in the interests of peace and dialogue. He also showed that despite claiming of being representatives of all the ex-servicemen, the international organizations merely represented their leadership and could not, at the end, resolve the differences existing between the national organizations. John Horne correctly observes that the cultures of victory and defeat cannot entirely represent all the national experiences of ex-servicemen. Also, not all the veterans organized themselves after the war. Veterans' organizations played an important role in the transnational field, but they also overestimated their importance and their capability to represent the entirety of the war experience.

Altogether, the book is very well structured and provides interesting and well-argued perspectives over veterans' internationalism. The cases described cover the most of the peculiarities that can be encountered by dealing with ex-servicemen's associations in Europe and North America and perfectly follows the initial guidelines. The aim was to represent the cases that showed a different paradigm compared to the dominant elements of post-war violence and nationalist revisionism and it was well achieved. However, the element of violence persisted in some of the organizations considered. The *Reichsbanner*, for instance, was born as a paramilitary republican organization that referred to the war-experience in opposition to the *Stahlhelm*. It was not in the aim of the editors to provide references on the transnationalism of nationalist's organizations. However, an essay covering the cases of *Stahlhelm* and *Jungdeutsche Orden* in Germany could have given an element of comparison with the fascist-influenced Italian ex-servicemen's organizations.

The last observations, however, should be mostly seen as a suggestion for further researches. The book edited by Eichenberg and Newman should be read by anyone interested in the complex and partially unclear development of international and transnational connections in the interwar period. The presence of some minor shortcomings only confirms that this work explored new perspectives that still needs further research and involvement.