

The Recruiting Crisis

As we approach the two and a half year mark of brutal war and occupation of Iraq, the United States' war aims lay exposed. There are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Iraqis have not greeted the U.S. military as "liberators". There was no connection between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. According to a November 2004 study by the British medical journal Lancet, 100,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the occupation. U.S. casualties near the 2000 mark.

As a result, more and more Americans are questioning the war. The polls are startling: according to an Associated Press poll conducted on August 22, only 37% of Americans approve of Bush's handling of the war in Iraq and 53% of Americans believe that going to war with Iraq was a mistake. A July 27 Gallop poll found that 51% of American believe that Bush deliberately misled the public about WMD in Iraq. A Harris poll conducted from August 9-16 shows that 61% believe that troops should be withdrawn in the next year.

It is in this context that the U.S. military is finding itself in a crisis. As the occupation continues with no end in sight, the military is scrambling to fill its ranks. According to Major General Michael Rochelle, "Today's conditions represent the most challenging conditions we have seen in recruiting in my 33 years in this uniform." The Army missed its recruiting deadlines four out of the first six months in 2005, including missing its deadline by some 42 percent for the month of April. It will miss its 2005 recruiting deadline. The Army National Guard has missed its deadline in each of the last nine months as of July. The Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) enrollment has slipped by 16 percent over the last two years. The Marines, who take the brunt of U.S. casualties in Iraq, missed recruiting goals for four straight months earlier this year.

The military is stretched to its limit. Carrying out an occupation against the will of the Iraqi people – and a possible invasion of Iran or Syria requires a large, reliable military force. That means that the U.S. military is desperate for more warm bodies to fight Bush's war.

The Recruiters' Lies

Military recruiters rarely describe the real horrors of war and life inside the military. They won't tell potential recruits that 27 to 28 percent of the survivors of Gulf

War I suffer chronic health problems, most linked to the use of depleted uranium (DU) -- that is still being used in Iraq. They won't tell recruits that as of March 2005, 12,000 of approximately 245,000 returning soldiers from war in Afghanistan and Iraq had been in VA hospitals to be treated for Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) or that one in four vets from the current war in Iraq have already been in for medical treatment. As Bob Herbert of the New York Times put it about a Selective Service System pamphlet that boasted about paid vacation and dental care, "There was no mention of combat, or what it's like to walk the corridors and the grounds of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, where you'll see a tragic, unending parade of young men and women struggling to move about, despite their paralysis..."

They do not prepare you for what conscientious objector Kevin Benderman witnessed on his first tour of duty in Iraq: "Somewhere along the route there was this one woman standing along side the road with a young girl of about 8 or 9 years old and the little girl's arm was burned all the way up her shoulder and I don't mean just a little blistered, I mean she had 3rd degree burns the entire length of her arm and she crying in pain because of the burns. I asked the troop executive officer if we could stop and help the family and I was told that the medical supplies that we had were limited and that we may need them. I informed him that I would donate my share to that girl but we did not stop to help her."

Military recruiters do promise education, job training and benefits. They attempt to systematically target those who can't afford an education, often minorities. The U.S. Army Recruiting School Handbook admits as much, "Over the years individuals have stated that money for college was one of the dominant reasons for their enlisting in the Army." In the same handbook, recruiters are encouraged to "contact your first-year college students to see if they returned to school. How is their second semester financial situation?"

Recruiters promise enlistment bonuses of up to \$20,000 and up to \$70,000 in funding for college education. The little known fact is that the military actually makes \$72 million a year on its educational program because so few actually qualify for the benefits. Only 15% of soldiers from all services end up with a college degree and less than 10% of all Army recruits use any funds from the Army College Fund.

Though the Pentagon talks of increasing bonuses in an attempt to attract new recruits, these aren't all they're cracked up to be either. According to a recent New York Times article, only 6 percent of Army enlistees actually receive a \$20,000 bonus and in 31 of 33 job categories recruits were more likely to receive nothing.

Military recruiters often claim that the military is the best place for on the job training. This is another lie. In fact, according to a 1989 study by two Ohio State researchers, only 6% of female and 12% of male veterans in civilian jobs make use of the skills learned in the military. The American Friends Service Committee notes that veterans earn between 11% and 19% less than non-veterans in similar backgrounds.

There have recently been several documented cases of recruiters misleading and lying to high school students, causing the military to halt recruiting on May 20, 2005. The most egregious case involved a Houston recruiter caught on tape telling a young man that he would be arrested if he didn't show up to his recruiting session. A Colorado teenager went undercover to an Army recruiter for a newspaper story saying he was a high school dropout. The recruiter told him to get a fake diploma. These practices are commonplace. As former Marine recruiter turned antiwar activist Chris Dugan writes, "That (recruiting) quota was the most important thing. Not what you could contribute to the Marine Corps, or the supposed ideal of defending your country."

Discrimination

The military is a notoriously sexist and homophobic institution. One in three women in the military report being sexually assaulted. The military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy prevents any members of the LGBT community in the army from being open about their sexuality. This policy contributes to an unbearable atmosphere for the LGBT community. As a Human Rights Watch report points out, "In March 2000, the Defense Department published a study showing that eighty percent of service members surveyed randomly had heard offensive speech, derogatory names, jokes, or negative remarks about gay men or lesbians during the previous year. Eighty-five percent believed such comments were tolerated to some extent. Thirty-seven percent reported they had witnessed or experienced an incident they considered to be anti-gay harassment."

Don't Ask Don't Tell openly violates many high school and college anti-discrimination codes, yet the military is still allowed on campus. Many activists have pointed out this blatant contradiction when demanding that the military be removed.

This is Not a "Free Speech" Issue

As the movement against the military on campuses has gathered steam, many administrations and pro-war activists have argued that while antiwar activists have a right to protest the war, military recruiters have a right to "free speech". The most obvious irony of this argument was made evident in the last year. Counter-recruitment and antiwar activists have faced enormous repression on college campuses across the country. Besides, it is not as if military recruiters are merely making pro-war arguments in the abstract. Military recruiters are attempting, through documented lies and manipulation to sign people up for an occupation that has left thousands of Iraqis and Americans dead and wounded. Michael Lewtin, currently co-convenor of US Labor Against the War, was a participant in the movement in 1980 to take on military recruitment at U Mass-Boston took this argument on in a pamphlet entitled, "We Oppose Military Recruiting at UMB":

If organized crime set up a table in building 020 to 'recruit' assassins would anyone defend their 'right to free speech?' If pimps came to 'recruit' prostitutes or heroin pushers 'recruited' junkies, would crowds of angry students gather in their defense? Hardly. That type of 'speech' is directly related to activity so obviously dangerous and wrong that no one defends them.

Why then is military recruitment different? We've seen that the military serves as the armed wing of big business, that it actively encourages racism and sexism, and that its purpose is to suppress by murder popular movements whether in Vietnam, the non white communities in the U.S., the unions or the universities. As such, it is the most deadly and large scale form of 'organized' crime in the world today. It is legal (as was slavery 100 years ago) only because those who make the laws (the corporations and their representatives) need it to survive. But like organized crime, pimps, heroin pushers and slave traders, it has no right to organize anyone into its criminal activities. Legal or not, it must be stopped.

Building a Counter-Recruitment Movement

The movement against military recruiting in high schools and colleges took off on January 20, 2005, the day of Bush's inauguration, when 200 students at Seattle Central Community College surrounded a recruiters' table and forced him to leave. The image was captured by the mainstream media and became inspiration for student antiwar activists throughout the country. Many member groups of the Campus Antiwar Network (CAN) subsequently took actions against recruiters on their campuses. Students at University of California-Santa Cruz, San Francisco State University, New York University, City College of New York, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Illinois-Chicago, Kennedy High School in Minnesota, Southern Connecticut State University and other campuses all initiated actions which forced recruiters to leave or cancel recruiting sessions. Columbia University in New York attempted to bring ROTC back on campus but a movement that CAN took part in helped prevent that from taking place.

CAN has lots of ambitious goals for the coming year, along with continuing its campaigns against recruiting at each school. CAN has initiated a "College Not Combat" contingent in the nationwide antiwar marches on September 24 in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. CAN is a part of a "College Not Combat" ballot initiative in San Francisco and will be part of the National Student Counter-Recruiting Conference at UC-Berkeley on October 22 and 23. You should join your local CAN chapter in their efforts, or start your own!

We believe that it is not enough to convince people on an individual level that the military is a bad idea. For every individual the movement can convince to not join the military, there are hundreds more that will fall prey to lies and deception. We need to build a movement that will force the military out of our school and our classrooms for good, so that no student is recruited because he or she doesn't know if they will have enough money for school or because they are concerned about job opportunities. We believe that the money that is going to fight the occupation of Iraq and the \$4 billion spent annually on military recruiting should be spent on real educational opportunities and job funding. The best way to win that demand is to build a mass movement to get recruiters off our campuses for good.

College Not Combat:



Get the Military Out of Our Schools!

Campus Antiwar Network
campusantiwar.net