

Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire

Total War and Everyday Life in World War I

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1 Food and the politics of sacrifice

Der Morgen, a newspaper affiliated with the Imperial Organization of Austrian Housewives, wrote in 1917, "Completely altered conditions make for completely altered people."¹ In the context of World War I, this statement could have applied to any number of scenarios: to soldiers' life-altering encounters with the machines of modern warfare; to the geographic upheaval of millions of war refugees; or to the pain of a single family dealing with the death of a father or son. But in 1917 Vienna, the "altered conditions" referred to a catastrophic food shortage, and the "altered people" to distressing new modes of social interaction brought on by hunger. In this wealthy imperial capital, residents were theoretically allotted only 830 calories of nourishment per day, and in practice could not obtain even this small amount.² By the end of the war, a medical study found that 91 percent of Viennese schoolchildren were mildly to severely undernourished.³ A journalist noted how food had come to dominate the collective psyche of wartime Vienna: "Every conversation we have is merely pretense and circles back to the question of the supply room. It appears we think only with our stomachs. We talk of menus. We dream of cookbooks."⁴ The food shortage soured personal relations among the Viennese; it called the bluff of the Vienna War Exhibition, which depicted the home front as a community of shared interest;⁵ and by destroying an implicit wartime contract between civilians and the state, the food crisis created another front in the Habsburg war effort.⁶

¹ *Der Morgen*, 20 January 1917, 6.

² Hans Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung der Völkernahrung im Kriege*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1926), 335. This figure is for a regular worker; a hard laborer (*Schwerarbeiter*) was entitled to 1,292 calories.

³ Clemens von Pirquet, "Ernährungszustand der Kinder in Österreich während des Krieges und der Nachkriegszeit," in Clemens von Pirquet (ed.), *Völksgesundheit im Kriege*, 2 vols., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1926), I, 158.

⁴ "Das tägliche Brot," *Neue Freie Presse*, 1 August 1916, 1. ⁵ See chapter 2, below.

⁶ See the ground-breaking work of Richard Plaschka et al. (eds.), *Innere Front: Militärassistenz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918*, 2 vols. (Munich:

Food figured prominently in reports of even the most dramatic high political events of the Viennese home front. In October, 1916, the wildly unpopular Austrian prime minister Karl Stürgkh was assassinated while eating lunch at the hotel restaurant Meissel und Schadn. While news reports focused immediately on the sensational identity of the assassin, radical socialist Fritz Adler, son of Viktor Adler, one of the party's most venerable members, the second angle of interest on the story was Stürgkh's lunch itself. Widely blamed for Austria's wartime food crisis, the prime minister had been dining on a bowl of mushroom soup, boiled beef with mashed turnips, pudding and a wine spritzer. No one could prove that Stürgkh's last meal had been in violation of rationing laws, but he had eaten a better lunch that day than most Viennese, and his death evoked little public sympathy.

World War I historians have been particularly drawn to food because of the ways that food figured in the rhetoric of sacrifice in total war in the different belligerent countries.⁷ In Russia, the connections between scarcity and large-scale political change have long been recognized. Barbara Alpern Engel writes, "It is virtually an axiom that wartime scarcity and inflation contributed decisively to the downfall of the tsar."⁸ While historians of other European countries have not accorded scarcity as prominent a place in their political narratives of the period, several have noted that food crises most often played out in streets and marketplaces, beyond the bounds of traditional political institutions, and that food riots involving "non-political" actors such as women and children require an expanded definition of politics.⁹ Lynne Taylor concludes that food riots of the early

R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1974) for another interpretation of an "inner front" in the Habsburg war effort. The volumes recount in great detail the nationalities conflicts within the Habsburg military and efforts to combat them.

⁷ For Germany, see Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). For Russia, see Barbara Alpern Engel, "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I," *JMH* 69 (December 1997), 696–721; Lars T. Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For Britain, see J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 1986), ch. 7. Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis, "Feeding the Cities," in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Capital Cities at War: London, Paris, Berlin 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 305–41, offers a comparison of food conditions in three European capitals. For the continuing relationship of food and politics in Austria after World War II, see Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann and Ela Hornung, "War and Gender Identity: The Experience of Austrian Women, 1945–1950," in David F. Good et al. (eds.), *Austrian Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Providence/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), 213–33.

⁸ Engel, "Not by Bread Alone," 697.

⁹ See Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, for rejection of the thesis that food demands are essentially "economic," not "political"; Berthold Unfried, in "Arbeiterproteste und Arbeiterbewegung in Österreich während des Ersten Weltkrieges" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1990), undermines much of his own otherwise sound analysis when he concludes, after spelling out the many similarities and parallel developments of food

twentieth century are examples of "politics happening outside of the political arena."¹⁰ But in wartime Vienna, food *was* the political arena. At all levels of Viennese society – from women vegetable sellers at Vienna's Naschmarkt, to the mayor and his advisers, to the paper trail of memos of the War Ministry, Ministry of the Interior and the Police Department – food dwarfed other matters of public concern. Traditional political institutions such as parties (and their affiliated newspapers), the city council and the parliament were restricted or shut down by the dictates of war, leaving a vacuum where "politics" had once taken place. Food, because it directly affected the mental and physical functions of the human body, quickly filled this vacuum. Markets, streets, restaurants, private and public "war kitchens" and any other site of food distribution or consumption formed Vienna's new arena of politics. World War I introduced a novel and important variable into the tangled web of Viennese social identities: one's access to or distance from food.

A study of food provides clues for understanding the relationship of the state and an emergent citizenry that included women and children.¹¹ Historical literature on modern citizenship has focused on an implicit contract between the state and male citizens, whereby soldiering conferred citizenship; by fighting and offering their lives, men were granted this exclusive status. As had been argued at various junctures in European history, women could not be citizens of the first order because they did not serve and sacrifice for the state as soldiers.¹² Nor, for that matter, could minors of either sex. This assumption about the logic of citizenship was current in World War I Vienna, as recounted by Emmy Freundlich, a socialist activist:

When women approached the state before the war to demand their political rights, they were always told they couldn't ask for the same voting rights as men because

demonstrations and workers' strikes, "Sicher waren die Lebensmittelunruhen weder in ihren Formen noch in ihrer politischen Bedeutung den großen Streiks 1917/18 vergleichbar," 79. For the street as a site of politics, see Thomas Lindenberger, *Strassenpolitik: Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin, 1900–1914* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1995).

¹⁰ Lynne Taylor, "Food Riots Revisited," *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 2 (Winter, 1996): 483–96, 493.

¹¹ Much historiography on modern European citizenship (especially France and Germany) examines the relationship of individual to collective, whereas the focus in Habsburg historiography has been the relationship of the collective (nation) to the state. The Western European individual approach has produced significant work on women and citizenship, while the collective-state approach of Habsburg historians has all but ignored the place of women as citizens. One recent exception to the collective-state approach is Hannelore Burger, "Zum Begriff der österreichischen Staatsbürgerschaft: Vom Josephinischen Gesetzbuch zum Staatsgrundgesetz über die allgemeinen Rechte der Staatsbürger," in Thomas Angerer et al. (eds.), *Geschichte und Recht: Festschrift für Gerald Stourzh zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1999), 207–23.

¹² Jean Bethke Elshaint, *Women and War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

their claim to these rights was not based on the universal military service of men. On account of being women (*durch ihres Frauentum*) they were hindered from performing the highest act of citizen duty: to give one's life for the well-being of the state.¹³

But debates about food show that women and children – those we might think of as “second order” citizens – were entering into a new exchange with the state during World War I. If the exchange – blood for citizenship – could not be contracted with women and children, how was the state to secure their cooperation and support? Civilians were clearly “involved” in the war, but what were the terms of their involvement? Food would play a significant part in the answers to these questions.

Two key terms – the duty of *Durchhalten* and virtue of *Opferwilligkeit* – framed civilian participation in the war. *Durchhalten*, “holding out” or “endurance,” was an essentially *passive* duty. Unlike the soldier, who performed duty actively – fighting, defending or displaying acts of bravery – the civilian's duty was to wait and perhaps suffer, but to do so quietly. Holding out was a means of honoring the more celebrated sacrifice of soldiers.¹⁴ The highest home-front virtue was *Opferwilligkeit*, the willingness to sacrifice resources and especially comfort. The increasingly dire food shortage, and the state's inability to remedy it, disrupted this rather one-sided arrangement. Hungry home-front residents began asking what they were holding out *for*, and what they might expect in return for their sacrifice. They had expected, and were ready to accommodate, inconvenience and burden, but they were not willing to passively endure hunger, illness and even death. As the food crisis wore on, and makeshift distribution schemes broke down, those on the home front who had been called on by the state to sacrifice articulated a powerful new identity for themselves: war victims. The German word *Opfer* – which means both sacrifice *and* victim – provides the semantic underpinning for the trajectory traced in this chapter, the story of how chronic food shortage destroyed assumptions about the role of the civilian in war.

As we shall see, the war precipitated urgent calls for “holding out” and public trumpeting of the “willingness to sacrifice.” When the state failed to provide food to the capital city, civilians abandoned the assigned role of heroic helpers of their even more heroic soldiers, and began to see themselves as war victims.¹⁵ This raises the question of just who or what

¹³ WSLB ZAS Staatliche Unterstutzungen II, “Die Mütter und der Staat,” *Arbeiterzeitung*, 24 November 1916.

¹⁴ “Holding-out” was a common way of characterizing civilian duty in other European countries. See Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), ch. 1.

¹⁵ For recent work on the exchange between the state and those who claim victim status, see Joseph A. Amato, *Victims and Values: A History and Theory of Suffering* (New York:

was doing the victimizing. The Viennese identified three sources of their victimization: (1) They felt themselves to be victims of the Habsburg imperial structure itself. Not only had other territories (Hungary, in particular) cut off food supplies to Vienna, but the capital was also expected to absorb hundreds of thousands of refugees (read: mouths to feed) from outlying imperial provinces. From the Viennese perspective, even the farmers in the Lower Austrian lands around Vienna had betrayed the capital by withholding food. (2) They considered themselves victims of state and municipal leaders who failed to secure food imports, whose myriad distribution and rationing schemes broke down, and who were utterly incapable of combating inflation and the tactics of war profiteers. (3) The final and perhaps most socially disruptive element of the “victim complex” was the Viennese belief that they were being victimized by fellow citizens. Outrage at Hungary or at municipal authorities paled in comparison to the ire provoked by the figure of the profiteer, who could be lurking anywhere, any time, as the great monster of wartime injustice.

Finally, we shall examine the practice of *Anstellen* – lining up – in front of shops and at markets. This seemingly innocuous practice was the flash point for regular, sustained civilian violence and rioting. In return for their sacrifices, the women and children of the lower and middle classes who participated in the food riots had a specific demand of the state: fair and equal distribution of the food supply. In concrete terms, they did not achieve their goals. The food shortage in Vienna never abated and in fact worsened in the immediate postwar period. But the food crisis – culminating in “lining up” and rioting – had serious consequences for the Habsburg war effort. The result was a dissolution of community – of relations between neighbors, between customers and shopkeepers and between residents and local authorities. By 1917, the persistent refusal to perform duties and the frequent rebellions against authorities amounted to civilian mutiny. In waging World War I, state and military officials needed a stable, productive, *passive* home front. When the capital city became a front in its own right, statesmen found they had lost the realm of “not war” upon which the project of war depended.¹⁶ In certain respects,

Praeger, 1990). Greg Eghigian, “The Politics of Victimization: Social Pensioners and the German Social State in the Inflation of 1914–1924,” *Central European History* 26, no. 4 (1993), 375–403; Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁶ For the dissolution of the boundaries between front and home front in total war, see Elisabeth Domansky's provocative and meticulously argued “ Militarization and Reproduction in World War I Germany,” in Geoff Eley (ed.), *Society, Culture and the State in Germany 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 427–63.

the victims of the home front were more dangerous to the state than the victims on the battlefields: the latter were killed and could be memorialized as heroes, but the former stuck around as hungry, noisy reminders that states have obligations to those from whom they demand sacrifice.

Civilian duties: *Durchhalten* and *Opferwilligkeit*

The following declaration from Lower Austrian Governor Bienert, posted in the streets of Vienna, contains three key elements in the wartime discourse of sacrifice on the home front:

Notice!

Our enemies have openly declared that in order to achieve victory, they want to starve us . . .

A recent review shows that we have sufficient provisions to last until the next harvest – assuming we practice strict frugality when using the abundant resources of our fatherland, and that we sacrifice not our health but our pleasures and comfort. But these are hardly sacrifices when compared to those made to the fatherland by our brothers in the field!¹⁷

First, by drawing attention to the blockade imposed on the Central Powers by the Allied Powers, the governor cast the food shortage as a consequence of enemy actions against civilians. He stressed that the food question was rooted in the *external* politics of war. Second, he proposed that the solution to the shortage lay in civilian willingness to sacrifice all but the essential foods and resources. With frugality and discipline, civilians themselves had the means to foil enemy intentions. These sacrifices would not be *so* great, however, that civilian health would be jeopardized. Finally, he juxtaposed civilian sacrifices to those made by soldiers, suggesting, as was common in wartime discourse, that the former would be minor in comparison.

When the Allies (led by Britain) began to implement their blockade of the Central Powers in 1914, Vienna newspapers relayed the scandal: “Starvation War!”, “Enemies Instigate Economic War!”, “They Want to Starve Us Out!”¹⁸ The terrifying prospect of a starvation war (*Aushungerungskrieg*) was cast as an act of enemy cowardliness: “What they could not do by summoning their mass armies, they want to achieve by cutting off our imports of foodstuffs and placing our population in

¹⁷ Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Flugblätter-Sammlung 5/102.

¹⁸ For the series of measures that cumulatively constituted “the blockade,” see C. Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), ch. 2.

danger of starvation.”¹⁹ The Allied action was not specifically a blockade of foodstuffs, but the Austrian government portrayed it as such because of the resonance that hunger had with civilians. An “iron blockade” or a “steel blockade” would not have had the same emotional pull with residents on the home front. In fact, Austria-Hungary was, for the most part, *self-sufficient in food production* before the war, so a food blockade should not have had drastic consequences.²⁰ But as a strategy for mobilizing civilians, “starvation war” was an effective tool; every woman and child in Vienna could imagine herself or himself targeted by the external enemy in a very immediate way, via the aches and pains of hunger.

With a personal, bodily stake in surviving a starvation war, Viennese women discussed their management of food in new, state-oriented terms. The scarcity of food demanded flexible, creative preparation. One columnist noted, “Ever since [the enemy] has wanted to starve us out, it has become a matter of honor to carry out a wise cooking regimen.” Cooking had become a more “exalted task” which, when performed efficiently and conscientiously, could “help defeat the enemy.”²¹ Publishers advertised a new crop of war cookbooks that would help the thrifty housewife to stretch her limited resources. To reinforce women’s duty to save, these cookbooks drew on the rhetoric of the starvation war being carried out by a ruthless, external enemy. One explained, “Our enemies want to starve us . . . This devilish plan is the work of the English government . . . Conserve all foodstuffs . . . Squandering foodstuffs is equivalent to squandering munitions.”²² At the beginning of the war, many women responded enthusiastically to the novel idea that they had a *duty* to the state, and were pleased that their management of food had become the focus of discussion among important ministers and men of state. Women’s magazines stressed this duty, and urged women to think beyond their personal households when making food decisions. They advised women to put the needs of the general public above their private needs: “We must no longer live in the way

¹⁹ *Volksernährung in Kriegszeiten*, Merkblatt, herausgegeben vom k.k. Ministerium des Inneren (Vienna, January 1915).

²⁰ A 1910 geography textbook boasted, “Wie wenig andere europäische Staaten, kommt Österreich-Ungarn dem Ideal einer sich selbst befriedigenden wirtschaftlichen Existenz nahe; es vermag seinen Bedarf an Nahrungsmittel noch größtenteils selbst zu decken . . .” Heidrich, Grunzel and Zeehe, *Österreichische Vaterlandskunde für die oberste Klasse der Mittelschulen* (Laibach, 1910), 8. Hans Loewenfeld-Russ gives a more precise picture of Austria-Hungary’s prewar trade balance in food, and concludes that with the exception of a few products, the Monarchy “could generally feed itself from its own production and was less dependent on imports than Germany or England,” *Die Regelung*, 28.

²¹ “Küchengespräch im Salon,” *Neue Freie Presse*, 20 June 1915, 17.

²² Gisela Urban, *Österreichisches Kriegs-Kochbuch vom k.k. Ministerium des Inneren überprüft und genehmigt* (Vienna, 1915), 3.

that is pleasant for us, but rather in the way that is useful to the state."²³ In short, the rhetoric of a starvation war allowed civilians to identify personally with a state under siege; they too felt besieged. As one Viennese writer explained, "[Women] are stocking supplies as if every house were a besieged fortress, or could become one any day."²⁴

Yet, if we return to the language of the governor's notice, we see that beneath exaltations of women's new public duties and praise for their efforts was a second message: sacrifice on the home front was relative – subordinated to the greater sacrifices on the front. Calls for civilian sacrifice frequently contained an "it's the least you can do" clause, intended to remind the Viennese that theirs was a sacrifice of a secondary order. In optimistic texts from 1914 and 1915, sacrifice meant giving up inessential ingredients, accommodating to new tastes, and could even have health benefits for those from higher circles who had had rich, fattening pre-war diets.²⁵ Civilian sacrifice initially constituted a series of small, almost inconsequential measures. A typical guide for women recommended:

- "while cleaning [vegetables], only the woody, spoiled and truly unusable parts should be trimmed"
- vigorous chewing is thought to release more nutrients; "for this reason, bread should never be eaten fresh, but rather several days after its production . . ."
- gathering and drying tea leaves from local forests (blackberry and linden blossom) makes for tea that is not only tasty, "but without a doubt has better health benefits than the so-called Russian tea."²⁶

Home front sacrifice did not entail *hunger*. The same guide reassured readers, "Certainly no one should suffer hunger." By this standard, it was easy to elevate the sacrifices of the front. "However large the sacrifices imposed on individuals may be, they stand in no relation to those sacrifices our fathers and brothers must offer in the field."²⁷ In light of soldiers' battle-front heroics, how could civilians complain of stale bread or strange-tasting tea?

The discursive elevation of front sacrifice over home front sacrifice, made repeatedly by government officials, male writers and women themselves, was not unique to Vienna. Rather, it was part of the gendered structure of the war itself. Margaret and Patrice Higonnet have likened the

²³ *Mein Haushalt: Offizielles Organ des Ersten Wiener Consum-Vereines* 10 (1914), 1.

²⁴ Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, *Kriegstagebuch eines Daheimgebliebenen: Eindrücke und Stimmungen aus Österreich-Ungarn* (Graz, 1916), 206.

²⁵ Johann Joachim, *Österreichs Volksernährung im Kriege* (Vienna: Manzschke k.u.k. Hof-Verlags- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1915), 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33, 40, 37. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

front-home front relationship in World War I to a double helix: although the objective situation of women may have changed (new opportunities) and although they enjoyed increased status (new public duties), they remained in an unchanged position *vis-à-vis* men. Men's opportunities and status shifted outward and war provided a new frontier for heroics off-limits to women.²⁸ While the Higonnets were concerned primarily with work and social activities performed in wartime, their model corresponds equally well to the concept of sacrifice.

If we juxtapose early civilian proclamations about sacrifice with personal letters sent from home front to front later in the war, the *Opfer* trajectory – from willing helper to war victim – becomes clearer. At the outset of war, women from around Austria sent submissions to a publication entitled *The 1914–15 War Almanac of the Patriotic Women of Austria*, in which they spelled out their commitment to sacrifice. The work contains seventy-two entries, laden with proclamations of duty, submission and reverent homage to men in the field. Sophie von Rhuenberg from Linz submitted a poem called "The Shawl," in which an expectant mother on the home front knits for an unknown soldier a scarf that will keep him warm and protect him from bullets because she has "dreamed her love" into the woolen fabric. From Vienna, Anna Friedl-Eichenthal, who ran an organization for midwives, wrote of women, "We are all helpers – important, even indispensable helpers – but still just helpers . . ." Hermine Cloeter, also from Vienna, described the profound change the war brought to her life. She and other women were no longer satisfied with the minor, petty intrigues of their prewar lives. Full of enthusiasm for a cause that transcended their personal interests, thousands of women and girls offered their services, eager to "help, help, help."²⁹ Contributors to the *Almanac* were enthralled by their new public duties, but they conceived of these duties very much within the framework of the Higonnet double helix. Soldierly sacrifice overshadowed their own important, but secondary, contributions. The only mention of food in the *Almanac* is a humorous piece on a soldier in a trench who is licking his lips in anticipation of eating a delicious omelet, when a grenade buries the pot it is cooking in. "The omelet – the cursed Russians shot away his omelet!"³⁰

²⁸ Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al. (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁹ *Almanach des Kriegsjahres 1914–15 der patriotischen Frauen Österreichs*, Herausgegeben zu Gunsten des Witwen- und Waisenhilfsfond für die gesamte bewaffnete Macht (Vienna, n.d.), 74, 26, 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

By 1915, notable shortages of basic foodstuffs were evident in Vienna. Police charted the first appearance of market lines for particular items:³¹

Flour and bread.	Autumn 1914
Milk.	Early 1915
Potatoes.	Early 1915
Oil.	Autumn 1915
Coffee.	March 1916
Sugar.	April 1916
Eggs.	May 1916
Soap.	July 1916
Beer, Tobacco, Cigarettes, Plums, Cabbage.	September 1916

Already by 1915, the warnings about properly trimming the vegetables or baking with less butter were outdated and replaced by acute difficulties in obtaining supplies. Many of the shoppers in market lines were turned away empty-handed, and with little for sale at the markets, civilians began to question the meaning and limits of home-front sacrifice. When the state failed to secure an adequate supply of basic foodstuffs, civilians rejected the initial portrayal of their sacrifices as praiseworthy but secondary, token acts honoring the real sacrifices of soldiers. For example, the thirty women and children who hijacked a bread wagon in Vienna's working-class XVI district in March, 1917, placed their sacrifices on a par with those of their men. Denied potatoes at a nearby market, they attacked the wagon, pounded on the doors and shouted slogans foreign to the language of the *Almanac*: "We want bread! We are hungry! Our men are bleeding to death in the battlefields and we are starving!"³² This incident, typical of street scenes from the second half of the war, shows how civilian perceptions of sacrifice had changed. Gone were eager statements from thrifty housewives who felt "honored" to be taking part in matters of grave public importance. Gone too was the "it's the least we can do" clause of civilian sacrifice; here, civilians angry at a failed food distribution system placed their sacrifices *alongside* those of the soldiers.

Because subsequent volumes of the almanac were not published, it is impossible to trace changes in attitude of the specific women who contributed to it, and to measure how these women's conceptions of sacrifice changed over the course of the war. But a different set of women's writings from later in the war conveys a very different interpretation of the term *Opfer*. By 1917, state censors had become alarmed at the despairing tone of private letters sent from the home front to soldiers in the field.

³¹ AdBDW, Stimmungsbericht, 4 November 1916. ³² AdBDW 1917 V/9 #5386.

Censors compiled a report, stating that in this correspondence, "Comments such as 'When you all return home, you won't find us alive' were not uncommon." Civilians wrote to soldiers, "Be happy that you're over there," and "Don't trouble yourselves – if you starve here or over there, it doesn't make a difference."³³ From these remarks, we see that some women on the home front no longer felt themselves to be on the fortunate side of war; they no longer elevated the suffering of soldiers above their own. Just as battle produced war victims, so too did hunger.

Civilian commentary on food ranged from anger, to despair, to outright surrender. The state found itself with a population that no longer *cared* about the war, as defined by militarists and statesmen. These civilians envisioned their own war in which they and soldiers alike were victims of a state with an utterly failed food policy. Censors noted that numerous women letter-writers threatened "that the womenfolk (*Weiber*) were going to fetch their men, and if they couldn't immediately retrieve them, then the women's war (*Weiberkrieg*) would begin."³⁴ Others were more passive. Frau Lauer, an Austrian woman whose husband was in a Russian POW camp, wrote him in March, 1917, "I have lost all hope that I and your only child will ever see you again, because we are going to die of starvation. I'm so weakened from the pains of hunger and still, we receive no food."³⁵ A year later, when Viennese officials met to discuss the latest crisis (an unexpected overnight reduction in flour rations) they noted a mood of resignation among the city's hungry residents. "The people are said to have grown weary of this matter long ago. They are undernourished and exhausted – every day people have to be carted away by ambulance. They explain, if there's no change, [they'd] rather lie down at home than waste [their] last muscle strength getting these measly rations."³⁶

Were the Viennese actually *dying* of starvation, as some of these women's comments seem to suggest? In early 1919, city physicians reported inanition (starvation) to be the *direct* cause of between 7 and 11 percent of Viennese deaths during wartime. In 20–30 percent of cases in which post mortems were conducted, starvation was a *contributing* cause of death, helping along some other disease.³⁷ Many who did not

³³ ÖStA, KA, AOK GZNB 1917, carton 3751, #4647, "Stimmung und wirtschaftliche Lage der österr. Bevölkerung im Hinterland," May 1917. Whether these letters are from Vienna or from other areas of the *Hinterland* is not specified.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ ÖStA, KA, AOK GZNB 1917, carton 4574, "Bemerkenswerte Nachrichten zur Verpflegungsfrage in der Monarchie," 22 March–7 April 1917.

³⁶ WLSA B23/75 Gemeinderat, Gem. Rat Skaret in Protokoll Obmänner-Konferenz, 17 June 1918.

³⁷ Hoover Institution Archives, Dr. Böhm, "Sanitary statistic [sic] and mortality of the population of Vienna during the War, 1914–1919," 19 March 1919.

Table 1.1 *Deaths of Viennese women during World War I*

1912	15,355
1913	15,390
1914	15,310
1915	16,305
1916	17,029
1917	20,816
1918	23,898
1919	21,223

Source: Siegfried Rosenfeld, *Die Wirkung des Krieges auf die Sterblichkeit in Wien* (Vienna: Volksgesundheitsamt, 1920), 27.

starve nevertheless suffered acute hunger, which encompassed a number of physical and psychological ailments. Hunger made people irritable, influenced their perceptions and weakened the body to diseases. Civilian deaths did climb during the war, as the above table demonstrates:

Because we do not have accurate statistics on population fluctuation during the war, it is not possible to assess the increase in the death rate. But hunger, combined with fatigue from long hours spent working or standing in lines, likely contributed to women's deaths by making them more susceptible to diseases. The psychological effects of urban hunger were twofold: the incivility that came to characterize wartime social relations can be understood, in part, if we imagine a population of two million people, some of whom were experiencing frequent hunger-induced irritability; and hunger may have contributed to the delirium and paranoia that led to "food fantasies," to be discussed shortly.

Despair about food scarcity was not confined to the lower classes. Police reports noted that women of the middle classes also took part in food "excesses." That police specifically mentioned this might indicate that they were surprised or concerned to see *bürgerliche* women behaving in ways not befitting their class. Censors similarly detected food despair in letters from wide segments of the population: "In all manner of speaking, regardless of temperament, education level or political disposition of the writer, whether in truly serious, concerned, ironic or threatening language, this mood of dejection comes through."³⁸ Of course, to say that

³⁸ AdBDW 1917 V/9 #W/1-555/17. Runderlaß from k.k. Nö. Statthalterei to k.k. Pol. Dir. Wien, 20 January 1917.

Viennese of various classes expressed similar despair over food shortage does not mean that they shared the same diet. Diversity in diet and in methods of food preparation had been markers of prewar class distinction; accordingly, Viennese were measuring their wartime food sacrifices against the prewar standards to which they had been accustomed.

By early 1917, when censors recorded this pervasive dejection, the state had lost the ability to define the parameters of civilian sacrifice. Whereas women had earlier considered "holding out" a challenge and had responded with enthusiasm, trumpeting creative solutions for stretching supplies, they reached a point where there was nothing left to stretch. The contributors to the almanac had once considered it an honor to be asked to participate in the "world historical event" of war, the "Lehrmeister" that had taught them to place the interests of the whole above their own private concerns. But lack of food changed civilian understandings of "the war" altogether. Censors concluded from home front letters, "In low spirits . . . any and all interest in the big events has disappeared. Enthusiasm for the grand affair has disappeared along with a belief in *Durchhalten*." For widespread segments of the population, "the question of what one would eat today and how one would feed the family over the next 24 hours" was the defining feature of war.³⁹

The three discursive pillars of civilian sacrifice, as outlined in Governor Bienerth's notice, had all crumbled by 1917. The "starvation war" was indeed underway, but the Viennese rarely spoke of the external enemy; the food blockade from without lost its potency as a symbol for unifying individuals on the home front. In addition, frugality and conscientious meal preparation were no longer viable solutions to the food crisis; the shortages were too severe to be combated by recycling, "stretching" and other tricks of careful housewives. Finally, many Viennese ceased to believe in the maxim that sacrifice at the front was greater than sacrifice at home. Instead, they counted themselves among the war's victims and set out to identify the source of their victimization.

War victims and victimizers

Food scarcity was more severe in Vienna than in other European capitals. The rationing schemes began sooner there than in Paris or London, and allotted residents an ever shrinking number of calories. The first ration cards were issued in Vienna in April, 1915, for flour and bread, followed by sugar, milk, coffee and lard in 1916, potatoes and marmalade

³⁹ ÖStA, KA, AOK GZNB 1917 carton 3749, #4588. Censor's report on the mood of the people. March, 1917.

in 1917, and meat in 1918.⁴⁰ By contrast, Paris had only two rationed products, sugar beginning in 1917, and bread beginning in 1918, in addition to other less stringent meat and dairy controls. The food situation was even less restrictive in London, where rationing was not introduced until February, 1918. Bonzon and Davis report that Londoners faced inflationary food prices and inequality of access to certain foods, but “[a]part from the disappearance of a few items such as butter, the overall level of food consumption in London was not reduced drastically.” In fact, “there were even some gains in nutritional intake” among the working classes.⁴¹ Viennese rations were smaller than those in Berlin, which was undergoing its own wartime food crisis.⁴² It may have come as a surprise to Berliners to learn that many Viennese considered the German food distribution system to be a model one. One angry letter-writer wrote to the Viennese War Profiteering Office a typical comparison: “[T]his is a *Schweineerei* . . . In Germany there is much better order and justice . . . there they wouldn’t have something like this.”⁴³ As table 1.2 makes clear, once ration cards were instituted in Vienna for a certain product, residents could count on steady reductions in rations.

The rationing system itself grew more complicated as new foodstuffs were added and the amounts rationed decreased. Ration cards for Vienna bore the imprint of the Lower Austrian governor’s office, but required the stamp of the municipal government. Cards for bread, issued on a weekly basis, entitled their holder either to a loaf of a certain weight or an equivalent amount of flour. They specified the *amount* to which the holder was entitled but not the *price* of the particular good, which was regulated separately. This was an important distinction; inflation at the market stall was the very last hurdle in the distribution chain and prevented some urban consumers from obtaining the foodstuffs they had been rationed on paper. Warnings on the cards that read, “Non-transferable! Keep secure! Copying forbidden!” suggest that a black market had developed for ration cards themselves. In 1917, a new system of color-coded cards was introduced that corresponded to four tiers of family income, and the lowest tier (*Mindestbemittelten*) was allotted extra rations.⁴⁴ Such “special treatment”

⁴⁰ Hans Hautmann, “Hunger ist ein schlechter Koch: Die Ernährungslage der österreichischen Arbeiter im Ersten Weltkrieg,” in Gerhard Botz *et al.* (eds.), *Bewegung und Klasse: Studien zur österreichischen Arbeitergeschichte* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1978), 661–81, 666–7.

⁴¹ Bonzon and Davis, “Feeding the Cities,” 319–20, 315.

⁴² Davis notes that during the last phase of the war, a person on the “basic ration” in Berlin was allotted 35.7g of meat, 8.9g of fat and between 375g and 500g of potatoes daily. Davis, “Home Fires Burning,” 568. Compare these figures to table 1.2. The ration of flour/bread in Vienna and Berlin was comparable.

⁴³ AdBDW 1917 V/7 #5385. Anon. letter to Kriegswucheramt Wien, August 1917.

⁴⁴ Belinda Davis has written of World War I Berlin that the *Minderbemittelte*, or “women of lesser means,” constituted a powerful new consumer-based identity among women of the

Table 1.2 *Declining rations of essential products in wartime Vienna*

	At time of introduction of ration cards		At end of war	
	Daily amount	Calories	Daily amount	Calories
Flour	100g	300	35.7g	107.1
Bread	140g	350	180g	450
Lard	17.1g	153.9	5.7g	51.3
Meat	28.5g	28.5	17.8g	17.8
Milk	1/8 l	82.5	–	–
Potatoes	214g	171.2	71.4g	57.1
Sugar	41.6g	166.4	25g	100
Marmalade	23.8g	47.6	23.8g	47.6
Coffee	8.9g	–	8.9g	–
Total		1300.1		830.9

Source: Hans Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung der Völkernahrung im Kriege*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1926), 335. These figures are for a “non-self-providing” consumer. The other two rationing categories were “self-providing” agricultural worker and heavy laborer.

for the poorest Viennese was intended to offset price by increasing amount, but had the effect of turning the *Mindestbemittelten* into a “privileged” group in the eyes of other consumers. Middle-income consumers felt they were being squeezed between the very wealthy, who could always make do and the very poor, whom the state was favoring.⁴⁵ Inflation, as measured both in prices and amount of currency in circulation, collapsed the distance between lower- and middle-income consumers, leaving the latter disgruntled over their relative loss of status (see table 1.3). As so frequently occurred during the war, this loss was translated into greater perceived “sacrifice.”

Key to the food distribution network were the *Zentralen*, established by the government for the management of essential goods. Despite their name, the *Zentralen* were not centralized, but functioned in the following way: private businesses specializing in a certain good would form a government-sponsored cartel that served as the clearing-house for that product. While sanctioned by the government, the *Zentralen* were thus administered by private business interests.⁴⁶ Over the course of the

lower classes. See Davis, *Home Fires Burning*. Unlike in Berlin, the term *Minderbemittelte* did not become a significant social category in the vocabulary of the food crisis in Vienna.

⁴⁵ See 1918 police report cited in John W. Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897–1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 425.

⁴⁶ For organization of *Zentralen*, see Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung*, 71–84; Josef Redlich, *Austrian War Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929).

Table 1.3 Wartime inflation (indexed)

	Prices	Currency in circulation
July 1914	100	100
June 1915	213	208
June 1916	319.4	281
June 1917	394.8	382
June 1918	562.7	741
October 1918	573.3	977

Source: Gustav Gratz and Richard Schüller, *Der wirtschaftliche Zusammenbruch Österreich-Ungarns: Die Tragödie der Erschöpfung*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Vienna: 1930), 184.

war, *Zentralen* were established for at least twenty-seven goods, ranging from leather to cotton to sugar. The “Miles” (Ministerium des Inneren legitimierte Einkaufsstelle) and its successor “Oezeg” (Österreichische Zentral-Einkaufsgesellschaft) handled imports of fats, pork products, beef, butter, cheeses, fish, eggs, fruits and vegetables from outside of Austria.⁴⁷ The system was improvised; not surprisingly, those running the *Zentralen* were accused of taking sizeable cuts before the goods actually reached consumers at the market. Black marketeering (*Schleichhandel*) was broadly defined as circumventing the *Zentralen* altogether and marketing goods that had not made their way through the government-sanctioned clearing-house.

Imports of nearly all foodstuffs into Vienna declined sharply during the war, while the population of the city was actually growing. The number of refugees entering Vienna was greater than the number of men leaving for military service.⁴⁸ Consider the decline of milk imports to Vienna, between 1915 and 1918 in figure 1.1.

⁴⁷ Ludwig von Nordeck zur Rabenau, *Die Ernährungswirtschaft in Oesterreich* (Berlin: Verlag der Beiträge der Kriegswirtschaft, 1918), 117–18.

⁴⁸ See Wilhelm Winkler, *Die Totenverluste der öst.-ung. Monarchie nach Nationalitäten* (Vienna: Verlag von L. W. Seldl u. Sohn, 1919) for conscription statistics; and Beatrix Hoffmann-Holter, *‘Abreisendmachung’: Jüdische Kriegsflüchtlinge in Wien 1914–1923* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1995) for refugees. The system of registration (*Anmeldung*) seems to have broken down with the massive movements of refugees and military conscripts. Those calculating food rations did not have an accurate count of the number of people actually living in the city. Population statistics from mid-1914 cite a total population of 2,149,834, of which 2,123,275 were civilian and 26,559 were active military. Despite an influx of at least 70,000 refugees in the fall of 1914 and the departure of thousands of men for the front, city statisticians recorded little change. By October, 1914, they marked an increase of only 17,453 people, and the military figure remained at its

Milk supply to Vienna (liters)

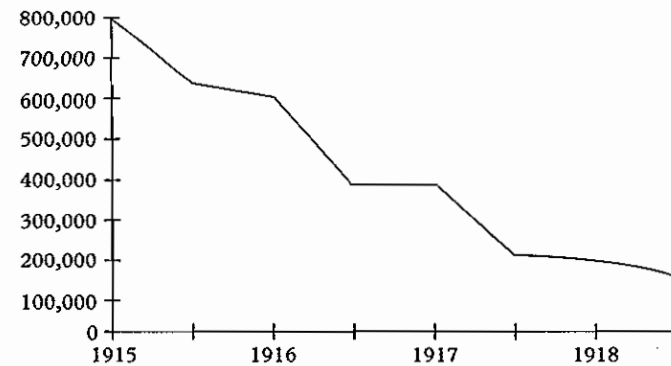


Figure 1.1. Declining milk imports in wartime. Source: Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung*, 222.

When milk ration cards were first instituted in May, 1916, each resident was allotted (although not *guaranteed*) $\frac{1}{8}$ liter per day, but by the end of the war, no dairy products at all were rationed to the general public. Production of milk-based foods such as cheese and chocolate were restricted. Milk, when it could be secured, was reserved for the “dairy privileged” – nursing mothers, children and the seriously ill. Like the imports of fruits and vegetables, which also declined markedly over the course of four years, the statistics on Viennese imports of beef and pork were bleak (see figures 1.2 and 1.3).

The municipal government instituted official “meatless days” (Fridays) with certain meat products (blood sausage, liverwurst, canned fish) allowed on Mondays and Wednesdays. Restaurants and cafés were restricted to “lardless Saturdays.” But these intricate regulations could not hide the fact that for many residents of Vienna, “eating” had become a mathematical exercise in consuming any available calories, no matter how disagreeable their source.

However much Habsburg officials would have liked to blame the food crisis on the “starvation war” pursued by Britain, the shortages in Vienna were, in fact, home grown. When it came to food, Austria-Hungary was at war with itself. Citizens of Vienna who felt they were living in a city besieged by supposed allies pegged the Hungarians and the local farmers of

prewar level. *Mitteilungen der Statistischen Abteilung des Wiener Magistrates*, Monatsberichte, August 1914, 161; and October 1914, 203.

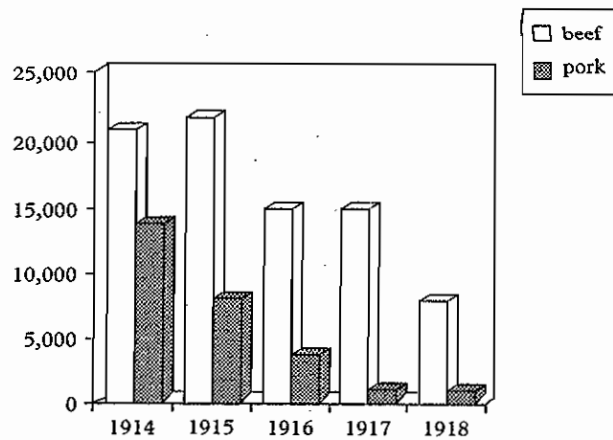


Figure 1.2. Beef and pork imports to Vienna (tons).

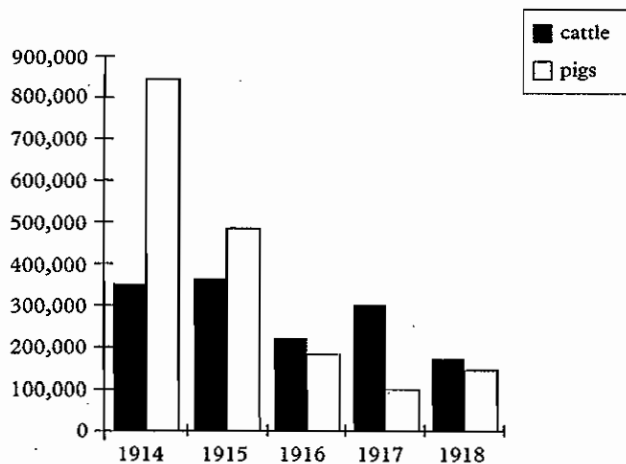


Figure 1.3. Livestock imports to Vienna. Source: Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung*, 205.

lower Austria as callous victimizers. The Viennese police received unconfirmed reports from the Austrian Food Office that Hungarian children traveling through Austria had been stoned by local residents chanting "Curse Hungary!"⁴⁹ "Eine Wienerin" sent an anonymous letter to Viennese Mayor Weiskirchner in April, 1918, expressing typical outrage

⁴⁹ AdBDW 1918 St./18 #55440.

Table 1.4 *Prewar Austrian food imports from Hungary*

Average Austrian consumption in years 1909–1913 of	% grown/produced in Austria	% deficit to import	% of deficit covered by Hungary
flour	68	32	92
beef	29	71	97
pork	48	52	99
milk	99	1	85
potatoes	97	3	40
corn	39	61	56

Source: Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung*, 31

at Hungarian greed, which had left the Viennese scrambling for inedible corn bread. Rumors circulated in the city that even the cornmeal was running low, and that Viennese bread would soon be made from hay. She had heard that in Bratislava, only 75 kilometers away and under Hungarian control, every resident could buy poppy seed and nut strudel made with white flour. Reaching her own conclusions, the letter-writer asked rhetorically, "Is the other half of the empire (*die andere Reichshälfte*) in cahoots with the enemies trying to starve us?"⁵⁰ This question was on the minds of many.

Historian István Deák has cautioned against using the term "Habsburg Empire" after 1867 because the Habsburg head of state was the king, but not the emperor, of Hungary.⁵¹ While he is correct in warning historians against anachronistic use of the word "empire," residents of World War I Vienna – such as "Eine Wienerin" – used the term indiscriminately and clearly included Hungary in its parameters. Living in the largest city in the Habsburg lands, at the symbolic center of political power, the Viennese felt emotionally entitled to the resources of this (misnamed) empire. They were not, however, *legally* entitled to the goods produced there. Economic relations between agricultural Hungary and more industrialized Austria were heavily contested with each ten-year renewal of the 1867 Compromise, the treaty that established dualism. Hungary managed to secure an Austrian market for its agricultural goods, on which the urban population of Vienna was heavily dependent.⁵² The great majority of foodstuffs imported to Austria in the prewar period came from Hungary (see table 1.4).

⁵⁰ AdBDW 1918 V/1 #55592. Anon. letter to Mayor Weiskirchner.

⁵¹ István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11.

⁵² On economic relations between Austria and Hungary, see Péter Hanák, "Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: Preponderance or Dependency?" *Austrian History Yearbook* 3, part 1 (1967), 260–302; Géza Jeszenszky, "Hungary through World War I and

However, Loewenfeld-Russ, head of the wartime Food Office, explained the glitch in this arrangement: Hungary had the *right* to sell to Austria, but was under no formal obligation to do so.⁵³ This arrangement would haunt the Viennese during World War I, and cause them to finger Hungary as the great victimizer of the Austrian people.

Austria-Hungary did not have a unified food policy, and in 1914 the existing improvised arrangement came under enormous stress.⁵⁴ First, Austria lost a great deal of the foodstuffs from its most agricultural province, Galicia, due to the war against Russia, which rolled back and forth across the north-eastern territory. Galicia accounted for one-third of all Austrian farmland and had produced a large grain surplus before the war. When we read, for example, that in 1918 "Austria" was harvesting only 41 percent of the grain it had produced in 1914, much of this loss stemmed from the agricultural crisis in Galicia. In addition to the battles being waged on their lands, Galician farmers lost farm labor to conscription and farm animals and machinery to military requisition.⁵⁵ When eastern Galicia and Bukowina were recaptured from the Russians after the failed Kerenski offensive in the summer of 1917, farming conditions there were bleak. "The terrain had been devastated [and] a large section of the population had fled and was being housed in refugee camps in the Monarchy's interior."⁵⁶ Second, but less central to the food crisis than the government would have it, was the blockade which prohibited Austria-Hungary from importing supplies from abroad. Third, Austria and Hungary combined had to feed the millions of men and thousands of animals of the Habsburg armies.⁵⁷ Hungary would claim throughout the

the End of the Dual Monarchy," in Peter Sugar *et al.* (eds.), *A History of Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 267-94.

⁵³ Hans Loewenfeld-Russ, *Im Kampf gegen den Hunger: Aus den Erinnerungen des Staatssekretärs für Volksernährung, 1918-1920* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1986), 34. Loewenfeld-Russ was one of the first civil servants assigned to the *Amt für Volksernährung*, founded in November, 1916. This observation makes a comparison of the food supply in Austria-Hungary with that in other countries difficult. Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis note that France was relatively self-sufficient in food, Britain was highly dependent on imports, and Germany lay somewhere in between. Bonzon and Davis, "Feeding the Cities," 309. Austria-Hungary as a whole might have resembled France in self-sufficiency, but this did not reflect the food trade patterns *within* the dual state.

⁵⁴ In 1917, the Hungarians agreed to join a new food committee for the whole monarchy. While they rejected a formal ministry, Prime Minister Tisza agreed to a cooperative *Dienststelle*, to be called *Amt der Ernährungsdienst*, also referred to as the *Gemeinsamer Ernährungsausschuß*. General [Ottokar] Landwehr, *Hunger: Die Erschöpfungsjahre der Mittelmächte 1917-18* (Zurich: Amalthea-Verlag, 1931), 8-13.

⁵⁵ Isabella Ackerl, introduction to Loewenfeld-Russ, *Im Kampf*, xiv.

⁵⁶ Landwehr, *Hunger*, 99.

⁵⁷ The monarchy's armed forces fell into three branches: the unified forces under control of the Heeresverwaltung, the Austrian Landwehr, and the Hungarian Honvéd. According

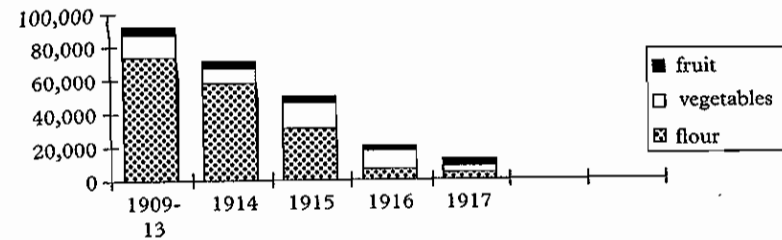


Figure 1.4. Wartime imports from Hungary (1000 Meterznt.). Source: Loewenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung*, 61.

war that it had taken on the responsibility of feeding the armies,⁵⁸ needed to provide for its own hungry population, and could not send as much food to Austria as it had before the war. Indeed, Hungarian exports to Austria fell dramatically between 1914 and 1918 (see figure 1.4).

At the level of high politics, Austrians cited the Hungarian food policy as a key factor in the eventual collapse of the Habsburg state.⁵⁹ High-ranking Austrians wondered why the spirit of Austro-Hungarian brotherhood in the field did not carry over to the home front. General Landwehr, head of the Joint Food Commission, recalled, "That Hungary was living better than Austria was on everyone's mind. While the sons of both states fought bravely at the front, this shared *willingness to sacrifice* was missing in the hinterland."⁶⁰ At the everyday level, in the angry minds and empty stomachs of shoppers, Hungary played a prominent role in the development of the Viennese victim complex. A thousand listeners gathered at the restaurant "The Green Door" in April, 1915, to hear Hans Rotter, introduced by Vice-Mayor Josef Rain, speak on "Provisioning Vienna in War." "Hungary treats us like a foreign country - like a state of the triple entente," thundered Rotter. Hungary was setting higher prices for grain and squeezing Austria out.⁶¹ A Herr Gabriel who operated a pub on Taborstrasse was arrested and fined for declaring that Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza belonged in the gallows.⁶² Many Viennese complained that Austrian leaders had been outsmarted by their cunning Hungarian counterparts. City councilor Goltz described in January, 1915, the growing

to Deák, mobilization brought the number of enlisted men to 3,260,000, and officers to 60,000. *Beyond Nationalism*, 75.

⁵⁸ Plaschka *et al.*, *Innere Front*, I, 226-7; and Loewenfeld-Russ, *Im Kampf*, 37.

⁵⁹ Loewenfeld-Russ, *Im Kampf*, 33. ⁶⁰ Landwehr, *Hunger*, 9 (my emphasis).

⁶¹ NÖLA Präs. "P" 1915, XVb, 1803. Pol. Dir. Wien to Statthalterei Präs., 11 April 1915.

⁶² AdBDW 1916 St./9 #28874. Denunciation from Josef Messner to Kriegsministerium, 7 June 1916.

suspicion that Hungary was a state properly ruled, while "Austria has absolutely no government."⁶³

In letters to various state-level ministries, citizens berated Austrian officials both for cowering before the Hungarians and for profiting personally at the expense of "the people." Viennese citizens declared that the government (*Regierung*), or alternately the rulers (*Herren, Herrschaften*) or statesmen (*Staatsherren*) had broken an agreement with its citizens. In return for their "hardship and sacrifice" letter-writers demanded sustenance.⁶⁴ In fact, they expressed the demand for food in a language of *rights*: an anonymous letter to the Ministry of the Interior signed "One for All" complained in 1917 that the working people "must sacrifice their lives, and for that we are left hungry . . . Every person, whether rich or poor, has a right to life . . . Let's turn the spit and let the rulers get a taste of hunger." Authorities filed correspondence of this sort as "threatening letters" (*Drohbriefe*) because they often contained explicit or inferred threats to those who had broken the contract between the state and people. "One for All" concluded menacingly, "We will most certainly recognize the guilty when we come across them."⁶⁵ The same year, with unsteady penmanship and many spelling errors, a woman wrote to the same ministry, accusing "the government" – whom she conflated with "the rich" – of betraying the people. "[The poor] have to fight for the rich so that they can fill their sacks while we are ruined . . . [W]hy does the government let us suffer and starve for so long? [W]hy doesn't the government just have us shot?" She too demanded "equal rights for all" in the distribution of food.⁶⁶ In a letter to the Agricultural Ministry in Vienna, anonymous writer/s "Anna and Rasper" asked in desperation whether mothers should offer their own blood and flesh to their hungry children. The government was feeding itself, but had failed to meet the needs of the people. "Do the statesmen only exist," Anna and Rasper wondered, "so that they can eat and drink at will?"⁶⁷ It is clear that "the government" had no mechanism for dealing with complaints of this sort. "Equal rights for all's" letter passed to at least three ministries, all of which stamped it "seen," none of

⁶³ NÖLA Präs. "P" 1915 XVb, 1803. Pol. Dir. Wien to Statthaltereipräs., 11 April 1915. For attitudes in Hungary, see József Galántai, *Hungary in the First World War* translated by Éva Grusz and Judit Pokoly (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 192–5. Besides feuding over food supplies, Austrians and Hungarians fought over who would pay for losses and damages caused by war (most destruction of land and property was in Austrian territory).

⁶⁴ For similar developments in Berlin, see Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, ch. 9.

⁶⁵ AdBDW 1917 St./20 #49367. Anon. letter to MdI, forwarded to police.

⁶⁶ ÖStA, AVA, MdI Präs. 22 in gen 1917 carton 2065, #87.

⁶⁷ AdBDW 1917 St./20 43367. Anon. letter to Land- und Ackerbau Ministerium, 28 October 1916.

which offered a solution to the woman's troubles. The bureaucrats who processed citizens' appeals to various layers of government had a bird's eye view of home-front hardship. In return for hardship suffered – for the loss of family members, failing health, hungry children and overall material misery – in short, in return for their *sacrifice* – citizens demanded food from the state.

With the Hungarians withholding food from the east, and the Austrian government poised to do little about it, the Viennese victim complex grew to include yet another group: local Austrian farmers who sold to urban markets at exorbitant prices. Social Democratic city councilor Skaret noted the "lack of feeling of solidarity" between farmers and the city population. City residents fantasized about farmers with abundant stocks; they imagined these farmers were feeding their animals luxury foods while sending the cattle feed to Vienna for human consumption. Bitterly eating "war bread" made of a variety of second-rate grains, the Viennese passed stories about farmers who fed prime barley to their pigs in the countryside.⁶⁸ The lack of solidarity between city and countryside was fueled by city dwellers' sense that *Stand* relations – the class and status structure of society – had been overturned by the food crisis. The shortages led to a crisis of value: what had once had value (porcelain housewares, pianos, fine clothing, and other luxury goods) was traded ignominiously for eggs, milk and poultry. As residents of one of the most cultured cities in Europe, the Viennese now had to grovel before local farmers who held the society's most valued commodities. Anecdotes and rumors about uncultured farmers stocking their cottages with the finery of city life circulated in Vienna and became part of the collective memory after the war. The same few stories were tirelessly retold: the piano teachers who had to move to villages outside Vienna, "following the wealth" to where the piano owners now lived; the farmer who took delight in watching a "city lady" tramp through his fields in her Parisian shoes looking for potatoes; farmers with fine carpets, gramophones and opera glasses whose use they could not fathom.⁶⁹ The anecdotes convey the sense of injustice felt by people far removed from the agricultural sector whose sense of entitlement as city dwellers was offended by the new economy of food.

Some farmers delighted in the urban envy of their foodstuffs. In July, 1918, Paula Kaswurm of the village Klausen-Leopoldsdorf wrote to an

⁶⁸ WSLA B23/73 Gemeinderat. Protokoll Obmänner-Konferenz, 20 April 1915.

⁶⁹ Eduard Ritter von Liszt, *Der Einfluss des Krieges auf die soziale Schichtung der Wiener Bevölkerung* (Vienna and Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1919), 53–4; *Wiens Kinder und Amerika: Die amerikanische Kinderhilfsaktion 1919* (Vienna: Gerlach und Wiedling, 1920), 13–14.

Austrian POW in Russia not to believe the stories he had heard about conditions at home. "I'm letting you know that things are still going very well here compared to the cities – they are envious of us all."⁷⁰ Another woman farmer who had "amassed wealth in war" expressed to a male relative in captivity that from now on, she no longer wanted to "play farmer." When he returned, she mused, "it won't do you any harm, not to have to play farmer either."⁷¹ That she imagined she was "playing" her role as farmer suggests that notions of *Stand* were indeed in flux.

The actual encounters she may have had with city dwellers took place not on their turf, the city, but on her turf, the farm. In peacetime, with a functioning distribution system, food had flowed into Vienna from the countryside, and farmers and consumers had had minimal contact with each other. The war brought a reversal of this flow; hungry Viennese who felt the farmers were withholding supplies while waiting for better prices set out to secure personally what they could not obtain at the market. Hundreds of thousands of Viennese trekked into surrounding farmlands during the war to buy, steal or extort food from Austrian farmers. The Habsburg state, fighting external battles on three fronts, had to post regiments to guard potatoes from its own citizens.

City dwellers' resentment towards their perceived rural victimizers came to a head in the potato war of 1918. The government and residents of Vienna had long complained that the local farmers were withholding food. In 1915, 1916 and 1917, Viennese Mayor Weiskirchner sent repeated telegrams to all levels of government demanding supplies for his city. The Lower Austrian governor prodded leaders of rural districts to comply: "The city of Vienna has registered complaint that practically no potatoes from the farmers of Lower Austria are reaching the market." Rural district officials replied they had sent all they had.⁷² The cycle continued until the summer of 1918, when the rural-urban stand-off began to seriously alarm the Ministry of the Interior, the Lower Austrian government and security forces in the farming villages surrounding the city. A proposed 50 percent reduction in the bread ration caused an explosive increase in the food traffic from Vienna to the countryside. On the night of June 28, "extraordinary throngs" of people headed on foot out of the city towards the villages of Stammersdorf, Königsbrunn, Hagenbrunn, Kleinengersdorf, Flansdorf and Enzersfeld. They were joined in the morning by train after train carrying thousands of passengers, all in search of food. In bands of several hundreds, "the masses of people poured over

⁷⁰ ÖStA, KA, AOK GZNB 1917, carton 3752, #4732. Censor's report, July 1917.

⁷¹ ÖStA, KA, AOK GZNB 1917, carton 3751, #4647. Report "Stimmung und wirtschaftliche Lage der österr. Bevölkerung im Hinterland," May 1917.

⁷² WSLA B23/74 Gemeinderat. Protokoll Sitzung Obmänner-Konferenz, 3 March 1916.

the lands" of terrified farmers. The behavior and sheer numbers of the strangers led some farmers to stay locked inside their homes. The city dwellers wanted to buy, and where they found a willing farmer, "a lively business . . . developed." Where they found resistance, violence ensued.

Farmers who refused to sell on grounds that potato trading was restricted or that the crops were not yet ripe for harvest fell victim to the urban scavengers. The Interior Ministry received reports of clashes: "Threats were said to have been made that houses would be burned down or the unwilling would be trampled." On June 29, an estimated 30,000 city dwellers were thought to be in the potato region around Vienna. In many cases "[g]angs swarmed the fields and stole the young potatoes and late potatoes . . . [W]ide stretches of land were plundered and devastated." The agents in this great potato robbery were women, children, and contingents of military personnel on leave in Vienna. The Military Command in Vienna sent troops to reinforce local gendarmerie and security forces. This would pit some Habsburg troops on security detail against other Habsburg troops looking for potatoes. Onlookers tried to determine the "character of the movement" and some felt it was "Bolshevik" in nature. The report to the Ministry of the Interior rejected this interpretation: despite the fact that the thieves appeared to be working by the thousand in collaborative, Bolshevik-style units, this was mere coincidence.⁷³ A number of circumstances – the cut in bread rations, the absence of vegetables, fruits, meat and potatoes at Viennese markets and the impossibly high prices of food on the black market – had caused thousands of Viennese "victims" to turn on their perceived victimizers with a vengeance.

The unrest in the farmlands around Vienna continued into July, 1918. Officials took several measures to stop the flow of human traffic between city and countryside. They increased the number of security personnel on foot and on horseback; they curtailed train services to potato-rich villages north of the city; and they resumed debate on the controversial topic of *Rucksackverkehr* – rucksack travel. Officials of outlying districts had pleaded with the Lower Austrian governor to declare a ban on carrying rucksacks. By denying city dwellers the means of carrying home their loot, the district leaders hoped to discourage the practice of storming the fields. But leaders in Vienna argued that such a ban would punish the most disadvantaged citizens, who would "die a slow, miserable death of starvation" if they were not allowed to use Sunday, their one free day, to travel to the countryside for food. *Rucksackverkehr* was a difficult, physically

⁷³ ÖStA, AVA, MdI Präs. 22 (1917–18) carton 2131, #15323 and #16297. Reports from Nö Statthalter to Minister of the Interior, 1 July and 13 July 1918.

taxing lifeline for those who had no other alternatives.⁷⁴ City councilor Lowenstein described the brutal tactics of rural security officers: they stopped any civilian carrying a rucksack, basket or bag, demanded to see its contents, and confiscated any foodstuffs that might have come from their district. Throughout the war, members of the Viennese city council and the mayor pressed the Lower Austrian government for an explicit decree legalizing *Rucksackverkehr*. Mayor Weiskirchner protested the planned “illegal measures” to search all hand luggage at Viennese train stations for flour, butter, eggs and legumes. Representatives from other parties on the city council agreed with Weiskirchner that this was a ludicrous plan;⁷⁵ while they did not encourage the practice of going to the countryside for food, they recognized it as a city dweller’s last resort. By supporting the right to carry a rucksack, Viennese politicians could claim to be representing city interests against those of greedy farmers and brutish rural security forces.

Resentful of the food practices of Hungary and the local Austrian farmers, the Viennese began to see their city as a lonely island surrounded by hostile forces. The terror of being “cut off” would resonate in postwar discussions of the viability (*Lebensfähigkeit*) of Austria, a very small country with an oversized capital. Leopold Blasel, a district representative from Vienna’s II district and a vocal critic of wartime food policies, reflected on the danger facing a large urban population disconnected from agricultural supplies. In his 1918 booklet, *Vienna: Sentenced to Death*, he described the tiny new Republic of German-Austria with its massive capital as a dwarf with a hydrocephalic head.⁷⁶ During the war, this perceived isolation might have led to an increased feeling of solidarity within Vienna, as residents and the municipal government faced down common foes. One might have expected to see develop among the Viennese and their government a shared identity as fellow victims. But the politics of hunger did not abide by this logic. Struggling throughout the war to establish himself on the side of “the people,” Mayor Weiskirchner and his city administrators were unable to duck responsibility for the desperate food conditions. Whether they had any actual control over food imports was irrelevant to wide segments of the Viennese population, who found

⁷⁴ Heinrich Lowenstein, *Meine Tätigkeit als Gemeinderat 1914–1918* (Vienna: Selbstverlag, 1919), 127–8. From “Interpellation in Angelegenheit der Freigabe des sogenannten Rucksackverkehrs,” Gemeinderats-Sitzung, 14 May 1918.

⁷⁵ WSLA B23/75 Gemeinderat. Protokoll Obmänner-Konferenz, 24 September 1917.

⁷⁶ Leopold Blasel, *Wien. Zum Tode Verurteilt: Eine aktuelle Studie zu den Wahlen in die Konstituante* (Vienna: Heinrich Löwy, 1918), 6.

in their own city government another fine, if vaguely defined, example of a wartime victimizer.

Members of Weiskirchner’s Christian Social party liked to portray their chief as the only man strong enough to stand up to the Hungarians. With “weak people at the rudder” of the Austrian government, the mayor had to do battle with Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza himself. Weiskirchner defended himself at the 1915 meeting at the “Green Door,” saying that, in his efforts to secure food for his city, he had been groundlessly attacked by Tisza, who claimed Vienna was “spoiled” and needed to learn to get by on the same kinds of foods eaten in Budapest. The mayor invited Tisza to “try the bread we get in Vienna” and spun a food fantasy very much like the one “Eine Wienerin” would send to the mayor a few years later. He had heard that people in Fiume on the Adriatic coast were eating high-quality *Kaisersemmeln* and sugar croissants.⁷⁷ Although positioning himself against Hungary was a wise public relations move by the mayor, his own administration would eventually become embroiled in the growing victim complex as citizens sought to identify the culprits of their hunger.

The city government began the war on confident footing, boasting that its “energetic intervention on behalf of consumers” had secured an adequate food supply and kept inflation in check.⁷⁸ This optimistic report from September, 1914, did not take into account that the war would drag on for fifty months, and the Viennese city government was completely unprepared for a war of this duration.⁷⁹ Wartime police files show that the mayor, who cast himself early on as the champion of food provisions, received more abusive, threatening letters than any other public official. He was denounced in a flood of anonymous correspondence. A “Schmid” accused Weiskirchner and his pack of “body guard bums” of being in cahoots with the local farmers. “The *Volk* is patriotic,” Schmid wrote to the Kaiser, “but not towards the scoundrels” of the city government.⁸⁰ Another resident who suspected that city officials had exempted themselves from ration regulations sent Weiskirchner an envelope of worthless fat ration cards, advising him to “burn the fat coupons and shove them up

⁷⁷ NÖLA Präs. “P” 1915 XVb, 1803, Pol. Dir. Wien to Statthaltereipräs., 11 April 1915.

⁷⁸ *Die Gemeinde Wien während der ersten Kriegswochen. 1. August bis 22. September 1914. Nach dem vom Bürgermeister Dr. Richard Weiskirchner dem Wiener Gemeinderate erstatteten Bericht zusammengestellt vom Sekretariate der Wiener christsozialen Parteileitung* (Vienna: Verlag des Sekretariates, 1914), 7–9.

⁷⁹ On the city government in wartime, see Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis*, ch. 7.

⁸⁰ KA, MKSM 1915 10-1/Nr. 27. Postcard to Kaiser, 22 July 1915.

your ass.”⁸¹ In a more desperate tone, an anonymous “Mother Starving With Her Children” described her plight to the mayor:

From the XIV District! Dear Mr. Mayor! Meat is very expensive and in very short supply. No vegetables. Potatoes one per day per person. Instead of 1/2 kg. of flour per week we get more potato flour – to do what? From day to day hundreds of thousands are waiting for sauerkraut and one sees a tub only once every 14 days... Why so seldom? We can't hold out any longer. We have shown enough patience and sacrifice, it can't go on. In the whole world, Vienna is the saddest off. Peace at any price...⁸²

Another mother wrote to warn Weiskirchner that if the food situation did not improve she would be forced to abandon her children as wards of the city.⁸³ We might ask, if wartime sacrifice was performed as a duty to the state, why did women who had reached the end of their “willingness to sacrifice” (*Opferwilligkeit*) target the city? This discrepancy tells us something about women's ambivalent notions of the state itself. The war called women to work for an abstract cause; it required that they expand their political imaginations beyond the household and the local.⁸⁴ But the municipality (*Gemeinde*) had traditionally been the unit of government with which Habsburg subjects/citizens had the most contact. So to the misery brought on by state-sponsored war, they attached the human face of the mayor.

Mayor Weiskirchner defended himself publicly against the countless rumors circulating about his policies and his person. Although he and his Christian Social party were no friends to the Jews, he was rumored to be selling top-quality white flour to Jews for making matzo. He was so dogged by the persistent rumor that he had offered his daughter as a down payment for fifteen sacks of flour.⁸⁵ For every public statement in defense of the mayor – for example, a speaker encouraging Christian Social women to refute energetically the tall tales of “the evil mayor and the wicked city government” – there were many more letters, rumors and grumblings that pegged him as a primary culprit of Viennese suffering.⁸⁶ When August Knes, a drunken night tram passenger, announced that before the war Mayor Weiskirchner had been a known swindler and was

⁸¹ AdBDW 1916 St./16 #34987. Anon. letter to Weiskirchner, Amtsnotiz 8 November 1916, “die Fett Marken selbst einbrennen und am Arsch biken das am Sessel biken.”

⁸² AdBDW 1917 V/9 #43148. Postcard to Weiskirchner, April 1917.

⁸³ AdBDW 1917 V/9 #41470. Letter from Mrs. Freudensprung to Weiskirchner, no date.

⁸⁴ See chapter 4 on women.

⁸⁵ NÖLA Präs. “P” 1915 XVb, 1803, Pol. Dir. Wien to Statthaltereipräs. 11 April 1915.

⁸⁶ *Oesterreichische Frauen-Zeitung* 1, no. 9 (1917), 128.

“now an even bigger one,” fellow riders were hearing familiar accusations, complaints now common in public discourse.⁸⁷

Bewildered, the mayor and his party found themselves in a perpetually defensive position. Christian Socials protested that they could not very well build potato fields on the Stephansplatz and that decisions about food provisions were made higher up, “completely outside the sphere of influence of municipal government.”⁸⁸ How, they wondered, had the government of a city with virtually no native food sources become a primary target for the abuse of hungry residents? A cartoon with the heading “Have you any idea of all the things I have to do as Mayor of Vienna?” expressed clearly the mayor's frustration at being blamed for problems he felt were generated at the state level. (See plate 1.1.) It depicted Weiskirchner in various settings, working hard to provision his city: wearing an apron and boots of the common man, he sold flour, drove a coal wagon, hauled potatoes to the market, and unceremoniously herded dairy cows into the city.⁸⁹ “And then the people complain,” the mayor wondered, “that I don't do anything! I'd rather be a minister!”

The growing divide between municipal and state leaders over food supplies began to cripple Austrian governance from 1915 onwards. In Vienna, regular city council meetings had been suspended at the outset of war, but Weiskirchner continued to meet with advisers and opposition party representatives in the Obmänner-Konferenz until the city council was reconvened in 1916. From the minutes of these meetings it is clear that the business of city government in wartime was almost solely procurement of food. In fact, governance came to resemble the management of a household: politicians discussed shipments of goats, spoilage of produce and even the best recipe for cooking szirok, a mysterious millet from Hungary that had upset the stomachs of diners in Vienna's public soup kitchens.⁹⁰ At a party meeting in 1916 the mayor pondered this new, food-focused agenda of local government:

It's strange, I think, in peacetime nobody demanded from me that I should get him potatoes. It didn't occur to anybody that I should provide flour or meat; it was never the legal duty of the municipality to do so... It is neither in a statute nor found in law that it is the city's duty to take care of food.⁹¹

⁸⁷ AdBDW 1915 St./15 #11529. Police report of verbal denunciation.

⁸⁸ *Oesterreichische Frauen-Zeitung* 1, no. 9 (1917), 128.

⁸⁹ WSLB Konvolut 73765C, from *Neue Glühlichte*, 18 November 1915.

⁹⁰ WSLA B23/75. Protokoll Obmänner-Konferenz, 13 May 1918.

⁹¹ WSLB Kriegssammlung C67052 Konvolut 2. “Zweite Vollversammlung der christsozialen Mandatäre Wiens,” 9 October 1916.

110928
 Haben S' a Idee, was ich als Bürgermeister von Wien alles zu tun hab'?



Einmal muß ich Mehl verkaufen,



wann muß ich Kohlen aufziehen,



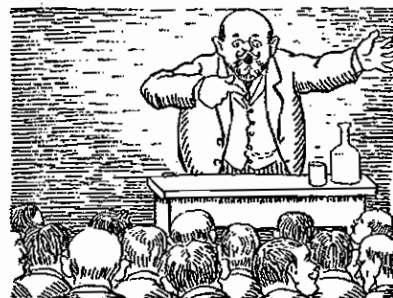
dann muß ich Erdäpfel auf den Markt bringen,



dann muß ich Milchkuhe nach Wien treiben,



dann Pferd Vorstellungen beim Ministerium machen,



dann über die Hypothekensituation Reden halten,

und da schimpfen die Leut' über mich, daß ich nie tu! Da müßt' ich lieber noch Minister sein!

Plate 1.1. Mayor Weiskirchner as a man of the people. Source: *Neue Glühlichte*, 18 November 1915.

But the angry citizens, hungry mothers and intoxicated grumblers of wartime Vienna were not looking for legal explanations for their hunger. The mayor joined the ranks of the Hungarians, the broadly conceived state “government” and the Austrian farmers as the victimizers of an urban population that felt it had not received food as just return for its wartime sacrifice.

“A sack with a hundred holes”

Was there actually enough food reaching Vienna? Despite the statistics that show sharp declines in all food imports, discussions among the Viennese rarely centered on *supply*. Rather, the wartime discourse on food, conducted in conspiratorial tones, focused intensely on the question of *distribution*. Citizens seemed to believe that in objective terms there might have been enough food reaching the city, but that it regularly fell into the wrong hands. Conspiracy theories spread quickly among residents who had little access to reliable, consistent information, and who contended with multiple “truths” about the food situation each day.⁹² In the new vocabulary of the food shortages, victims were pitted against their victimizers in a highly public drama: the hungry cried for fairness and justice in distribution. A police report warned, “The public bitterness is directed . . . primarily against the ‘rich’ . . . The population harbors deep resentment of the supposed unjust distribution of available supplies.”⁹³ Another police report concluded that people were less concerned with the “progression of the war” and more angry about the “inequality in the distribution of war burdens . . . They stand by the motto ‘Equal hunger for all.’”⁹⁴ That the Viennese were calling not for equal *food*, but equal *hunger* for all suggests that this was not a straightforward antagonism of the haves against the have-nots. Here, popular conceptions of social and economic justice were refracted through the wartime prism of sacrifice. There was a total sum of sacrifice to be divided equally among civilians. Those thought to be sacrificing too little, profiting too much at the expense of others, were accused of betrayal and, in language reflective of the times, high treason.

As the police noted above, bitterness against the “rich” figured in the struggle between victims and their perceived victimizers. However, in multi-national Vienna, “richness” was more than a purely economic

⁹² See chapter 3 for discussion of rumors and the crisis of “truth” on the Viennese home front.

⁹³ ÖStA, AVA, MdI Präs. 22 (1917–1918) carton 2131, #6356. Weekly police report to Ministry of the Interior, 16 March 1918.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Unfried, “Arbeiterproteste,” 74.