SHARING SCARCITY: BREAD RATIONING AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN BERLIN, 1914–1923

By Keith Allen

The destruction of local bread rationing center #46 made a lasting impression on its daytime inhabitants. Those first to arrive at the scene on the drizzling October morning found splinters strewn across the sidewalk and a gaping hole where the door had been. The interior of the normally meticulously-arranged office looked even worse. Using a crowbar to pry open doors, desks, and cabinets, the burglar had demolished almost everything in the office. All that was left was a tattered trail of expired rationing coupons.

As the immediacy of the intrusion faded, thoughts turned to the individual behind the act. The burglar had struck sometime in the late afternoon and had not even bothered to draw the curtains. Cigarette butts left next to the office manager’s desk indicated that the scoundrel had felt comfortable at the scene of the crime. The circumstantial evidence pointed to an inside job, a suspicion the office manager felt confirmed by a third clue, the perpetrator’s unforced entry to the building.

The office manager could raise the specter of foul play without fearing retribution. Acting on orders from above, local #46’s bread boss had taken the next week’s bread ration-cards home with him after work. The beleaguered chief knew that Berlin’s bread commission offices were often burglarized, particularly during the uncommonly harsh winter of 1916/17. As the crime wave took on new dimensions, metropolitan officials not only sent cards home with the boss. They also raised fines, lengthened jail sentences, and requested that subordinates carry coupons to the local police precinct. Steglitz’s bread boss boasted to his superiors that he had the problem well in hand: his ration-card cases were forged of iron, tripled-locked, and bolted to the floor.

The break-ins at Berlin’s local rationing centers demonstrate one, though by no means the most important, consequence of wartime scarcity: hard times engendered conflict. Burglary and triple-locked iron cases were just the beginning. The inability of the government to provide citizens with an acceptable quantity of foodstuffs at reasonable prices fueled the growth of black markets (though rarely in breadstuffs) and exacerbated urban-rural tensions. Wartime shortages tore other holes in the social fabric, straining relations between bureaucracy, on the one hand, and labor, commerce, women’s groups, and the consuming public, on the other.

These social tensions have led historians to judge Germany’s food supply system a failure, and the bureaucrats who managed it inept. According to Gerald Feldman, the inability of provincial and national authorities to cope with the problems of modern war not only hurt ordinary citizens. “Slow moving, ponderous and bureaucratic,” the German wartime governments’ “absence of adequate leadership” also contributed to illiberalism’s postwar ascendency.

First articulated over thirty years ago, Feldman’s account of German food policy during the First World War remains the standard interpretation. Most
recently, Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis have argued that "... [from late 1915 on] authorities [in Berlin] seemed to have breached the pact between society and state, a social contract of loyalty and sacrifice in return for adequate and fairly apportioned food supplies. The rupture of this informal but palpable understanding undermined the authority and legitimacy of the state." 

Problems of food supply and distribution,” Bonzon and Davis conclude, “clearly played a decisive role in the unraveling of the German war effort in the last two years of the war.”

Bonzon, Davis, Feldman, and Jürgen Kocka all agree that the ensuing sharpening of class tensions—and the marked unwillingness of wartime authorities to embrace compensatory reforms—was a primary determining factor in the collapse of state authority in 1918.

In fact, the line of conflict first drawn by Feldman between army, industry and labor on the one side, and an isolated, inept bureaucracy on the other, never characterized the wartime provision of the most important foodstuff in urban Germany. Rather, a coalition of particular interests—local bureaucrats, trade union leaders, women’s groups, and favored consumers—laid the groundwork for the nation’s remarkable social cohesion in the face of total war. Despite setbacks, municipal rationing authorities nonetheless diffused tensions produced by the First World War. As evidence from the nation’s capital suggests, when faced with the choice to support the central authority or to look out for themselves, Berliners favored cooperation over conflict.

Rationing of bread was introduced in Berlin in January, 1915 and extended to the rest of the country six months later. Rationing worked in the capital because city fathers persuaded citizens to accept their burden-sharing scheme. While Germany’s soldiers were losing the war on the battlefield, the nation’s bureaucrats were winning the home front with a subtle combination of patriotic appeal, collective bargaining agreements, voluntary assistance, and material concessions. Policies that demanded great sacrifices were never popular, and, as the story of the break-in at local bread rationing office #46 illustrates, they were challenged. When war broke out in the summer of 1914, Britain could call upon its command of the seas, the empires of Russia and Austro-Hungary, their vast surpluses of agricultural resources.

Germany’s participation in total war, however, required unity of authority and leadership: a sense of common purpose forged in efforts to provision households with a steady supply of bread, the main element of every German meal.

The First World War began in German cities with unprecedented demonstrations of social harmony. The surge of patriotic fervor made possible the most important piece of wartime social policy: the regulation of the food supply. In Berlin, in December’s last days a hastily summoned municipal war commission, including representatives from the city’s upper-and lower-chambers of government, consumer cooperativists, captains of local industry, and leaders of the local bakers’ federation, sanctioned the decision of the municipal government to create a Bread Supply Office.

Staffed by ten city councilors and five representatives from the Mayor’s office, the “Mixed Deputation for the Supply of Berlin with Foodstuffs” acted largely independently of the government that created it. Three prominent figures at City Hall ran the Department as their own private fiefdom: Georg Simonsohn, architect of the city’s bread rationing scheme and manager of the Bread Supply Office until 1920; Adolf Wermuth, former imperial
secretary of the treasury and lord mayor of Berlin; and Erich Simm, Simonsohn's closest confident and a senior administrator in Berlin's municipal government. In an unparalleled attempt to shore up the home meal, German civil authorities assumed direct responsibility for the price, quantity, and quality of grain stores. Twelve civil servants and sixty-five assistants staffed the office that sought to meet the basic dietary needs of the capital's 3.6 million inhabitants. Large enough to generate the steady stream of narrow paper strips that provided Berliners with food, the structure proved far too small to contain the coupons once they completed their migration through the city's tenement-house apartments and its bustling bakeries. The scale of the problem necessitated a larger staff and more space. In the next few years, town fathers would acquire real estate in the city's expensive administrative quarter and employ a battery of high-priced assistants. By the end of the war, twenty-two high-ranking civil servants, over eighteen hundred administrative assistants, and two hundred and forty five volunteers checked the weight of flour sacks, distributed cards, and inspected the purity of bread. The customer service section alone, one of the Bread Office's many concessions to consumer goodwill, employed over two hundred people.

Every city in Germany had a somewhat different ration, depending on such considerations as its size, proximity to rural areas, municipal competence, and location within the region. In Berlin, acting on guidelines established by imperial authorities, the city's Bread Supply Office initially gave people over the age of eighteen coupons that permitted them to buy 1950 grams of bread, or the equivalent amount of flour, each week. The Office distributed ration cards on a weekly basis, usually on the Thursday before the start of the next rationing week. Beginning on the following Monday, consumers could exchange coupons at bakery and pastry shops, paying 80 pfennig for either a ration of bread or an equivalent amount of flour. Most preferred bread to flour. Even before the war, the vast majority of Berlin housewives had ceased to bake bread on a regular basis, preferring instead to purchase their loaves, cakes, and sweets at the corner bakery. These purchases constituted a substantial portion of most Berliners' incomes. An average German household in 1914 (with its two adults, three children, and combined annual income of one thousand marks) spent nearly 12% of its income on bread.

To the bakers fell most of the responsibility, if little of the glory, for making the new commercial regime work. Bakers were required to submit new ration coupons weekly, along with an itemized flour inventory book, to their local bread commission office. While the bread maker anxiously watched, an official weighed his bloated burlap coupon sacks. If the scale confirmed that he had commerced virtuously, the baker received another ration of raw materials for the coming week. Restaurateurs had it easier, at least at first. Much to the chagrin of pastry makers, the owners of the city's restaurants, cafés, and hotels could serve customers without the bother of cards. Proprietors were merely required to record the purchases of bread. By October 1916, however, even most purveyors of prepared foods had to meet the strict codes of commercial conduct.

Despite all of the new adjustments required, the first weeks of rationing worked surprisingly well. Bakers accustomed themselves to the changes, and consumers set aside skepticism to do their part for the boys at the front. At the prompting of city officials, Berlin women not only agreed to get by with roughly a third less
bread per week, but also voluntarily gave up bread made from imported white flour in favor of home-grown rye. Convincing Berliners to bake with rye flour was no mean feat, for as those who did not already know soon found out, the coarse grain could only be used to bake bread.18

The enthusiasm that characterized the first months of the controlled economy, however, slowly gave way to the more melancholy mood of fall and winter. Few people had predicted a long war, and virtually no one had expected the hardship the war entailed to last an entire year, much less two, three, and four. No plan existed to replace the intricate network of shops, warehouses, and processing facilities that had delivered bread to the peacetime masses, and there was little room in the city or in the largely urbanized surrounding area to produce grain. The new rationing measures exacerbated relations between city and countryside, as farmers, despite their best efforts, were unable to compensate for the nation's basic dependency on foreign foodstuffs. When farmers hid stores, refused to slaughter animals, or sold grain on the black market, urban bureaucrats had to adjust.19

Much like their counterparts on the general staff, the officials of the city's bread commissions were forced to learn by doing, with predictable results. After a reasonably harmonious first twelve months, the second year brought attempts to prescribe the sizes, shapes, weights, and ingredients of pastries and other bread stuffs. The Bread Office issued stern instructions not to mix foreign with domestic flours. In cases where the grains had nonetheless been combined, pastry makers were instructed to place a sign in the window warning customers that the proprietor offered "baked goods made from foreign flour."20

The year's most notable fiasco followed the attempt of city authorities to replace the long-cherished white-bread breakfast roll with a standard loaf, produced from equal portions of wheat and rye. Bruno Haase, a private citizen from the wealthy district of Charlottenburg, expressed the popular response: "The intention of the city government to do away with the white bread rolls horrifies me. For health reasons, I have been a white-bread eater all of the 53 years of my life. If the city goes ahead with its plans for the introduction of a 'standard loaf,' there is no way I will ever be able to satisfy my hunger pangs again."21

Contrary to Mr. Haase's impression, rationing authorities did not intend to be hard-hearted. The nation's sudden shortage of farm hands, the disruption of trade networks, the insatiable needs of the army, merchants' speculation, unreliable shipments from the neutrals, and British authorities' decision to impose a "hunger embargo" drove metropolitan authorities to contemplate depriving him of his favorite breakfast rolls.22 After a storm of consumer protest, Berlin's city planners reversed their decision. They let their hungry citizens keep their breakfast favorites, provided they continued to keep the home fires burning.23

Rationing's direst days came during the harsh winter of 1916/17, in Germany as elsewhere in wartime Europe. The harvest of 1916 was a poor one worldwide. In Paris, food riots led by women workers forced the municipal government to introduce a comprehensive series of food controls. Even in London, where food rationing (with the important exception of bread) did not begin until February 1918, TheTimes reported long lines in front of East End food shops.24 In Berlin, matters were far worse, as potato flour initially replaced flour made from grain, and the weekly bread ration dipped to an all-time low of 1600g. From the first
week of February to the beginning of April, the lord of the city’s granaries searched his delivery list each morning for a train car of potatoes. In its place, he found turnips. As it became clear that the bloodless beet had assumed a place of prominence in the unholy trinity of wartime hunger, townspeople took to the streets.

Bonzon and Davis correctly insist that “bureaucratic foul-ups were inevitable given the structure of civil administration in Berlin.”25 Still, it is worth noting that when Berlin’s hunger victims converged on the citadel of city power, the Rathaus, Wermuth emerged to listen.26 After hearing their demands, the former Imperial trade commissioner to the United States invited representatives to join him in a frank discussion of the city’s food supply. The next morning, the elected officials joined Wermuth, Georg Michaelis, the Prussian Food Commissar, and Adolf von Tortilowicz Barocki, President of the Imperial War Nutrition Office, in the Rathaus ballroom.27 During the next three and a half years, Wermuth continued to meet with labor leaders each Saturday morning. The atmosphere was not always cordial, and many a patrician’s heart beat faster to hear her lord mayor “scolded like a mere schoolboy.”28 Still, the long sessions paid dividends, for city officials and labor alike. An initial concession was a decision to compensate for the harshest winter in centuries by doubling summer meat rations. In return, Wermuth solidified the city’s claim to represent the urban laboring classes before the Prussian provincial government, the empire, and the army.29 As Feldman demonstrated in his landmark study, under the pressure of the wartime embargo Germany’s bureaucrats proved remarkably adept at forging compromises with the reformist left.

In the subsequent years, Wermuth and labor leaders would illustrate that Germany’s local councilors were anything but “impotent” in the face of the capital’s food problems.30 True, the first frost of autumn 1917 provoked further signs of civil unrest. In September alone, the city’s two hundred and forty-six offices witnessed seventeen burglaries, though in only two cases did bandits make off with a substantial booty of rationing cards. Most of the thefts, and, for that matter, other indirect effects of the blockade such as black market activity and urban-rural strains between the capital and other parts of the country, did not occur during the war, but after its unsuccessful conclusion.31 The availability of food actually increased slightly in the last year of the worldwide conflict, though prices had slowly begun to rise. These changes, however, meant little to most Berliners. Their diets, like those of their grandparents, now moved in lock step with the seasons. Things did not really improve until the mid 1920s.

In retrospect, the city government’s attempts to provision bread stuffs seemed doomed to failure. In contrast to the Austro-Hungarian and Russian monarchies, each of which in peacetime produced more than enough food to feed their populations, before the war Germans imported almost six million tons of fodder, mostly grain, yearly. In fact, the shortfall was larger still, since much of the rye cultivated on German farms was used as fodder, while bread was baked from three million tons of imported wheat. The British embargo ensured that during the war years comparable amounts of rye were diverted from animals to breadmaking.32 Although Britain imported still more wheat, with about four-fifths of its total bread grains coming from abroad, the Royal Navy ensured that Manitoba’s wheat continued to reach Manchester’s masses.33 Almost immediately, German citizens
like Haase demanded that foreign grains return to German kitchens. As the Entente’s hunger blockage began to bite, Berlin’s bakers rushed to fill the orders of their customers, proving that old habits died hard for producers and consumers alike.

Although they were absolutely crucial to the war effort, the towns, particularly the larger ones, stood at the end of the nation’s food supply line. In light of this fact, Simonsohn and his associates in Germany’s fifty or so Großstädtte, towns of 100,000 or more inhabitants, grasped that if they were to win on the home front, they would have to ally themselves with both consumers and bakers; no laissez-faire policy as in England would suffice. In Berlin, the greatest fear was that townspeople would revolt against controls. For this reason, city spokesmen rushed to establish their populist credentials. In a rare address to “Berlin’s Citizens and Housewives,” Simonsohn, a newly-elected member to the city’s upper house, complained that bakers were producing “incredibly tiny” breakfast rolls even as grain prices fell. “This lust for profit,” he concluded, “must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.” The government’s generous dispersal of blame knew no bounds. In the coming years, Simonsohn and his colleagues hurled abuse at bakery makers: “They bake more pastries than allowed, they sell adulterated flour. They insist on baking more white bread than rye, and many provide favored customers with bread advances.” Bakers were accused of falsifying ration cards, honoring cards they knew were imitations, and purposely over-valuing the coupons of favored customers.

The pastry makers had good reason to resent these charges. For most of the war and the subsequent five hard years of peace, bakers had no control over the type or quality of flour they received. It is hardly any wonder that a nearly decade-long dependence on the city government for flour, coal, wood, and gas bred animosity. With flour making up more than half of the cost of production, and electricity and coal an additional fifteen percent, each baker’s survival hinged upon the municipality’s timely delivery of raw materials and energy each week. When the city government failed to live up to its end of the bargain, artisans accused City Hall of purposely misreading entries in the flour log books and favoring larger competitors over smaller ones.

Harsh words were common currency in this command economy, and yet hard times encouraged everyone, bakers included, to moderate their demands. Recognition of their dependence on City Hall, and perhaps a desire to win the hearts of their clientele, led bakers to voice their grievances in the idiomatic phrases of patriotic duty. Take, for example, a letter to municipal rationing authorities penned by a baker near the city’s Lehrter train station.

A lot of soldiers come by here on their way to the Front to buy bread. Well, they don’t have bread coupons, but I give them bread anyway. I know I am not supposed to do this, but the soldiers reproach me, and, well, to put in their words: ‘We’re fighting for the Fatherland and we can’t even get anything here to eat.’ I feel morally compelled, in the interest of the Fatherland, to give them bread without asking for a bread ration card. I am convinced this is the right thing to do, and I know many of my colleagues do the same thing.

City rationing authorities certainly had their hands full. As if keeping citizens, soldiers, and bakers happy was not enough, they also had to answer to their superiors in provincial and imperial ministries. Beginning on 1 February 1915,
SHARING SCARCITY

the Bread Department of Berlin, and its counterparts elsewhere in Germany, received shipments of wheat, barley, oats, and rye exclusively from an imperial allocation office. Berlin’s authorities welcomed this decision, for it ended precautionary hoarding, price fluctuations, and the speculation of the first weeks of the war. The new order returned metropolitans to a more familiar form of town rivalry, as local civilian and military authorities honed their skills at portraying the nutritional state of their charges in the direst terms. Arbitrary seizures never disappeared completely. Military interference after 1916 took on a new guise, when the army pushed provincial and imperial authorities to allow it to supply factories directly. In the meantime, however, the new regulatory system limited the involvement of the army long enough to halt the ruinous intramunicipal competition that threatened to devour city treasuries.

The subjection of bread distribution and processing to a single system of supply controls provided the municipalities with a basis for regulating demand. Throughout the war, local authorities made effective use of their limited autonomy. In Ulm, for example, shortly after the outbreak of war city fathers planted potatoes on city properties. Their prescient efforts yielded enough tubers to provision nearly the entire population throughout the war. Stuttgart’s administrators showed similar ingenuity. When, in August 1916, food ran short at three municipal welfare institutions, rationing authorities purchased—and farmed—740 acres of land. To feed pigs kept on the land, officials organized a kitchen waste recycling program. During the difficult winter of 1916/17, they sold the pigs at a handsome profit. Proceeds from the sale of the animals were used to feed 7500 of the city’s schoolchildren. For the constituents they served, the improvisations of local bureaucrats ameliorated the worst effects of the siege economy. They also, as few historians have acknowledged, sustained the long war effort.

Unfortunately for city officials, those who made the rules which governed food distribution also broke them. The more desperate military leaders became, the greater was their willingness to tinker with the home front’s local food markets. Imperial and provincial authorities could not prevent General Erich Ludendorff, quartermaster-general of the army and second in command to Field Marshal von Hindenburg, from seizing precious grain resources.

Like the bakers they sought to control, municipal authorities were caught in a double bind. Both pastry cooks and policymakers had to accept the flour given to them and appear thankful to receive it. Both groups were forced to adjust to a constant stream of regulations and had to explain to customers why some grains were available while others were not. Like the provincial and imperial ministers, each existed ultimately to serve the burgeoning needs of the military. All three groups faced citizens’ complaints about bread of poor quality. Public outrage against producers, rationing authorities, wholesalers and farmers could, and sometimes did, lead to violence in the streets.

It is no surprise that civil servants and bakers from time to time threw up their hands in despair. Nor is it any wonder, in light of the unprecedented hardships they were asked to bear, that consumers came to insist upon having their favorite foods at supper. The plight of bureaucrats and business people paled in comparison to that of most Berliners, the majority of whom belonged to working-class families that had been stripped of their wage-earning male members. The hard years of sacrifice led Regine Eller, “a very busy housewife,”
to reflect on the injustice of it all. No doubt many Berliners felt, as she did, that “the well-paid gentlemen at City Hall have everything they need. With their warm stoves and attentive staff, they suffer no privation. What’s more, their private stashes of milk, meat, and flour enable them to gorge themselves whenever they feel like it.”

The long, daily wait for life’s necessities that began early each morning and often extended well until the evening gave Frau Eller plenty of time to reflect upon the miserable state of her affairs. The growing number of Berlin women engaged in paid labor fared even worse. Between 1913 and 1918, the percentage of German women who worked at factories increased by 46%. Holding down a job while raising a family was hard enough before 1914. The war made it virtually impossible. The dangerous and often poorly-paid hours at the factory, followed by the endless wait at countless shops, plagued many Berlin women. The fear that the wait would end, as so many had, with an empty-handed walk home to hungry dependents was unbearable.

Popular resentment of privilege focused on City Hall, though it also had class dimensions. As Carl Timm, physician from the district of Prenzlauer Berg noted,

housewives (let’s be honest, their servants) in the city’s western suburbs merely display their rationing coupons and receive their goods without any hassle. That’s a lot different from how things are in the city’s northern and eastern districts, where municipal authorities really throw up obstacles. First, they pronounce with full fanfare how much of each good, at what weight, each citizen shall receive. Next, citizens exchange their wait number for a ration card. At this point, the nonsense truly gets underway. In vain, our women here in the North and East try to find out just what exactly they can expect to receive in exchange for their ‘coupons.’ And so it goes, day in, day out, until finally the commissioners have gotten rid of consumers and shopkeepers alike.

Rationing in Berlin was never popular, as these letters from Herr Timm, Frau Eller, and others indicate. Nonetheless, at the local level the camaraderie that characterized the first war months never dissipated completely. The success of local government in sustaining the war effort rested upon broad public participation in its bread rationing program. In order to fulfill their day-to-day obligations to customers, the city government called upon the assistance of able bureaucrats, loyal bakers, members of organized labor, and representatives of the women’s movement.

Berlin’s rationing system created conflicts among consumers, planners, and merchants, but it also contained mechanisms to ensure that tempers did not reach a boiling point. Harsh words and hurt feelings notwithstanding, the bakers and bureaucrats worked together in a court of appeals to adjudicate bread producers’ grievances. The new body represented both master artisans and senior civil servants. Members of the pastry makers’ federation and civil servants also sat together in a special division of the Bread Office that was established to catch falsifiers and to eliminate black-market activity. When Berlin’s government leveled charges of unfair trading practices against bakers, it did so with the approval of at least three of the city’s master bakers.

Relations among civil rationing authorities were often tense. Still, here too mechanisms existed to ensure cooler heads prevailed. In both provincial and
imperial ministries, the municipal government was far from isolated. Berliners, particularly city officials, were overrepresented in the agencies charged with the national and provincial distribution of meat, fruits and vegetables, potatoes, and bread. Moreover, the lord mayor, formerly a member of the imperial civil service, was on close terms with a number of well-placed government officials, including the emperor, Prime Minister Bethmann-Hollweg, General Ludendorff, and General Kessel. When Simonsohn disobeyed orders, he did so with the full concurrence of the lord mayor, who then turned to his superiors and proclaimed his ignorance, all the while shielding the Bread Office's day-to-day operations from provincial and imperial intervention. In contrast to the state of affairs in Petrograd, where even a suggestion of introducing a rationing system for bread provoked bitter disputes among the workers' representatives, the city administration, and the Imperial bureaucracy, cooperation among German food supply officials guaranteed a daily norm, however low, of flour and bread to all inhabitants.

German wartime rationing succeeded because a wide range of consumers supported it. Gestures of conciliation did not have to be large to be meaningful. Simonsohn knew that the bread scheme worked only when communal authorities took the time to respond promptly and politely to customers' seemingly endless questions. He understood that the art of civil service lies in the ability to refuse without offending. While anxious to keep the peace within his expanding department, Simonsohn nonetheless refused to tolerate rudeness from communal rationing authorities. The local bread commissioners certainly did their best, but sometimes their best simply was not enough. Responding to press complaints that citizens were not being treated with the proper respect, Simonsohn instructed local managers that "office staffs must meet all public requests with politeness." The bread chief helped ensure that professionalism with a personal touch won over the city's skeptical consuming classes.

The Bread Office's gestures of goodwill involved still other, more substantial, concessions to the public. In response to consumer requests, Simonsohn and Simm extended local commissions' hours, from 5 to 8 p.m. on weekdays and added another two hours on Saturday. They also allowed the city's few vegetarians to substitute meat rations for extra barley, semolina, rolled oats, and pasta, as well as providing Jewish citizens with matzos for Passover. They sought to eliminate distinctions between downtown and the suburbs, making where one worked, and, by implication, where one ate, the guiding principle of card distribution. These persistent and ultimately successful efforts to integrate the city's outer districts not only made commuters' lives easier. They also acknowledged the city's real economic boundaries, and thereby laid the groundwork for the provincial entity of Greater Berlin that emerged in 1920.

Enlightened self-interest guided the bread lords' decisions. Keeping managers at their desks well into the evening helped prevent break-ins; providing vegetarians with alternatives ensured that more meat was available to the rest of the population; and allowing commuters to draw on the inner city's reserves meant that they too had a stake in the system's successful operation.

Other gestures to the city's hungry poor are not easily explained in terms of narrow-minded self-interest. The provisions established for the city's Jewish population fall in this category, as did the municipal government's efforts to
ensure that domestic servants received their full rations. In a dramatic break with precedent, the Bread Office instructed local newspapers to impress upon heads of households that domestics had a right to receive bread ration-cards. Those who failed to meet their obligations to their servants, Simonsohn warned, faced the possibility of fines or imprisonment. True to its word, the city government tried three cases within the first three months of rationing.

What about the bottom line? While the price of most commodities rose appreciably during the war, the price of bread did not. On the contrary, Berliners paid less during the hard winter of 1916/1917 for a standard loaf than they did during the summer of 1915. The price for a standard loaf of bread was only one pfennig higher than it had been three years earlier. In Berlin, in real terms, the price of bread during the war fell dramatically. Not until the postwar years was inflation in breadstuffs felt in Berlin.

Low prices certainly do not connote high quality, of course. The imperial government’s War Wheat Corporation was notorious for mixing and matching cereals. Shortly before the lean months of winter 1916/17, the imperial authorities asked Berliners to ingest breadstuffs made from seven different grains. No one will ever know how often Berliners’ wartime foodstuffs were adulterated, though it is clear that the problem greatly concerned the inner circle of the Bread Supply Office.44 While Simonsohn and his associates could do little to control quality, they spared citizens the indignity of putting more and more good money into bad bread. Compared to other big German cities, Berlin’s authorities did reasonably well. The average price of bread per kilo in Berlin during the war (38.4 marks) was lower than in Cologne (40.8) and Munich (41.9), though higher than in the nation’s leading trade city, Hamburg (32.9).45

Scholars of food rationing in Germany acknowledge that the German population, unlike the British, suffered from serious food shortages during the First World War. My essay supports this contention, insofar as it points to significant level of wartime of deprivation among a broad range of Berlin citizens. Importantly, however, this essay demonstrates that the sense of domestic catastrophe one gains from most accounts of food rationing in Germany is exaggerated. On the most important point of all—the physical suffering induced by malnutrition—new evidence suggests that the efforts of Germany’s local bureaucrats paid dividends. From February 1917 onwards, two professors in Leipzig began a systematic survey of nutrition in their city. Their sample of fifty-nine families spanned the classes, from independent businessmen to manual laborers, with an emphasis on skilled labor and the lower middle class. Their findings show that, “except for the period of the ‘turnip winter’ and for the summer of 1918, the levels of civilian food consumption in Germany (taking weight loss into account) approximated to prewar norms.”46 Postwar testimony from Germany’s wartime enemies offer further evidence of the success of local rationing authorites. In Hamburg in February 1919, a British officer noted that “the adult population does not, to the lay eye, show very obvious signs of under-nutrition,” while in Berlin, as another member of a military mission observed, “people in the streets looked well-nourished.”47 Four months later, an American visitor echoed these sentiments, reporting that “the most striking external feature of Germany at the present moment is the apparently almost complete normality of the life of the population.”48 Observations made in
early May, 1919 led the Cambridge economist, C.W. Guillebaud, to a similar conclusion.

I was surprised by the good external appearance of the vast majority of the persons whom I met about the streets. There are very few fat people in Berlin to-day, but equally there is no obvious expression of hunger and exhaustion on the faces of the people. The bulk of the middle and upper classes looked in quite normal health, and their faces did not appear sunken or pinched. The poor certainly showed the influence of privation to a greater extent, but although lack of food and the depressing influence of defeat have taken the desire and the capacity to work hard from the majority of people, the bulk of adults are, in appearance at least, a long way from actual starvation. The food of the poor is monotonous and unpalatable to a high degree, but it is at least sufficient to maintain life for the healthy adult who is neither old nor constitutionally liable to disease.49

Personal contacts, decent service, enlightened self-interest, and patriotism were among the most important elements of Berlin’s rationing program. A less obvious, though no less important, source of social consensus, was general agreement on whose hunger pangs should be eased first. The ultimate justification for the people’s sacrifices was the widely-shared sentiment that those at the front should receive the best food available. If Edwin Schuster, member of Bavarian Engineering Company Number 8 is to believed, the common foot soldier had considerably more food, in particular, bread, than he needed.

No difference is more glaring than the paucity of foodstuffs at home and their waste here in the battle field. The squandering begins immediately. During the transport, men receive a number of warm meals, and upon arrival at the Front, each soldier obtains four pounds of bread, sausages, and an additional pound and a half of red meat. These provisions are fully superfluous, for virtually every man receives in care packages from home enough foodstuffs to keep himself stuffed. We have no idea what to do with all the bread we receive, the Home Front’s most important foodstuff. As soon as we arrived at the battle field, we also get an entire week’s ration of bread. Many throw the rock-hard loaves away. Others feed them to the horses.50

Schuster’s testimony illustrates that wartime rationing was based upon widely-accepted notions of civilian sacrifice and military reward. This common priority underpinned a wartime policy that held army rations above the availability of foodstuffs to civilians. When authorities felt least assured of popular support, they voiced sacrifice in terms of military exigency. By and large, civilians agreed to pay the price. The irony was, as Schuster noted, packages from home not only endangered the lives of loved ones, they also added to the front’s abominable rat plague.

Civilian willingness to keep a stiff upper-lip also rested upon their belief, sometimes shaken but often confirmed, that their leaders were doing their best to help civilians who sacrificed the most. The first group to receive the recognition of the authorities were workers whose jobs involved unusual physical strain. Acting on instructions from the War Wheat Commission, Berlin’s city government moved in the spring of 1915 to provide supplemental bread rations to workers over twenty-one years of age who were engaged in heavy labor. Soon thereafter, qualified laborers received an extra 450 grams of bread per week.51

Simonsohn, Simm, and Wermuth pushed imperial authorities to cover many more people than their plan originally envisioned. Simm instructed local com-
missioners that they should not, as the food administrators from the War Wheat Commission prescribed, ask workers to submit a letter of approval from their employers. "It is self-evident," Simonsohn added, that "the applicant's entire economic status must be considered, above all the number of children in his household."52

In the ensuing months, Simonsohn, Simm, and their subordinates ensured that every Berlin household received an application for a supplemental bread card. By the end of 1915, the city had issued over 625,000 cards, and by the end of 1916, the number of supplemental cards distributed weekly had reached 600,000. During the winter of 1916/17, at the insistence of Prussian and imperial authorities, the city government trimmed the number of cards to 400,000 per week. The cuts, which coincided with a reduction of the supplemental ration from 450 to 350 grams, were extremely ill-timed, and Berlin’s municipal authorities protested to their superiors.

The city government nonetheless supplied a wide spectrum of workers with supplemental bread coupons throughout the war. Many of these occupations were essential to the war effort. This was true of workers on Berlin’s rail and waterways, as well as munitions workers. The labor of other Berliners, such as nightshift workers, textile workers, street cleaners, or construction workers was, however, probably not essential to waging total war.53 The Office’s commitment to the laboring classes earned it the grudging praise of critics. As an otherwise disgruntled anonymous “member of the majority party” (the German Social Democratic Party) acknowledged to trade union bosses, “if work is demanded, than you all [trade union leaders and municipal rationing authorities] step in and make sure laborers receive an adequate diet.”54

The bread card supplement acknowledged the special importance of skilled labor, the rank-and-file members of the country’s potentially revolutionary majority party. In Berlin as elsewhere, the war brought a dramatic change in policy toward the country’s Social Democratic Party and the party-affiliated Free Trade Unions. Beginning in early 1915, the former pariahs of German society were regularly consulted on the division of the country’s meager grain reserves among the laboring classes. After the April uprising of 1917, cooperation between the bureaucracy and organized labor in Berlin took on special importance. During the difficult year of 1917, Adolf Cohen, head of the metalworker union of Greater Berlin, and Alvin Körsten, a Social Democratic delegate in the Reichstag, attended numerous meetings, private and public, with Simonsohn and Simm. Labor’s demand was simple. Handbills pasted to the walls of an armaments’ factory in Wedding during that winter by “politically indifferent” workers summarized laborers’ demand: “Equal food and equal pay, and soon we’ll have seen the war’s last day!”55 Acting on their constituents’ wishes, Cohen and Körsten asked that supplemental cards be distributed to any worker who held sickness insurance, that is, to virtually everyone who worked outside of the home. Simonsohn and Wermuth agreed. Labor leaders rewarded this goodwill gesture on the part of city government by joining municipal authorities in the renunciation of Prussian government demands to raise the weekly supplemental bread ration to its previous level of 500g. Supplemental bread cards certainly helped ease the hunger pangs of laborers. They also signified social worth. The provision of extra food to men waging war, or to those who produced the material necessary
SHARING SCARCITY

383
to supply the front, not only reflected planners’ priorities, but also elicited the support of the city’s laboring classes.

The war brought about dramatic changes in the nature of production, as Berlin’s workers left the light-manufacturing sectors of the economy to accept employment in heavy industry. Labor mobility had always been high in Berlin. In the years leading up to the war, for every 200,000 workers who came to the capital each year, another 100,000 returned to the surrounding countryside or to Prussia’s eastern provinces. Higher rates of migration, coupled with mass conscription, ensured that the city’s laboring classes in the postwar era would be younger, less skilled, and include more women.56

Berlin’s Social Democratic leaders could not help but notice these changes. While acknowledging the wishes of provincial and imperial authorities to favor workers in armaments industries, Cohen and Köhrn nonetheless aligned themselves with policies that profited all workers, regardless of age, sex, or skill level. In this decision, labor found an important but unlikely ally in the Office for Bread Supply.

On 1 October 1915, Simonsohn proposed that a supplemental bread ration card be distributed to young people between the ages of nine and twenty-one. In his view, this supplemental bread ration would recognize the contribution of youth to the war effort, though he emphasized that it was more than merely another reward to hungry laborers. All youth, he insisted, regardless of economic class, were to be included in the program.

The Prussian and imperial authorities at first agreed to make young people’s diets a priority, though they successfully lobbied to limit supplements to those between the ages of twelve to seventeen. By the summer of 1917, however, Prussian authorities sought to reverse their decision, arguing that the desperate military situation justified eliminating the measure in favor of increasing rations to metalworkers. Simonsohn, Simm, Cohen, and Köhrn refused.57 Since laborers in armaments factories were already receiving higher wages and working longer hours than their comrades who produced foodstuffs and textiles, Cohen and Köhrn argued against further benefits to workers engaged in wartime production. Shoring up Social Democracy’s shrinking ranks, not promoting further divisions within an increasingly diverse range of workers, remained the guiding principle of socialist leaders.58 Unlike workers in industrial centers such as Chemnitz and Mannheim, Berlin’s bureaucrats and labor leaders together faced the opprobrium of their superiors. Batocki and Michaelis attacked the Office for Bread Supply in the imperial and provincial parliaments, and Berlin’s civilian leaders and their Social Democratic allies responded in kind in the city assembly and in the national organization of cities, the Städteetag. The Berliners refused to budge. In the last months of the war, provincial and imperial authorities tried again to bring the capital’s administrators to heel, decreeing that the de facto reward system for youth go instead to pregnant women.59 Only the end of the war cut short the renewal of further hostilities.

Friendly service, reasonable prices, and the cooperation of organized labor help explain the success of Berlin’s bread rationing program. Yet in order to fulfill their day-to-day obligations to customers, the city government needed shock troops. It found them in the Berlin branch of the Women’s National Service, or Nationaler Frauentdienst, the umbrella organization for women’s associations during the war.
On 1 August 1914, Hedwig Heyl, later head of Berlin's municipally-sponsored network of take-out restaurants, and Gertrud Bäumer, the writer and feminist thinker, had presented the Prussian Interior Ministry with the plan for this distinctly German service organization intended to replace the Red Cross. At the Berlin branches, tens of thousands of women handed out bread rations, cooked and delivered meals to school children, delivered lectures on domestic science, offered traveling cooking courses, and distributed bread rations to wounded soldiers at city train stations. Without their energy and ingenuity, Berlin's rationing scheme would not have survived the first difficult months, much less the break-ins, the 'Turnip Winter, and the confusion that followed demobilization.

The success of the local rationing schemes hinged upon the participation of women's charitable organizations. One of the central problems for Simonsohn and his staff was keeping tabs on the city's bakers, and to this end women's groups rendered invaluable services. Responding immediately to the government's request for help with "the confidential supervision of the bakeries," Josephine Levy-Rathenau, recent founder of Berlin's women's employment bureau, instructed her charges to "present yourselves as consumers at bakeries during their busiest hours and record whether merchants observe the city's regulations."60

By keeping bakers honest, citizens satisfied, and bureaucrats vigilant, the new guardians of shortage helped the work of rationing. Women's efforts as overseers were so indispensable that they came to work not only for Simonsohn's department, but also for his Prussian and imperial counterparts. Herein lay the roots of conflict. Initially charged with helping Berlin's municipal authorities spy on the bakers, the women's organizations ended up caught between the bureaucratic fronts. Frau Ilse Müller-Östreich, member of Women's Advisory Food Council, established by the Reichstag in January 1916 to oversee the War Nutrition Department's efforts, repeatedly chastised Berlin's city government for its handling of investigations initiated by evidence her zealous volunteers had gathered. In a 1918 letter to Simonsohn's superiors, Müller-Östreich explained that in many cases "it is hardly worth the effort of submitting a report."61 After outlining two cases where the city government had failed to follow up on two leads, Müller-Östreich turned the ethos of civil service to her own advantage. "You will understand that my time is too precious to waste on reports no one reads. I will assume that you do not intend to call my credibility into question. The effect, however, is the same." Müller-Östreich threatened to direct "future observations to other authorities," a thinly-veiled reference to Simonsohn's foes in the Imperial government.62 Careful not to provide his many opponents with an excuse to eliminate his office, Simonsohn responded cautiously, stating his willingness "to continue the work we began together" while nonetheless pinning the blame for the sorry state of relations "solely" on the advisory council's "method of communicating individual cases" instead of, as the food director insisted, "establishing common principles for meaningful, long-term cooperation."63

Simonsohn's expressed desire to "establish common principles" with the women's organization was cynical enough to be mistaken for irony. In the course of gathering information about the availability of foodstuffs and their price, leaders of the women's movement came to entertain hopes that their service to the nation would pay postwar dividends. At each opportunity, Berlin's bread com-
missioners blocked their progress. As early as 1916, Levy-Rathenau, Bäumer, and other leaders of the women’s movement asserted their claim to participate in the formation of municipal bread policy. In each instance, the commissioners defended their decision-making prerogative tooth-and-nail, arguing that “the inclusion of women in planners’ decision-making bodies would destroy their character as administrative organs of the state.” For this reason, they insisted, women’s participation at the highest levels of governance “cannot be justified.”64 Even with the ostensible support of the Prussian State Commissioner for Public Nutrition, volunteers were unable to leverage their devotion to the Fatherland into formal political participation.

In early October 1918, the German Army High Command unexpectedly asked insistently urged stunned civilian leaders to request an armistice based on the American President Wilson’s famous “fourteen points” of January 1918. In later years, many Germans—and historians—would come to share General Erich Ludendorff’s view that the Home Front had stabbed the army in the back. In truth, as C. Paul Vincent has put it, “the general [and many later commentators] overlooked the fact that the army had fashioned the knife.”65 The shattering news of defeat on the battlefield made the sacrifice of all German citizens appear tragically wasted; suffering, as many civilians bitterly concluded, had lost its point.

The news of defeat on the battlefield did lead to a collapse of internal order in the capital, though not, importantly, as early or as completely as many historians have assumed. “In Berlin,” Bonzon and Davis insist, “the authorities’ inability to gain a hold on the [food] situation was an essential element in the erosion of the authority of the state.”66 In fact, the war’s revolutionary finale did not end the municipal rationing coalition. Instead, the wartime liberal-socialist alliance, with its tested policy of conciliation among the local political class and active exclusion of radical left-wing elements, prevailed. Just as they had done during the long war years, labor representatives continued to join Lord Mayor Wermuth every Saturday morning to discuss food policy. Under the stern gaze of the lord mayor, the revolutionary council for the provision of foodstuffs eliminated the supplement to “hard working” and “hardest working” industrial laborers and raised the overall bread ration to 2350 grams per citizen per week.67

Wermuth’s presence at the council’s meeting demonstrated that the end of hostilities did not end cooperation between local bureaucrats and organized labor. Even in the heady days of Berlin’s revolutionary November, the soldiers’ and workers’ councils acceded to Simonsohn’s wishes, agreeing to deny soldiers’ efforts to obtain bread by merely presenting an identity card.68 Simonsohn showed his gratitude by lobbying for the national elimination of the supplements which Berlin’s revolutionary government had already declared null and void. When it came to the defense of the city’s autonomy, local bureaucrats were more comfortable dealing with leaders of November revolution than were their provincial and national counterparts.69 At the local level, the unity of the political class transcended many ideological allegiances. The transfer of control over Berlin’s food supply to elected authorities, a concession denied to Petrograd’s municipal officials by state agricultural officials, laid the foundation for consensus among Berlin’s Majority Socialists70 and the bourgeois democratic bloc through both war and revolution.
Price controls that the Office of Bread Supply had created during the lean years of war remained in place during the equally lean years of peace. With few changes in personnel, bread bosses like local commissioner #46 continued to fulfill local government's first responsibility: to ensure all citizens got something to eat.71 Ties to labor, firm since the April uprising, were strengthened, as city food authorities enlisted representatives of Social Democracy, liberal unions, and Christian workers' organizations in the struggle against black market activity. Women's organizations, the backbone of the Department's surveillance efforts, remained an integral part of the postwar supervision of bakeries. When, in fall 1919, the city needed help in storing winter potatoes, public advertisements brought out hundreds of female volunteers.

The city government of socialist ministers eliminated supplemental bread cards, though they continued to play favorites with the old groups in new ways. Precious little changed in the management of the city's bread resources, save a thick, black pencil line on the stationary masthead through the words, "Royal Residence." Wermuth remained in office until the end of 1920. It was not the socialists, the left-wing independents, or the centrist majority who left the lord mayor in the lurch, but his former monarchist allies instead. Neither the First World War's deprivations nor the postwar uprising of Spartacist radicals (who had hoped that hunger would pave the way for a coup) brought about a reconstitution of social relations in Berlin. In the immediate postwar era, the continued Allied blockade promoted further collaboration between the forces of parliamentary democracy and repression against opponents on the right and left.

The inflation, not the war or revolution, terminated wartime rationing in Germany.72 Despite all the deprivations they suffered during the war, citizens reported that really hard times for most of them set in after the armistice and continued until 1923, when postwar inflation ended. The mounting insolvency of Germany's municipalities took many faces; among the first signs of deterioration was a dramatic rise in the number of break-ins. Burglaries were so common in March of 1919 that the entire batch of cards had to be declared invalid. As the troubles worsened in the ensuing months, bakers in the city's north and east closed on Friday and Saturdays, leaving customers with empty stomachs and a lot of time on their hands to consider their predicament.73 In spring 1920, hundreds of women led protest marches on the now-socialist City Hall with banners reading: "Down with the Food Profiteers" and "Give us Cheap Bread."74 Mass plundering of bakeries ensued, led neither by socialists nor communists, nor by armed para-military bands, but instead by the city's women and young men.75 Rising prices and the explosion of the black market made impossible what had always been a Herculean task: promoting relative equity in the distribution of basic foodstuffs among citizens of dramatically unequal incomes.

The economic crisis of the early twenties destroyed the Bread Supply Office, though it did little to solve the problem that had hamstrung rationing efforts throughout the period: the quiet tyranny of consumer taste. The problem of getting Berliners the kind of bread they wanted worsened in the 1920s, as efforts by Berlin and other municipalities to raise rye consumption fell flat. What city governments could not accomplish seemed like an opportunity for the Reichstag.
In 1930, the national parliament passed tariff legislation that sought to discourage working-class consumption of imported wheat grain in favor of home-grown rye. After 1933, a new generation of politicians would offer a racially-inspired response to the country’s perceived agricultural inadequacy.

The huddled heads at Berlin’s City Hall could not solve the riddle of consumer desire, though it seems unfair to expect that they could achieve what few since have even attempted. Faced with the unprecedented supply challenges of total war, Simonsohn and his staff created alliances with labor, offering enticements to the family’s most threatened, and used female volunteers to supervise bread shops. In this sense, Berlin’s bureaucrats defied the place in history assigned to them by later historians.

Four years of scarcity had pitted bakers against planners, city against countryside, and consumers against rationing officials. Nonetheless, growing dissatisfaction did not lead to social upheaval until well after the war. Hardship neither brought to a boil prewar social tensions nor unraveled the nation’s social and moral fabric. On the contrary, the most ambitious program in the field of wartime social policy fostered goodwill among thousands of traders and millions of working families. The success of local government in war, not its failure, is the main lesson of Berlin’s rationing experience. The willingness of Berliners to make do with less bread for so long suggests that Germany’s twentieth-century history, so often written with expressions of conflict as its master narrative, must also be examined in terms of cohesion and stabilization.

Department of History
Washington, DC 20016

ENDNOTES

For their helpful comments on this essay I would like to thank Deborah Cohen, Wendy Goldman, Donna Harsh, Hanco Jürgens, Mary Lindemann, Sun Lixin, Ulrike Thoms, Jonathan Wiesen, Christine Worobec, and Tetsuya Yamane, and the anonymous reviewers of the Journal.


4. By 1918 Germans bought between 1/7 to 1/8th of all of their bread, flour, and potatoes from the black market. Milk, butter, and cheese were more frequently purchased from illegal sources. I would emphasize that the black market supplemented, not supplanted, the control system on such basic foodstuffs as bread.
5. See, for examples, Gerald Feldman, *Army, Industry, Labor in Germany 1914–1918* (Princeton, 1966); Jürgen Kocka, *Facing Total War: German Society, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 1984); Anne Roerkoehl, *Hungerblockade und Heimatfront: Die kommunale Lebensmittelversorgung in Westfalen während des ersten Weltkrieges* (Stuttgart, 1987). In the 1920s, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace commissioned several studies of the food situation in wartime Germany. The most important of these was August Skalweit’s *Die deutsche Kriegernährungswirtschaft* (New Haven, 1927). The picture of bureaucratic ineptitude which emerges in present-day historical accounts was already formed in the 1920s, when the blockade was still in force and commentators sought to extract concessions from the victorious Allies.


10. The analogy is borrowed from Lars T. Lih. His excellent book on grain procurement in Russia during the wars and revolutions of 1914–21 is *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley, 1990), see 231–3; 246, 247.

11. The fundamental basis of the UK’s fortunate wartime food shortage situation was the maintenance of imported supplies. Jay Winter, “Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919: Capital Cities at War,” in *Capital Cities at War*, 23. Winter correctly notes that “after 1915 the Allied capitals rarely faced critical material constraints. When they did, as in the case of coal, administrators on national and inter-Allied levels reacted, and the national and international reserves of the Allies were brought into the equation. In this framework, we can see on the local level what such imperial abundance meant for the well-being of civilians in London and in Paris, and what the absence of such reserves meant for Berliners.”

12. For examples, see *Vossische Zeitung*, no. 351, 19 July 1914; *Berliner Morgenpost*, no. 33, 3 February 1914; *Gemeinde Blatt*, no. 32, August 9, 1914.

13. The municipal government of Berlin, like that of many other German cities, was formally divided into two parts. One was a representative assembly, or *Stadtverordnetenversammlung*. Its members were elected by all citizens, albeit in accordance with (prior to 1918) the highly undemocratic Prussian three-class voting system. The members, in turn, elected the members of the other part of the city government, the magistrate. The latter consisted of the lord mayor and the city councilors (*Stadträte*). Had Berlin’s elections been held according to proportional representation, Social Democrats would have controlled city government by the 1890s. As it was, socialists learned to exercise their influence indirectly.

14. Roughly 6 percent of all Germans lived in the capital.


17. At industrial canteens, hospitals, clinics, and other charitable institutions, overcrowed bureaucrats agreed to trade flour against mere receipts. The Bread Commission nonetheless reserved the right to make surprise inspections.


19. In 1917/18, Germany produced roughly half as many cereals as in 1912/13; production figures for meat were even lower. For information on this subject, see Frank M. Surface and Raymond L. Bland, American Food in the World War and the Reconstruction Period. Operations of the Organizations Under the Direction of Herbert Hoover 1914 to 1924 (Stanford, 1931), 189, 91.


22. Hostility to soya, potato, and other cereal flours was by no means limited to Germany. For similar objections to the "war loaves" in Britain, see James P. Johnston, A Hundred Years of Eating, Food, Drink, and the Daily Diet in Britain Since the Late Nineteenth Century (Bristol, 1977), 20–8.

23. White-bread rolls, available today in the smallest hamlet, were at this time an almost exclusively urban phenomenon. See, Erwin Topf, Der Menschheit täglich Brot (Jena, 1926).


25. Bonzon and Davis, "Feeding the Cities," 341. Oddly, however, the authors fail to discuss any of the individuals directly involved in the municipal distribution network in Berlin.

26. According to Kocka, some 200,000 workers, particularly munitions workers, took part in the April strikes. See Kocka, Facing Total War, 49, 61. The number of strikes increased in each war year except, importantly, the last; strikes during the war were, compared to the prewar period, relatively rare. Wartime statistics offer the following tally: in 1915, 137, in 1916, 240, in 1917, 561, in 1918, 531. In 1912 and 1913, the numbers had been roughly 2,500 and 2,100 respectively.

27. Adolf Wermuth, Ein Beamtenleben (Berlin, 1922), 373–8. Wermuth was elected Lord Mayor of Berlin on the 15th of May 1912, against the votes of the lower-house's Social Democratic faction. On the Saturday morning meetings generally, see the account of wartime rationing in George Yaney, The World of the Manager. Food Administration in Berlin during World War I (New York, 1994), 134–41.

28. Hedwig Heyl, Aus meinem Leben (Berlin, 1925), 155. The observation, and perhaps also the reaction, were Heyl's.


30. Bonzon and Davis insist that the success of Allied food efforts—and the failure of German attempts to control the food supply—stemmed from the ability of French and British officials to transfer responsibility away from local authorities and to higher
levels. Bonzon and Davis, "Feeding the Cities," 30. On the contrary, Germany's long participation in total war was a direct result of the municipalities' influence over food policy throughout the war.

31. Even the most vocal critics of Berlin's wartime rationing program concede this point. Bonzon and Davis, "Feeding the Cities," 317. Resources such as fertilizer and fodder were also in very short supply.

32. Avner Offer, The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation (New York, 1989), 63. Shortages of coal, locomotives, rolling stock, repair parts, and labor further curtailed Germany's ability to deliver grains to the cities. See Feldman, Army, Industry, Labor, 254–9. Although eastern Europe was the most important source of German grain imports, the shipments arrived by sea through western seaports. Germany's railways did not have sufficient capacity to carry grain from the east to offset the grain imported by sea. Offer, The First World War, 341.

33. Dewey, "Nutrition and Living Standards in Wartime Britain," 201. Food rationing was not introduced in London until February 1918. In Paris, government controls on foodstuffs were not begun until the middle of the war. As Offer notes, "by drawing on the staggered harvests of its different suppliers, on the American, Indian and Russian winter- and spring-wheat harvests in one half of the year, and on Australian and Argentinian harvests during the second half, Britain simply kept much of her stocks on the grainfields themselves (thus eliminating the thorny problems of stockpiling)." Offer, The First World War, 346.


35. See, for examples, Preußisches Geheimes Staatsarchiv (hereafter referred to PrGStA), Rep. 197A Preußischer Staatskommissar für Volksernährung, I. Volksernährung, Liste 48 Generallia A. Oberste Behörden, I. Staatskommissariat für Volksernährung, 1 Einrichtung des Staatskommissariats für Volksernährung.

36. Calculations are based on figures provided by Silbergleit, "Brotpreise," Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften, 29.


38. For this reason, local authorities' assessments (particularly those made by home-based regional military commanders) of citizens' nutritional needs were often exaggerated. Accounts, such as Jürgen Kocka's, which rely heavily on such reports should be met with a certain degree of skepticism. Kocka, Facing Total War, 41.


40. Regine Eller, Berliner Tageblatt, no. 274, 14 August 1919.

41. Factory is defined here as a production facility with ten or more workers. The overall percentage of female factory workers in Germany increased during the War from 22% to 34%; Kocka, Facing Total War, 36.


45. This calculation is my own, based on figures provided by Silbergleit, "Brotpreise," in Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften, ed. Ludwig Elster, Adolf Weber, and Friedrich Wieser 4th ed. vol. 3 (Jena, 1927), 31, 32.

46. Offer, The First World War, 48. The basis of the authors' inquiry, that food requirements decline in relation to body weight, family size, and work performed, was unique among wartime studies. Even though basic energy needs were met, as Offer rightly insists, the decline of cheap fats such as margarine and lard, as well as meat, certainly left many feeling extremely hungry.


57. Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Potsdam (Hereafter referred to as BLHA), Allgemeine Angelegenheiten der Abteilung I Lebensmittel, Rep. 1A, Staatliche Verteilungsstelle für Groß-Berlin, No. 29.
58. Primarily because of conscription, SPD membership rolls declined dramatically during the War. Nationwide there were 1,086,000 party members in 1914; 586,000 in 1915; 433,000 in 1916; and 243,000 in 1917. Kocka, Facing Total War, 52.


70. By the outbreak of the Revolution roughly 100,000 laborers had defected from the SPD to a new, left-wing Independent Socialist Party, or USPD.


72. Feldman, The Great Disorder, 409; 561–4; 622, 637–8; 701–2; 705–7; 768.

74. Vorwärts, no. 323, 28 June 1920; Vossische Zeitung, no. 322, 29 June 1920.

75. Rote Fahne, no. 533, 29 November 1921; Berliner-Lokal-Anzeiger, no. 530, 16 November 1921; Vossische Zeitung, no. 549, 20 November 1921.