

Urban Societies and Cities

By [Andrew Lees](#)

Summary

Cities — with their comparatively large and dense but also vulnerable populations — went from being theaters of mass mobilization in favor of the political status quo to being sites of domestic hardship and conflict and, in several cases, stages for the performance of political revolution. Initial enthusiasm among many city dwellers for going to war was followed by efforts to maintain pro-war patriotism and by growing hostility to ethnic aliens. Increasingly, however, difficulties caused both by aerial bombardments and by food shortages (together with casualties on fields of battle) aroused popular discontent and undermined national unity. Officials sought to maintain civilian morale by working to alleviate civilian suffering; but, food riots and strikes helped to prepare the way for vast regime changes in defeated states.

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Patriotism at the War's Start

The spirit of patriotism as it was expressed on city streets was vividly recalled in [postwar memoirs](#). [Stefan Zweig \(1881-1942\)](#), a prominent Austrian literary figure, described the excitement that manifested itself in early August of 1914 in Vienna as news of the war's outbreak quickly spread and soldiers reported for duty.

The first shock at the news of war ... had suddenly been transformed into enthusiasm. There

were parades in the streets, flags, ribbons, and music burst forth everywhere, young recruits were marching triumphantly, their faces lighting up at the cheering A city of two million, a country of nearly fifty million, in that hour felt that they were participating in world history, in a moment which would never recur, and that each one was called upon to cast his infinitesimal self into the glowing mass, there to be purified of all selfishness.

Zweig thus described a [mood of excitement and exhilaration](#) among countless individuals who envisioned opportunities for achievement and recognition as members of a collectivity that was to receive their unswerving loyalty.¹

Also in memoirs, the British philosopher [Bertrand Russell \(1872-1970\)](#) wrote scathingly about the bloodthirstiness that in his view was evident in demonstrations by cheering crowds in London that gathered in Trafalgar Square. Like Zweig, Russell told a story of the [war's origins](#) in which military action was strongly supported by ordinary people. These people, it was asserted, were swept up in waves of patriotism that pervaded large sectors of the societies in which they lived.²

The extent of popular bellicosity should not be exaggerated. Antiwar protests as the war was starting were much less likely to take place in the countryside and in small cities than in large ones. In the big cities, members of the working classes were much less likely than members of the middle and upper classes to express eagerness for going to war, and many urban workers staged antiwar demonstrations of their own. Nonetheless, once the war had begun, support for fighting it became a leitmotif of public life in urban centers, particularly in national capitals, and memories of militant solidarity during the initial days and weeks of the conflict were widely invoked later for the purpose of encouraging citizens to stand together.³

Striving to Maintain Morale

For several years, men and women who were active on the various home fronts strove with a good deal of success to maintain [civilian morale](#) by working to convince other city dwellers that winning the war was both necessary and likely. The pro-war spontaneity that had manifested itself in early August in urban demonstrations needed to be followed by measures that would help to institutionalize the solidarity that had seemingly been omnipresent when the war started. To put it another way, the mobilization of [labor](#) power required the concomitant and ongoing mobilization of men's (and [women's](#)) minds and hearts. Urban density and the availability of public spaces made cities ideal locations for the pursuit of this objective. Capital cities in particular, with their national monuments as well as their governmental buildings and organizations, served as centers and symbols of national integration, but many other cities also functioned as places in which militant patriotism

flourished.

[Propaganda](#) in which public authorities worked both to exalt the virtues of men who wore their nations' uniforms and to denigrate their opponents' supposed savagery became all the more necessary insofar as civilians were being asked—albeit only partially—to share in the privations experienced by soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Efforts to manipulate public opinion often took shape in colorful posters that were widely displayed on kiosks in cities' central areas. Here, passersby were continually reminded of their obligation to support their countries' efforts to vanquish the dangerous forces of evil. In [Britain](#), until the introduction of conscription in 1916, heavy emphasis fell on the moral obligation of young men to enlist in the nation's armed forces. Everywhere, great weight was placed on the need for citizens to support their countries financially, through the purchase of war bonds.⁴

Schoolteachers sought to enhance support for the war effort specifically among children and youths. Teachers at [schools](#) in Berlin and Paris and—albeit to a lesser extent—London moved away from traditional modes of instruction. They emphasized themes that were related to the war, using classroom lessons (particularly in the areas of history and geography) as tools for the strengthening of patriotism.⁵

In Paris, the minister of public instruction, [Albert Sarraut \(1872-1962\)](#), sent a circular to teachers early in the war in which he expressed his “wish that on the opening day of the school term, in every class, the teacher's very first words should raise up all hearts to the nation, and that the very first lesson should honour the sacred struggle in which our forces are engaged.”⁶ Schools also strengthened patriotism via extracurricular activities. Commemorations of former pupils who had fallen in battle as well as of fallen teachers reminded students of the sacrifices that had been made for their countries' benefit.⁷

Entertainments also served as vehicles for strengthening pro-war sentiments. Numerous playwrights and producers of plays made it a point to use the stage as a platform for theatrical works that were clearly intended to serve political purposes. In Berlin, between September and December of 1914, of the seventy-two plays that were performed there, forty-five re-enacted in one way or another the spirit of national solidarity that had appeared to be so widespread earlier that year. A particularly popular example of this genre was titled “Special Editions.” Depicting events in the lives of members of a middle-class family, eight of whom are young men who go to the battlefield but eventually return to their parents' homes unscathed, this play was performed almost 300 times by the autumn of 1915. Filmmakers also produced works that combined amusement with efforts to influence viewers politically. [Movies](#) with titles such as *For the Fatherland*, *On the War Path* and *In Enemy Territory* helped to maintain support for the war. Comparable films were also shown to large audiences in

Paris and London. In the British capital, *The Times* asserted in 1915, that “the realities of this war” were “being more brought home to the British public through the agency of the picture than by any other means.” Most of these films were not at all “realistic.” They depicted a war that was highly sanitized. The viewer got no sense of the messiness and the horrors of life (and death) in the trenches.⁸

In Berlin, London, and Paris, huge exhibitions depicted various features of the battlefronts, with a view to tightening the bonds between civilians and the men who were ostensibly fighting to defend them. The Berlin *Kriegsausstellung*, (*War Exhibit*) which opened in January of 1916, took civilians on imaginary tours of battlefields that included visits to a trench as well as to areas that were marked by [barbed wire](#). The following year, a “tank bank” was established in London in Trafalgar Square. Serving as a place where Londoners could purchase war savings certificates at a real [tank](#), the tank became part of a larger complex that included a model battlefield, replete with [artillery](#), trenches, and debris. Later, in October of 1918, a group of private citizens funded the erection in Paris of the *Panthéon de la Guerre*, a giant panorama that depicted various aspects of the conflict that was about to end.⁹

Hostility Toward Aliens

Patriotism could entail not only a heightened emphasis on solidarity with fellow citizens in opposition to citizens of foreign countries but also hostility toward aliens within the body politic. In central and eastern Europe, Jews were frequently singled out as supposedly insidious outsiders, whose nefarious activities included profiteering at the expense of fellow city dwellers as well as (it was asserted) reluctance to fight for their fatherland. Antisemitism ran rampant not only in Berlin and Vienna but also elsewhere.¹⁰ Both to the east and to the west, ethnic Germans—many of whom could trace their ancestry in the countries in which they lived over many generations—were targeted by members of the national majorities. Riots occurred in Moscow in May of 1915, when crowds of workers attacked the premises of German businessmen. Policemen and soldiers had to be brought in to suppress the violence. Hostility toward ethnic Germans was equally evident in London, where anti-German riots broke out repeatedly. Already on 6 August 1914, a mob that comprised about 5,000 Londoners demonstrated outside a German-owned butcher’s shop, shouting, “Down with Germany.” Riots occurred on a large scale in the aftermath of the [sinking of the *Lusitania*](#) and after particularly big German air raids. Hostility toward [Germany](#) was also made manifest in changes of names. The most famous example of such renaming occurred in Britain, where the royal family changed its name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor. At the level of quotidian practice, the Sainsbury grocery chain changed the name of its popular “German Sausage” to “luncheon sausage.” Politically motivated name changing occurred also in the

United States. In 1917 in Cincinnati, where there was a large German-American community, local officials changed “Berlin” and “Bremen” streets to “Woodrow” and “Republic” streets.¹¹

The war years also witnessed hostility toward members of racial minorities who had migrated into the places where they lived relatively recently. Tensions arose in London and Paris as a result of the importation of inhabitants of colonial territories and others who lived overseas to serve as laborers in metropolises where male workers were in short supply. In French cities, conflicts became particularly acute. Native workers feared irrationally that foreigners would compete for women as well as for jobs. Hostility toward North Africans was most pronounced. But it was accompanied by resentment of Chinese and Indochinese. All of these people were subjected to outbreaks of rioting as well as to assaults on individuals by gangs of French hoodlums.¹²

Tensions also arose as a result of the growing presence of [refugees](#), several million of whom fled the carnage that was afflicting their native lands. For example, hundreds of thousands of [Belgians](#) moved not only to areas under French control but also to [the Netherlands](#) and to England, where they tended to congregate in urban areas. Although there were manifold efforts to ease the refugees’ plight, newcomers who differed ethnically and culturally from citizens of the areas to which they migrated elicited growing resentment among members of host populations. Ethnically based hostility toward refugees—many of whom were Jewish—was still more pronounced in East European cities. (The refugee problem here, it must be emphasized, became still more acute after the outbreak of the Russian Civil War in 1918.)¹³

Race-based anger came to a boil more violently in the [United States](#). Here, the need for increased industrial production set in motion a massive northward migration by tens of thousands of African Americans, who sought employment in factories as a means of escaping from low-paid jobs in the American South. Racially based animosity led to a [race riot](#) in 1916 in East St. Louis, where nine white people and a larger number of black people lost their lives. Shortly after the war ended, in 1919, much more serious clashes broke out in Chicago. A reign of terror that lasted for thirteen days resulted in the deaths of fifteen white people and twenty-nine black people.¹⁴

The worst case of wartime persecution of an ethnic minority took place in the [Ottoman Empire](#). In April of 1915, the [government](#) began to deport and to murder numerous leaders of the Armenian community. Fearing that what it saw as a fifth column might seek to undermine efforts to beat back the Allied attack on the Dardanelles, Ottoman officials undertook an assault on its Armenian citizens that would ultimately lead to [millions of Armenian deaths](#).¹⁵

Urban Destruction

Ethnic and racial conflicts—while significant and troubling to men and women who sought to maintain domestic unity—were by no means the most serious problems with which national and local leaders had to cope. In the first place, there was the physical devastation that resulted from military attacks.¹⁶ Although combat took place for the most part in nonurban areas, cities as well as trenches were assaulted. During their march through [Belgium](#) at the outset of the war, the Germans caused widespread destruction in a number of cities—not only Brussels, where they leveled at least 10,000 buildings, but also Louvain, where they set fire to the magnificent old library of the university. Belgrade, the capital of [Serbia](#), also suffered severely as a result of shelling by Austro-Hungarian forces during the war's early days. In all of these areas, urban destruction was accompanied by rapidly growing numbers of refugees, whose search for safety led to abandonment of homes.

Larger cities suffered from aerial assaults. German light [aircraft](#) struck Paris for the first time within a few weeks after the war began. Later, starting in 1915, [zeppelins](#), Gotha [bombers](#), and long-distance artillery joined the fray. The night of the first attack by zeppelins (20-21 March), seven bombs fell on the city itself and fifty-eight fell on surrounding suburbs. The intensity of the air attacks grew in early 1918. The introduction of new long-range cannons made it possible to hit targets 120 kilometers away, providing a means of attacking Paris at no risk to German life. Between March and August, German cannons killed 256 Parisians and wounded 628. By the time the war ended, military aircraft and artillery had caused almost 500 deaths and more than 1,000 additional casualties among Frenchmen, primarily in Paris.¹⁷

Attacks from the skies also beset residents of London. Here too zeppelins started to drop bombs in 1915. The initial assault was carried out at the end of May. A single zeppelin dropped eighty-nine incendiary bombs and thirty “man-killing grenades,” taking the lives of eleven persons. The first attack by an airplane occurred in November of 1916, but it was not until the following spring that London experienced serious loss of life. Altogether during the conflict, at least 1,000 inhabitants of the British capital lost their lives, and hundreds of other Britons either lost their lives or were seriously wounded, Glasgow being a city that experienced particularly heavy losses.¹⁸

Berlin being too far to the east to be reached by enemy planes until the war was almost over, attacks on Germany were primarily carried out against areas to the west. The first German civilian was killed in an air raid in September of 1914, during which a British airplane bombed a zeppelin hangar in Düsseldorf. Between 1914 and 1918, some 15,700 bombs fell on German territory, causing about 740 deaths and injuring almost 1,900 persons. Southwest

Germany was one of the chief targets of British and French pilots. Here, some 1,400 bombs caused more than 670 casualties. Bombs were dropped not only on military targets but also on centers of industrial production, among them Mannheim, Frankfurt am Main, Cologne, and various cities in the Ruhr Valley. In addition to attacks that were motivated by military and industrial considerations, other attacks were launched as reprisals for bombings of Allied cities by Germans. Two such raids were carried out in 1915 and 1916 against Karlsruhe. The second of these raids was the most serious air attack in Germany during the entire war, resulting in more than 260 casualties.¹⁹

Constantinople was the other major capital that experienced bombardment, albeit on much smaller scale than what was suffered by Londoners, Parisians, and Germans. British seaplanes dropped bombs on the city in 1915 and 1917. Russian aircraft also entered into the fray. In October of 1917, fifty-four Ottoman civilians died in a raid aimed at a military target that hit a mosque instead.²⁰

Measured against the damage done to Louvain and Belgrade and the harm caused by later attacks during the Second World War, the violence experienced by most city dwellers as a result of bombing and long-distance urban during the First World War was relatively limited. It was highly significant nonetheless, forcing urban residents to recognize that a new [age of total war](#), in which armed conflict was going to affect civilians as well as soldiers, had arrived—nowhere more so than in urban areas that were densely settled.

Occupied Cities

Numerous cities were occupied by foreigners, many for several years. By November of 1914, Germany controlled most of Belgium and much of northeastern [France](#). These territories contained about ten million inhabitants. A majority lived in cities or towns, the largest of which was Brussels, with a population of 700,000. (The second largest city, also located in Belgium, was Antwerp. The largest French cities were Lille and Roubaix.) Although civilians living in Belgium and northern France—after the shooting of hundreds of Belgians during the war's early weeks—did not suffer to any great extent from persecution at the hands of German invaders, tens of millions of easterners were treated much more harshly by their new rulers. Invasion of Lodz by Germans was followed by seizure of [raw materials](#), finished goods, and machinery. By October of 1916, 75,000 residents were also sent to Germany, for [forced labor](#). After Russian forces evacuated Warsaw in 1915, Poles suffered from an economic crisis that grew steadily worse during the German presence. Requisition and strict control of supplies entering the city resulted in increasing scarcity amidst growing corruption and rapidly declining living standards. Local authorities sought to ease hardships caused by the [occupation](#) but lacked the revenues that would have enabled them to support social welfare

agencies and to combat major public health emergencies. Occupied briefly in 1914 by Habsburg forces, [Belgrade was occupied](#) again between 1915 and the war's end. Widespread internment of Serbs who were suspected of orchestrating opposition to Habsburg rule, together with the physical damage that had preceded the Habsburg takeover, had demographic consequences that were also highly destructive. Urban destruction induced thousands of Belgraders to seek safety through flight and thus to become refugees. The city's population shrank by at least 90 percent, from about 80,000 in 1914 to at most 8,000 when the war ended. In this situation, cultural and social as well as political institutions ceased to function.^{[21](#)}

Whereas shelling and bombing directly affected only a few cities on a large scale and whereas only a small percentage of cities were occupied by foreign invaders, large sectors of urban populations nonetheless experienced ongoing hardships on a daily basis. The waging of "total" war entailed more and more sacrifices, not only by soldiers, sailors, and airmen but also by civilians—and not only by those civilians who suffered from military attacks and the presence of enemy forces.

Food Shortages

Sacrifices were imposed on civilians most notably as a result of shortages of [food](#). Such deficits were endemic in urban areas, occurring in all of the capitals of the major combatant countries in Europe and in many other cities as well. Supplying urban centers with sufficient food was hampered by several factors. The general disruption of international trade; shortages of agricultural laborers; the lack of adequate means of transportation as a result of the need to use trains for military purposes; the need to feed people who had migrated to cities in search of employment; and [British naval blockades](#) all contributed to food shortages.^{[22](#)}

The problem of such shortages was most severe in [Russia](#), Germany, and [Austria](#). St. Petersburg was the first major city whose inhabitants experienced serious [food](#) shortages. Beset by large numbers of refugees who were fleeing the invading Germans, Russian leaders were unable to move food to areas where it was most needed. Consequently, food became harder and harder to obtain. By the end of 1915, tea, sugar, salt, and fats were in short supply and only intermittently available in the city's markets and stores. By the end of 1916, meat, eggs, and fish had vanished from local markets, and early in the following year potatoes started to run out as well.^{[23](#)} In the German capital, the interdiction of shipments from abroad by British ships, the unavailability of the grain that had formerly been imported from Russia, and the drafting of agricultural workers to serve in the armed forces all

contributed to acute difficulties, which reached their peak in the winter of 1916-1917. During these months, many Berliners had little or nothing to eat except for turnips. To be sure, few if any Berliners died of starvation. Nonetheless, [malnutrition](#) became increasingly widespread, giving rise both to sharp upticks in rates of mortal illnesses such as tuberculosis and to heightened demoralization and discontent.^{[24](#)}

Similar conditions prevailed in Vienna. Galicia, a major source of [food](#), was occupied at several points by Russian soldiers, which substantially reduced the amount of grain that could be sent to the Austrian capital. Inhabitants of Vienna were also hurt by the reluctance of Hungarians to continue to send produce to the west, preferring to look after their own interests instead of those of the Habsburg Empire as a whole. Already by the autumn of 1914, bread was running short, and by the spring of 1915 milk and potatoes were also in short supply. Declining supplies of additional foodstuffs led to hundreds of queues of would-be shoppers, who stood for hours outside shop windows. The situation was so dire that many inhabitants of the city were dying of starvation.^{[25](#)}

Not only Constantinople, but also other cities in the Ottoman Empire suffered as a result of [food](#) shortages. The Allied blockade in the eastern Mediterranean and also along the coast of Yemen was perhaps the chief cause of these shortages. But disruption of trade among countries that bordered the Black Sea also had harmful consequences. By early 1918, the cost of potatoes in the Ottoman capital was thirty times higher than it had been in the summer of 1914. A visitor to the city in 1916 observed that the “lines in front of the baker shops were of people obviously undernourished, their faces thin, pale and drawn.” The price of bread spiked while its quality tumbled. Other necessities, such as fat for cooking and sugar also became increasingly rare and expensive. One outcome of these developments was growing conflict between those who could afford to pay for what they wanted and those who could not.^{[26](#)} To the capital’s south, in Beirut, conditions were even worse. By April of 1915, war-induced shortages of grain and flour were causing a full-fledged famine, which resulted in the deaths of huge numbers of the city’s inhabitants. Between 1914 and 1918, the population of the city fell from about 180,000 to 75,000. Migration, forced exile, and conscription certainly played important parts in this development, but starvation and diseases that resulted from it also contributed to what was an urban catastrophe.^{[27](#)}

Shortages of food—albeit less severe—were also evident elsewhere. Parisians, with their large agricultural hinterland, fared relatively well, never coming close to mass starvation. Indeed, as late as the spring of 1917, one could still buy patisserie. Nonetheless, [German occupation](#) of grain growing areas led to tensions between rural and urban populations over

allocations, to rising prices, and to general discontent.²⁸ Londoners were the least nutritionally deprived among the inhabitants of major European capitals. Despite the threats posed by submarines to ships that were bringing food to Britain from overseas, enough ships were able to get through enemy lines so that—like Parisians—Londoners were never in danger of starving. Still, short supplies and rising prices caused plenty of discontent. By 1916, New Zealand lamb was available only in butcher shops that catered to upper-class customers. Later that year, mutton was replaced by rabbit. Over the course of the entire year, food prices rose 26 percent. In March of 2017, the first food queues were formed, as would-be purchasers lined up and stood for hours in the hope of being able to buy limited amounts of things to eat. By the end of the war, queues for meat as well as for tea and margarine had become more and more widespread.²⁹

Residents of cities that were located thousands of miles away from the main theaters of military action—for example, in [Australia](#) and [New Zealand](#)—also suffered from food scarcity. Men who had worked the land left it in order to don their countries' uniforms. Meanwhile, exports of foodstuffs to Britain were increased.³⁰

Governmental Interventions and Services

Governmental authorities became increasingly involved in the areas of economic and social affairs in order, they hoped, to assuage popular disgruntlement and maintain social order. At the municipal as well as the state level, public officials continued to move away from earlier reliance on the principle of *laissez-faire*. As Jean-Louis Robert and [Jay Winter](#) have written, "In all three cities [Berlin, London, and Paris] there was in wartime a significant expansion of social policy and public intervention in urban life, through state, provincial, and municipal authorities..."³¹

Observers of and participants in municipal activities in Germany were quite effusive in their celebrations of municipal [government](#) in their country. The mayor of the city of Posen asserted in 1917 that "German cities [could] look back proudly on everything their citizens [had] accomplished in war as well as in peace for the common good not only of their local areas but also of the larger totalities, the state and the Empire, the *Volks* and the fatherland."³² A few years after the war ended, Berlin's chief archivist narrated a multitude of activities designed to help meet urgent needs in the nation's capital that had taken place in his city during the war, many under the auspices of public officials.³³ Such praise was less audible in other cities. It did, however, find expression in France in postwar surveys of recent developments in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, all of which depicted urban contributions to the

recent victory over Germany in a highly favorable light. By fostering production of munitions as well as meeting the needs of their citizens, public officials and the people they governed at the local level had been indispensable for the war effort.³⁴

Many initiatives were undertaken with a view to ameliorating conditions that afflicted city dwellers during the war. All of these forms of social action and many others arose out of the desire to maintain national solidarity as well as social order. Assisted by numerous philanthropic organizations, such as the Charity Organisation Society in London,³⁵ public officials established new practices and institutions that were designed to promote social welfare by providing food, fuel, medical care, and social services to families in need. Much of this assistance was directed at households headed by soldiers' wives. In view of the widespread shortages of food, it comes as no surprise that combatant countries introduced food rationing. Implemented in part via cooperation with women's groups, whose members sought to ensure that scarce supplies were distributed as fairly as possible, rationing was put in place in Berlin and Vienna in early 1915, in Paris toward the middle of the war, and in London in early 1918.³⁶ Efforts to promote child welfare in ways that went beyond provision of food also enjoyed wide support. Increasingly aware of the urgent need to combat threats to their nations' long-term demographic [health](#), local authorities took many steps to promote it. Consider, for example, the case of London. In addition to establishing infant welfare centers, where pregnant women could obtain expert advice, borough councils employed more and more health visitors. By 1919, ninety-three of them provided pre- and postnatal assistance to mothers at home.³⁷ A plethora of other cities offered similar assistance.

Such efforts succeeded only to a limited extent, and as a result cities served increasingly as stages for the expression of popular unhappiness. Whereas urban milieus had at first fostered pro-war patriotism and continued to do so for a while, what city dwellers as well as soldiers had to endure militated more and more against the maintenance of national unity and support for the war effort.

Food Riots

Continuing shortages of food, despite rationing, led to angry demonstrations outside grocery stores, to scuffles among women who were standing in line, and in some cases to riots.³⁸ Demonstrators protested against governmental failures to manage scarcity in such a way as to ensure rough equality of access to food among their countries' social classes. What bred resentment among members of the lower and middle classes was not so much food scarcity per se as the growing realization that despite the shortages experienced by ordinary people the wealthy continued to eat well. As a 1918 police report in Vienna warned, "The public

bitterness is directed ... primarily against the rich.... The population harbors deep resentment of the supposed unjust distribution of available (food) supplies.”³⁹

Growing discontent as a result of food shortages was particularly strong in Eastern and Central Europe. Disgruntlement was more pronounced there than in western countries both because of greater scarcity and because of declining support there by citizens for the men in charge of governmental institutions. In Russia, in the summer of 1915, large groups of women descended on a market in Moscow and refused to leave until merchants agreed to lower the prices of potatoes. Riots began in the fall of 1915, and they escalated during the next several years. They came to a climax in March 1917, when demonstrations by Russian women set in motion a process that resulted in the end of the Imperial regime.⁴⁰ Despite efforts by Berlin police to suppress anti-government demonstrations, protesters made themselves heard, also starting in 1915, when riots broke out as a result of sharp increases in the cost of butter. During the winter of 1916/1917—the so-called “turnip” winter—protests picked up in intensity, and they continued to do so over the next year. During the summer, for instance, 300 women gathered at the stall of a greengrocer in Lichtenberg, demonstrating against him on account of his prices and forcing him to flee in order to escape the women’s wrath.⁴¹ After a series of food riots in early 1917 and again in early 1918, police reports indicated that “an enormous portion of the population [did] not care about the war at all anymore.” Shortages of food were clearly tending to undermine national solidarity.

On the Allied side, albeit to a lesser extent, food protests also worked to undermine support for the war effort. In Turin in August of 1917, unrest that had to do with supplies and prices of things to eat went on for three days. Finally, the [Italian government](#) suppressed the uprising militarily. As a result, forty-one people were killed and 200 were wounded.⁴² Also in 1917, demonstrations against the cost of food took place in Melbourne, underlining the fact that the war was indeed a “world” war, in which sacrifices were being imposed on civilians who lived far away from any of the sites of armed combat.⁴³

Strikes

Urban protests, mainly by women, that were related to the lack of food were accompanied by strikes, in which the leading roles were played by working-class men.⁴⁴ Having declined sharply during the war’s early years, when the withholding of labor was widely viewed as being inimical to national unity and strength, work stoppages were on the rise in much of Europe and in other countries too. Significant [strikes resumed in Britain](#) starting in early 1915. The rising cost of food and other necessities, together with long hours under high

pressure in many industries, led to demands for higher wages. Employers' responses to these claims were generally stingy, strengthening the belief that capitalists were benefiting from the war at their employees' expense. One of the most serious strikes to occur in Britain in 1915 took place in London, starting on 14 May. Transport workers went out on strike for over two weeks, causing considerable disruption at munitions factories in Woolwich. Men and women who were employed there depended heavily on trams for their journeys to and from work. Most of the strikers' demands were met, encouraging other workers to follow the strikers' example.⁴⁵ Although most strikers were male, women also became involved in work stoppages, as in the case of Parisian dressmakers, who struck in May of 1917.

Over all — in Germany, Britain, France, Italy, and Russia as well as in Great Britain — trends with regard to [strike activity](#) were clear and similar. Marked increases took place both in the numbers of strikes and in the numbers of men and women who participated in them. In the work stoppages that took place during these years, strikers voiced not only job-related grievances but also growing opposition to continuation of the war itself.⁴⁶

Strikes and strikers became especially numerous, and their objectives became more far-reaching than ever before in January 1918. On 14 January, a [strike](#) broke out at a motor works in Vienna. Within a few days, nearly a million workers throughout the [Empire](#) had walked off the job. Workers protested not only against food shortages but also in favor of "immediate general peace," "the most speedy end of the war," and national self-determination. This work stoppage helped to foster a second one that occurred in Berlin later in the month.⁴⁷

On 28 January, at least 200,000 (and perhaps as many as 400,000) workers in the German capital put down their tools in the factories where they had been employed, and they were soon joined by workers in other cities too. The agendas of the men and women who worked to bring it about emphasized opposition to continuing to fight a war that was becoming steadily less popular among ordinary members of the German population. Indeed, a list of seven demands drafted by an elected council of strike delegates made no mention of wages or working conditions, focusing in the first place on the need for "conclusion of a general peace without annexations or reparations." Other demands called for democratization and liberalization, both in the Kingdom of Prussia and in the Empire as a whole as well as for "more and better food." The [strike](#) lasted only a few days. Partly because so many of the strikers were munitions workers, police and soldiers were sent in on 3 February to suppress it. The strike may be regarded as a dress rehearsal for the [revolution](#) that was to occur less than a year later.⁴⁸

Increased strike activity in connection with war-related grievances took place outside as well as inside Europe. Numerous [strikes in the United States](#) testified to mounting discontent among workers during a war that American socialists as well as other labor leaders had opposed as a conflict among capitalists from the outset of the debate about possible American participation.⁴⁹ Strikes were also increasingly widespread in Australia and New Zealand, where labor leaders aligned themselves politically with antiwar Britons, particularly with regard to conscription, which was highly unpopular. In Australia, the year 1916 saw a great upsurge in the numbers of industrial disputes and of lost working days, and the following year saw a tripling of the latter figure. Also in 1917, coal miners in New Zealand repeatedly stopped working. Gas workers in the capital, Canberra, went on strike for a month. Women workers, moreover, did battle with the Colonial Ammunition Company.⁵⁰

Revolutions in Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary

In Europe, military defeats, in conjunction with civilian hardships, gave rise to political [revolutions](#), the focal points of which were national capitals. The year 1917 witnessed the collapse of the Romanov dynasty and then the [overthrow](#), by the Bolsheviks, of the liberal regime that had succeeded the Tsarist regime. During a bloody [civil war](#), which began in 1919, millions of inhabitants of what came to be known as the Soviet Union lost their lives as a result of the Bolsheviks' determination to hold onto power.⁵¹

In early November of 1918, [Wilhelm II, German Emperor \(1859-1941\)](#) was forced to abdicate and the German Empire gave way to a republic. The November revolution, while forceful, was not violent. Nor were subsequent uprisings, by Communists in Berlin in January of 1919 and by left-wingers in Munich during the spring. Both cities nonetheless experienced considerable loss of life, inasmuch as moderate socialists in positions of power did not hesitate to call on groups of recently demobilized soldiers for the purpose of suppressing left-wing revolts.⁵²

On 11 November, following the [formation](#) of the newly independent states of [Czechoslovakia](#), [Poland](#), and [Yugoslavia](#), [Charles I, Emperor of Austria \(1887-1922\)](#) gave up his throne in Vienna. The following day witnessed the establishment of an Austrian-German republic. On 16 November, a Hungarian republic was established in Budapest. On 21 March 1919, a coup led by the Hungarian Communist [Béla Kun \(1886\)](#) ushered in a Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Communist regime came to an end on 1 August, largely as a result of military defeats by Czechoslovaks and Romanians, with French support. Before, however, being driven from power, Kun and his followers executed hundreds of Hungarian opponents. In so doing, they as well as others contributed to the bloody chaos that was such a prominent feature of life in large parts of Europe even after the First World War had officially ended on 11 November

1918.⁵³

Andrew Lees, Rutgers University

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