

War Requirement Acts

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Summary

The War Requirements Acts were passed in Austria-Hungary in 1912. They placed military requisitions under parliamentary control and helped the army to obtain the most needed products and services during wartime in a more organized way.

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Definition

War requirements are mandatory non-armed personal and material services (e.g. horses, vehicles, [transportation](#), billeting, or [food](#)) provided in exchange for financial compensation in order to meet military demands during mobilization or wartime.

Antecedents

The emergence of [modern warfare](#) made the regulation of army commandeering in the homeland inevitable and necessary. The first measures in [Austria-Hungary](#) dealt only with the acquisitions of horses and billeting. The draft order prepared by the [Hungarian government](#) in 1909 already met the general military demand. The later War Requirements Act passed in 1912 contained much of the same text as the 1909 order. Before 1912, war requirements were to be regulated as part of the emergency wartime measures. The elaborated draft bills and decrees were not in effect, however, because of diverging political views in Vienna and Budapest. The Hungarian government was opposed to inordinate power claims by the army and was convinced that war services needed to be regulated independently of the emergency decrees, as a separate law. In their view, that better suited the modern economy. But in 1912, in the shadow of the [First Balkan War](#), the [Austrian](#) and Hungarian governments

set their debates aside and regulated war services in a new way.

Passage of the Act

The Hungarian government and the common War Ministry elaborated the draft of the new bill passed in the Hungarian parliament on 4 December 1912 (Act of 1912:LXVIII. on the War Requirements). Section One ordered that war services were to be utilized in case of mobilization or an increased state of war, when the requirements of the army could not be met in time or only at inordinate cost by the usual peacetime methods. Article Two ordered that obligation to deliver war services began and ended following the communiqué of the Minister of Defense and was to be requested only according to people's abilities to provide. Section Four provided for the drafting of civilian personnel under the age of fifty in case no other volunteers or persons liable for military service were available to meet military demand. Younger people were to be preferred to elder people, and there may have been preference for people from professions best suited to military demand. There were exceptions, however: public servants, state and local officials, priests, and people under the protection of [international law](#) were exempted.

Owners of requisitioned industrial plants and transport companies could also be obliged to continue operating and employing their workers in wartime. In preparation for motorized [warfare](#), the act also obliged owners of all motor vehicles capable of road transport, and water and aerial vehicles, to relinquish their vehicles and drivers to the armed forces for compensation. Employees in requisitioned companies, laborers, teamsters, and chauffeurs were subjected to military discipline during their working hours, according to Article Nine of the law, but they were also entitled to a fair compensation for their services. They and their families had the right to the same benefits and [medical care](#) as military personnel did in case of death or injury, free of charge. The exact amount of wages and other compensation was regulated later, by separate decrees. Compensation was paid by the common War Ministry.

The Vienna *Reichsrat* saw the introduction of exactly the same bill, but the Austrian government was forced to accept minor modifications to overcome political resistance. Whereas the Hungarian parliament accepted the bill without significant debate, in Austria the members of the Justice Committee vehemently repudiated it because they believed the original text would allow enforcement in peacetime as well. For that reason, Article One added a stronger limitation than the Hungarian version: war services were to be employed only during impending war or wartime. The fourth paragraph also differed; in defense of people deployed in war services, it ordered that they were allowed to be put into action only outside of the war zone.

The Austrian War Requirements Act (*Gesetz vom 26. Dezember 1912, betreffend die*

Kriegsleistungen RGBI. Nr. 236) was finally accepted on 20 December 1912 and sanctioned by the Emperor on 26 December 1912. The Austrian and Hungarian regulations showed only moderate differences, and even the law for Bosnia-Herzegovina, passed in 1914, contained the same regulations.

The War Requirements Act during the First World War

The obligation to deliver war services began with the communiqués of the Austrian and Hungarian Ministers of Defense on 26 July 1914. The enacting clauses of the act and additional regulations were elaborated only much later. And there were many questions to be settled—first of all, the amount of compensation. At the beginning of the war it was assumed that fighting would not last long and that horses and vehicles would return to their owners a few weeks later. Therefore, the commandeering authorities made only daily payments. But when the war dragged on, the question of allowances needed to be regulated in a more sophisticated way. The Emperor's orders of 9 and 10 January 1915 in Austria and the Act of 1914:L in Hungary made the permanent takeover of the acquired horses and vehicles possible.

Unclear legal proceedings caused many disagreements and complaints. Requisitioned goods were paid for, but sometimes as long as nine or ten months later and at prices far below the market level (not accounting for inflation). From 1915 on, the Austrian and Hungarian governments issued several new orders to clarify the details and change the amount of compensation for food, shelter, and damage to buildings caused by military requisition. Under public pressure, the army eventually increased the amounts and accelerated payment.

The new regulations also decreed that only people older than seventeen years were allowed to be drafted for war services. There was an exception for younger unskilled workers already employed at acquired factories (Decree of the Austrian Minister of Defense of 14 November 1914, and order of the Hungarian Minister of Defense of 14 May 1915). In 1916, the upper age limit of civilians obliged to participate in the war effort was raised to fifty-five.

Consequences

The subjection of factories of military importance to the War Requirements Act had far-reaching consequences for employees and employers alike. Personnel were put under military control, former rules of industrial law were set aside, and workers were restricted in their rights of notice and strike. Many workers lost their freedom to move. On the other hand, this was sometimes to the workers' benefit; they might have been redeployed to military factories in other parts of the Monarchy, or they could have been enlisted as worker soldiers, who worked under much stricter discipline (often at the same workplace).

Entrepreneurs lost their rights to set the basic elements of the labor contract, such as wages or working conditions. Moreover, the new rules were not always clear, which caused many conflicts among workers, employers, and the factory's army representative. The number of strikes multiplied from 1916 on, and "Complaints Committees" (*Beschwerdekommissionen*) were established to solve conflicts in the affected factories.

There were many difficulties in agriculture as well. Acquired horses and carriages were impossible to replace due to increasing shortages in the war economy, causing decreasing gain yields. Requisitions were often irrational and sometimes even violated the legal regulations. As a consequence, farmers reduced their production or hid their food supplies and sold them on the black market, where soaring prices made life for town-dwellers increasingly hard.

Significance

The War Requirements Acts made it possible to wage a protracted war that demanded immense material and human resources. It was an essential element of the [war economy](#), allowing the military to disregard civil rights and command important material and human resources on the home front. On the other hand, uninterrupted requisitioning hurt the popularity of the army and caused growing disenchantment with the war. Ensuing food crises, as well as family and community disintegration, caused tremendous tensions in the society. The failure of the state to provide enough food and other essential resources led to decreasing enthusiasm for the war, a loss of legitimacy, and social disintegration on the fronts and in the hinterland alike.

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External Links

- [Announcement Explaining War Requirement Acts \(November 1914\), Viennese Digital Library \(Wienbibliothek Digital\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Announcement of Regulations on the Amount of Oats the Populace is Allowed to Feed Horses \(10 May 1915\) \(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Announcement on the Requisition of Automobile Tires and Rubber in Accordance with the War Requirements Act \(1 November 1915\) \(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Announcement regarding the Prices of Milk in Accordance with War Requirements Act \(11 August 1914\) \(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Az 1912. évi LXVIII. törvénycikk a hadiszolgáltatásokról \(The Act of 1912: LXVIII on the War Requirements\) \(Wolters Kluwer\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
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