

Grand Hotels at War

World War I felled Berlin's grand hotel industry in three blows. The first was a shortage of goods, services, and labor; the second, a decline in the quality of the goods and services still available; and the third, a resultant depletion of inventories and capital reserves as shortages drove prices out of reach. As the state made increasing demands on everyone's time and energy, managers found themselves unable to devote their full attention to shoring up systems and hierarchies. A grueling four years then ended in ignominy and danger when, in November 1918, political violence surged into hotel lobbies, restaurants, and guest rooms. In the meantime, shortages, regulations, and market dislocations of war made business at Berlin's grand hotels impossible and, in turn, prefigured the peace, when a return to normal conditions would likewise prove impossible. The fate of Berlin's grand hotels mirrors the fate of Germany's Second Empire, which also collapsed in the face of defeat and revolution in the fall of 1918.¹

Shortages and dislocations had more complicated indirect effects on the grand hotels of Berlin. On the one hand, with a lack of food, material, and labor, plus the state's takeover of distribution, hotel staff were quite suddenly marshaled as gatekeepers between guests and the goods and services they demanded. Where there had been bounty, there was now scarcity; where there had been luxury, there was now austerity.

¹ See Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); cf. Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The culture of service and privilege gave way to limits and rationing as the hierarchical relationship between guests and staff was reversed. Nevertheless, those hoteliers who remained in business benefitted from full occupancy after 1914. The concentration of war industries and administration on the capital, as well as the elimination of competition through government takeovers of hotel buildings, simultaneously increased demand and reduced supply. Hotel after hotel became office space for the new war corporations charged with directing the German economy. Management tended to reap the rewards of this situation – and the workers, the consequences.

FULL OCCUPANCY

After the initial shock of hostilities, hotel registrations increased, an unexpected outcome of a war that concentrated the national economy on Berlin to an unprecedented extent. At the same time, the supply of rooms decreased as hotel corporations sold their properties to the state for use as office space. This dynamic inflated hotel revenues for the duration of the war, despite the eventual disappearance of foreign customers.

Grand hoteliers' client base shrank as soon as the war broke out, with western customers now cut off by a naval blockade and impassable trenchscapes. To Berlin hoteliers' surprise, however, occupancy increased as domestic demand came to the rescue. After a lull in late 1914, the number of hotel stays per year in Berlin increased by hundreds of thousands between 1915 and 1917. They came overwhelmingly from within the German Empire – 97 percent of all guests were German; by 1917, 99 percent. Closed borders, tightened restrictions on travel, the state takeover of the economy, and the steady impoverishment of the empire accounted for the disappearance of foreigners.² Even for travelers from neutral countries, it became more difficult to get into and out of Germany unmolested and with their possessions intact.³ It also became harder to

² Berlin Police Presidium to the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, February 14, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080, f. 38.

³ Herbert Swope, *Inside the German Empire in the Third Year of the War* (New York: Century, 1917), 119–21; "Americans Pack Trains to Paris," *The New York Times*, August 4, 1914; "Tourists' Leaders Finding the Way," *The New York Times*, August 5, 1914; "10,000 Refugees Still in Berlin," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1914; "Newspaper Men Arrested," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1914; "Seized by Kaiser, Princes Escaped," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1914; "American Girls Insulted," *The New York Times*, August 9, 1914; "Many Send Word from War Zone," *The New York Times*, August 9, 1914; "Tells of Arrest as 'English Spy,'" *The New York Times*, August 9, 1914;



FIGURE 3.1 Men hawking German national flags and patriotic souvenirs near the Central-Hotel, August 1914

Image credit: Landesarchiv Berlin

do business in Germany, as officials in the latter half of the war tightened surveillance and regulation, especially of international commerce. While foreign businessmen had flourished in Berlin in 1914 and 1915, they disappeared from its hotels after 1916.⁴

When foreigners did visit the capital, they usually came on military, commercial, or diplomatic missions. German and non-German reporters, along with German businessmen, money carriers, and couriers helped fill the guest registers. Meanwhile, German holiday makers and country elites, without access to foreign climes and uninterested in the largely empty spa resorts, came to Berlin in good numbers. They filled the rooms left by foreigners.

“How Germany Went to War,” *The New York Times*, August 23, 1914; “Three Refugee Ships Arrive with More Tales of Hardship,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1914; “Passenger Ships Immune,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 1915; “How Germany Looks to George B. McClellan,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 1915; Garet Garrett, “How Germans React to War,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 1916; “American Tells of Berlin Conditions,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 1917; “Many Americans to Stay in Germany,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 1917.

⁴ Swope, *Inside the German Empire*, 78.

Americans returned a few months after the start of the war, not as pleasure seekers and society mavens but rather businessmen and journalists.⁵ “Hotels again full,” reported *The Times*: “The palm rooms of the Kaiserhof and Adlon are crowded at five o’clock coffee and whiskey time.” Americans arrived “in increasing numbers,” and they “gravitate[d] naturally to the American bar of the Adlon. About every other one is said to be ‘writing for the magazines.’” American custom was unreliable, however. By spring, Americans were “conspicuously not among those present.” Instead, military, diplomatic, and commercial attachés from the Central Powers, Germany’s allies, formed the bulk of the hotel scene’s foreign company. There was a particularly “large number of Austrian officers whom you now [saw] about the Berlin hotels.”⁶

Foreign custom decreased again in 1916–17. Berlin had 2,625 fewer Austrian visitors in 1917 than in 1916, a reduction of 16 percent, on account of Austria’s growing political and economic subordination to Germany. There were ever fewer opportunities for Austrians to make money in the capital and fewer instances in which Austrians were consulted by German decision-makers. The decrease in Dutch visitors was even more dramatic, down 53 percent in 1917. Visitors from Switzerland and Sweden decreased by 66 and 64 percent, respectively.

American visitors disappeared with the approach of their country’s entry into the war. The year 1916 had produced 1,436 American registrations per year, an average of about 120 per month. That number fell to 87 in February 1917, after the departure of the American ambassador and the attendant break in formal diplomatic relations between Germany and the United States. In March, 50 Americans came to the city, many en route out of the country. In April, the month that the United States declared war on Germany, 31 Americans turned up. May saw 11.⁷ Even before the disappearance of Americans from Berlin’s grand hotel scene, a *New York Times* correspondent noted that the Adlon was perceptibly “less cosmopolitan” than it had been in the first three years of the war.⁸ Full occupancy at Berlin’s grand hotels persisted nonetheless,

⁵ Annual report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation for 1914, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080.

⁶ “Berlin Nightlife under War Ban,” *The New York Times*, January 31, 1915; Swope, *Inside the German Empire*, 167; “Berlin Calls Women to Tasks of Men,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 1915.

⁷ Annual reports of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers for 1916 and 1917, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080.

⁸ “Many Americans to Stay in Germany” *The New York Times*, February 9, 1917.

as hoteliers and hotel corporations sold their properties to the state for conversion to office buildings and reduced the overall supply of rooms.

DISAPPEARING HOTELS

Rooms became scarce over the course of the war, as Berlin lost twenty-one of its larger hotels to government bureaucracy and war corporations. Formed to manage the challenges of production and logistics that the war had wrought, these corporations proliferated. So too did government bureaucracy. Because of their locations and scale, hotels provided ideal office space. Taken together, the twenty-one hotels converted to offices during the war led to 164,615 fewer registrations, a more than 10 percent share of Berlin's total. Losses coalesced along Unter den Linden and Wilhelmstraße, around the Reichstag and Friedrichstraße station. This was the heart of the city, the heart of the hotel industry, and the heart of the imperial and Prussian governments. It was also where a disproportionate number of grand and luxury hotels did business. The larger the property, the more attractive it was to officials in search of office blocks.

The first hotels to fall under state control, in 1915, were the Royal and the Minerva, middling properties in scale and luxury. With about sixty rooms, the Royal had been in business since the 1850s and was Berlin's oldest luxury hotel, opulent but lacking in modern conveniences. Its closure might have occurred without the advent of war. The smaller Minerva, with only 30 rooms, did not excite comment when it disappeared. These two hotels, the only two to be purchased in 1915 for use by war corporations, contained a combined 90 rooms and expected an average of 31 registrations per day. These losses were easy for the market to sustain.

But in the following year, 1916, government bureaucracies took seven hotels out of commission and reduced the capacity for registrations by an average of 170 per day, 62,050 per year. These included five large and mid-sized hotels – the Windsor, National, Prinz-Albrecht, Saxonia, and Ermitage – in addition to two grand hotels, the Monopol-Hotel and the Grand Hotel Bellevue & Tiergarten, both less fashionable than their peers but still recognized by *Baedeker's* and other guidebooks as first-class properties.⁹ The two latter establishments counted between them

⁹ List of hotels in the city of Berlin closed during the war and transferred to war corporations, prepared by the Berlin Police Presidium, February 22, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080, f. 29.

370 rooms and an average of 134 registrations per day. The loss of the Bellevue & Tiergarten put considerable pressure on other hotels near the Potsdam and Anhalt stations, particularly the Fürstenhof, Esplanade, and Palast-Hotel, all of which saw full occupancy from 1916 to the end of the decade.

In 1917, eleven hotel owners sold their properties to the state or its agents, depriving the market of another several hundred rooms. The Kleiner Kaiserhof, Hospiz (Budapester Straße), Reichstag, Terminus, Carlton, Kurfürstenhof, Heukulum, Wiesbadener Hof, Brandenburg, Victoria, and Lindenhof shut down. The last had been a grand hotel at Unter den Linden 17–18 with 120 rooms and nearly 15,000 registrations per year. The loss of the Lindenhof and the others reduced the city's capacity for hotel registrations by nearly 85,000 per annum.¹⁰

These closures and the resulting pressure on the hospitality industry came to the attention of the magistrate and city council in February of 1918, when the news broke that the state would purchase the Kaiserhof, Berlin's first grand hotel and among its two most famous. The Kaiserhof would be the largest property to close in this way. Its eminence, its location, its size, and its revenues gave councilors pause. They met on February 14, 1918, to decide whether to petition the Reichstag to cancel its deal. The debate made clear what was at stake: the maintenance of Berlin as a world city.

Since the police were in charge of permits for hostelries, an officer for the magistrate wrote to the Police Presidium on February 13, 1918: "The disappearance of a large number of hotels in Berlin, caused by the rental of space for various war corporations, fills us with concern about how to cover the need for accommodation for the flood of visitors sure to arrive with the end of the war."¹¹ The magistrate and his staff worried not only about the long-term effects of war on Berlin's economic health and tax base, but also about the nature of the peace and whether the city was even prepared for an end to hostilities.

In this view, the state should keep the doors of the Kaiserhof open for the good of all Berliners. The maintenance of Berlin as a world city depended upon the availability of suitable lodging for moneyed foreigners. By extension, the maintenance of the German Empire as a

¹⁰ Ibid. One more hotel, the Altstädter Hof, would close in February 1918, reducing the count to 21.

¹¹ Magistrate to Berlin Police Presidium, February 13, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080, f. 10.

world power depended in part upon the maintenance of its capital as a world city. This contention echoed prewar calls for the concentration of German national life in the capital. What had changed was the role of the state, which was now viewed as hindering, rather than facilitating, Berlin's rise. The council voted and resolved to "impede" the state's efforts to "strip the Hotel Kaiserhof of its extremely vital function" as Berlin's keystone grand hotel.¹²

Under these conditions, the magistrate petitioned the Reichstag and won. Lawmakers ultimately dropped their bid for the Kaiserhof.¹³ The debate, the majority opinion of the magistrates, and the acquiescence of the Reichstag evinced the sea change in the state's understanding of its role with respect to its subjects.¹⁴ By 1918, the state was not only responsible for mustering soldiers and prosecuting a war, as it had been for centuries, but also for provisioning the people in the broadest sense. This new charge was born of total war and the crushing burdens and painful deprivations it saddled on ordinary Germans.

SHORTAGES

On August 4, 1914, the Reichstag had passed an enabling act that transferred much of its power to the Bundesrat, an unelected body that would promulgate several hundred decrees by the end of the war. At the same time, the Prussian Law of Siege wrested executive power from civil authorities and placed it in the hands of one deputy commanding general for each of the 24 military districts of the empire.¹⁵ Four days later, on August 8, 1914, the war ministry established the Department of Raw Materials for War (Kriegsrohstoffabteilung), which was supposed to coordinate the efforts of producers and manufacturers in the Reich. In turn, the state's slow, fitful takeover of the German economy during World War I would have an even greater effect on the grand hotel industry than did the shifts of demand and supply in the market for hotel rooms.

Hotel managers found themselves having to contend with the decrees of the Department of Raw Materials for War as well as the ordinances

¹² Minutes of a meeting of the Berlin City Council, February 14, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080, f. 11.

¹³ Decision of the Berlin City Council, February 14, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080, f. 10; Magistrate to the Reichstag, petition of February 16, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080, f. 8.

¹⁴ Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, 238.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

and regulations handed down from the military by way of the Police Presidium. Individually and collectively, Berlin's grand hoteliers tried to negotiate with their civil and military overlords. The main avenues open to them, however, were through the police, who rarely heard protests sympathetically, and through the magistrate and city council, who had very limited real power as compared with the military-backed police bureaucracy. This and other bureaucracies became powerful mediators in the German economy as shortages of raw materials and finished goods worsened in late 1914 and early 1915.

And yet, in the war's early months, grand hotel guests were spared the grind of war. A certain Clara Meyer of St. Louis reported to *The New York Times* that "the Berlin cafes are doing business as usual" and that things "had not advanced in price" – not as of late September 1914, that is. By November, the word from another American guest, at the Kaiserhof, was that "social life appear[ed] to be at a standstill." Although the restaurants were still full, the mood was sedate. Rising prices discouraged the consumption of several prewar delicacies and most of the expensive wines. Banquets, luncheons, and parties became fewer and smaller. Hoteliers, accustomed to a flood of Americans for the Berlin social season, lost out in the fall and winter of 1914/15, when an American correspondent observed not "one American ... in the Hotel Adlon." On New Year's Eve 1914/15, there were none of the customary "horns" or "bells," "nor could any other noise-making contrivances be heard."¹⁶

Early in the new year, 1915, the authorities extended rationing to the city's grand hotels, obliging waiters to enforce a 2 kg per week limit on the individual consumption of bread. Upon returning to their rooms the night before enforcement, guests would have seen a card pasted over the headboard that read:

The BREAD CARDS instituted by the authorities are to be found for each of our honored guests and good for ONE DAY ONLY at the Bread Card Desk in the lobby, to be obtained daily. The honored guests are reminded that from Feb. 22 bread may only be given at meals on presentation of this official bread card. We therefore beg guests always to keep this BREAD CARD by them and to give it back when paying the bill on the day of departure.¹⁷

¹⁶ "Wartime Scenes in German Cities," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1914; "Says Berlin Feels the Pinch of War," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1914; "Berlin Silent City on New Year's Eve," *The New York Times*, January 2, 1915.

¹⁷ "Berlin Cheerful on Bread Ration," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1915.

This notice was extraordinary. Behind the obsequious language lay a transformation in the political economy of luxury hotels. For the first time, consumption would be limited. By what factor, guests would find out the next morning.

On the way to breakfast stood a man behind a table, the bread-card clerk, in fact an official of the state. The Kaiserhof's clerk, Wilhelmine patriotism personified, had a handlebar mustache and medals pinned to his chest.¹⁸ Guests lined up in front of him to have their names recorded in his ledger, whereupon they would receive from him a ration ticket that dispensed with the finer expressions of the previous night's notice: "Not transferable. Only valid for Feb. 22, 1915. Not valid unless bearing date. See back!" The reverse side contained information about what constituted bread under ration and what did not. The edges of the card were perforated and could be removed in pieces marked 25 g each, adding up to the full ration for the day.¹⁹ This card, its presentation, and the regulations it communicated represented a reversal of grand hotel dynamics. The cards and new practices admitted and responded to the reality of scarcity, a reality anathema to the culture and business model of the grand hotel. Moreover, this new system, requiring guests to wait in line to speak to a government official, rather than a staff member, breached the hotel's defenses against outside interference.²⁰ Finally, and most radically, the new dynamic positioned hotel waiters, who would distribute the rations in exchange for coupons, as gatekeepers between guests and the objects of their demands. In this new crisis, the heaviest burden of enforcement landed on the worker.

Some four months later, in June 1915, a new decree banned fixed-price menus, which had always guaranteed at least three courses. The new à la carte bills of fare limited guests to one dish. Later paragraphs of the new decree went so deep as to change the word order in individual menu items, with restaurateurs now having to list the vegetable before the meat, which had to be boiled rather than roasted or fried – to save on fat. Once again, it fell to individual waiters to explain and enforce the

¹⁸ On these officials' condescending airs, see Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 465, 482.

¹⁹ Cf. Swope, *Inside the German Empire*, 118, 163–70.

²⁰ Belinda J. Davis, "Food Scarcity and the Female Consumer," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, eds. Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 297–99. See also Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, 73–86.

latest restrictions. Ernst Barth, director of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, protested to the police against these measures, particularly the ban on fixed-price menus and the limit to one dish per guest, but to no avail.²¹

Regulations expanded again in October 1915 with the arrival of meatless and fatless days. Immediately, hoteliers and restaurateurs registered lower profits and struggled to dispel widespread confusion about the new definitions.²² On two days of the week, certain meats were banned from appearing on the menu. On two other days of the week, certain kinds of fat were banned. On the fifth day, the sale of pork was forbidden, pork not considered a meat under the “meatless day” decree. On any day, however, guests could order offal, game, poultry, and fish, none of which fell under the category of meat. Nevertheless, in contrast with the outside world, grand hotels still offered enough to eat. “You get your daily bread card [and] it gets you good bread,” wrote one correspondent for *The Times*. “It is a meatless day, the waiter tells you. For lunch there is sole and other fish, with plenty of potatoes, and dainty things in sauce.”²³ Another American observed that the urban food supply was neither “varied” nor “abundant,” but sufficient.²⁴

As foreign goods and foodstuffs – grains from Russia, exotic ingredients from the British Empire, fruits and vegetables from points south, and eggs, milk, butter, lard, and meat from neighboring countries – passed out of reach, local replacements for many such items proved “extraordinarily” expensive, as executives at Aschinger’s Incorporated reckoned, and drove up costs.²⁵ In response, hoteliers and restaurateurs became creative with the menus. Game and fish proliferated; sausage, offal, and other déclassé proteins became the norm. Portions shrank. The bread ration dropped by one-eighth. The number of meat dishes on menus fell and then came under rationing. By summer, shortage and want had become the defining experience of a hotel restaurant.²⁶

The mix of regulations became ever more complicated in 1916. Many customers found the new regime impossible to navigate, but some learned quickly and ordered to advantage. When hotel restaurants started printing on menus the gross raw weight of the meat on offer, guests turned bargain hunters could identify the heaviest courses for the

²¹ “Vereinsnachrichten: Verein Berliner Hotelbesitzer,” *Das Hotel*, June 18, 1915.

²² Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1915, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 635.

²³ “No Starvation in Germany,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 1916.

²⁴ Swope, *Inside the German Empire*, 162.

²⁵ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1915, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 635.

²⁶ “Simplified Menu Bewilders Berlin,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 1916.

fewest coupons, according to a *New York Times* correspondent. Waiters helped with calculating and strategizing, “putting their heads together” with the guests “to figure out which dishes did or did not require the production of meat cards.”²⁷

Meanwhile, prices continued to rise. The cost of food, heat, textiles, and labor particularly burdened hoteliers. Meat, fish, flour, potatoes, coffee, tea, chocolate, eggs, sugar, and beer were in extremely short supply. Block ice was harder to import. Widespread copper confiscations in 1916 left hotels with too few pots; replacements were too expensive. By November, clothing would be rationed, too, putting a strain on the appearance of the staff. Scarcity of materials for cleaning and for clerical work made day-to-day operations difficult. Paper shortages led hotel managers to withhold the complimentary stationery. In general, it now required a good deal of “effort” to come up with goods of even “middling quality,” hoteliers reported.²⁸

With rising costs, city authorities established a board of price monitoring, the Price Auditing Bureau of Greater Berlin (Preisprüfungsstelle Groß-Berlin), to chart and limit inflation, though to insufficient effect.²⁹ By late summer 1916 and through the end of the year, shortages, hoarding, and inefficiencies continued to drive prices up.³⁰ In September, the Department of Potato Distribution (Abteilung für Kartoffelversorgung) under the magistrate of Berlin made things worse by announcing that “owners of hotels, pubs, bars, restaurants, cafeterias, and similar businesses who intend to store potatoes for the winter will be given the opportunity to buy their winter supplies, for the period from November 20 to March 11, in advance.”³¹ Grand hotels and other large concerns with ample storage space now enjoyed a particular advantage. This system of sanctioned hoarding also signaled an unequal distribution of resources that favored factory workers and the wealthy – those who ate in grand hotels and large restaurants and cafés or who took their lunch from an office cafeteria or shop canteen.³²

²⁷ “12 oz. Meat Week’s Ration for Berliners,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 1916.

²⁸ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1916, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 635.

²⁹ Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, 117.

³⁰ Thierry Bonzon and Belinda J. Davis, “Feeding the Cities,” in *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919*, eds. Jay M. Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1:321; Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, 30–32, 50, 162.

³¹ Notice sent by the Department of Potato Distribution (Reichskartoffelversorgung) to hoteliers, plus resulting correspondence, in LAB A Rep. 013-01-08, Nr. 14.

³² Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, 24–32; Jonathan Manning, “Wages and Purchasing Power,” in Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities at War*, 1:257–60.

That winter, 1916/17, the potato crop failed, and new shortages overwhelmed the government's ad hoc measures for transporting, rationing, and pricing foodstuffs and materials.³³ There would be so little to eat that the period became known as the Turnip Winter, after the "Swedish roots" that Germans and particularly Berliners had to eat in lieu of food fit for human consumption. ("Swedish roots" are largely indigestible without the accompaniment of fats, which were mostly off the market by December 1916.) At the same time, Berlin faced an acute coal shortage. In mid-December, the Bundesrat responded to the emergency by decreeing various coal-conservation measures.

Public transportation, much of it dependent upon coal, became scarce during the day and stopped at night. Illuminated advertisements went dark, and it took months for hoteliers to persuade the authorities to allow entrance lighting, at least, for safety reasons during Berlin's notoriously dark winter – darker, now, since the city had cut municipal lamps. To make matters worse, the limited daylight hours in which Berliners could see enough to market and purchase goods contributed to the upward pressure on prices, especially for services. These dislocations would multiply and widen after the winter of 1916/17, the coal shortage still a year from its climax in 1917/18.³⁴

The lack of heat, light, and transportation removed the last opportunities for conspicuous consumption and bourgeois self-display at grand hotels. The shortage of coal limited heat and light in the restaurants, bars, and ballrooms. With the near disappearance of motorized transportation and the dispatch of horses and other beasts of burden to the fronts, hotels farthest from train stations had to lower prices. Well-heeled guests chose second- and third-class establishments if a first-class railroad hotel could not accommodate them. Few visitors braved the wind-swept, pitch-black streets to find a grand hotel in the urban interior.³⁵ Then the national rail network itself broke down. By April 1917, with the food crisis worsening, railroad planners found themselves unable to answer civilian needs for calories and coal. The result was another cut in the bread ration for Berliners – and that on top of the potato ration of January 1917, which had limited effect since there were almost no

³³ On the authorities' apparently abject failure to provision the capital, see Bonzon and Davis, "Feeding the Cities," 1:339.

³⁴ Armin Triebel, "Coal and the Metropolis," in Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities*, 1:353.

³⁵ Annual report of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers for 1917, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080.

potatoes to buy, anyway.³⁶ Despite hoteliers' best efforts, life in hotels became far less comfortable than during the first half of the war.

MANAGERS, SALARIED EMPLOYEES, WORKERS

Hotel employees' salaries and workers' wages increased during the war, though unevenly and not always in proportion to prices.³⁷ The salaries of hotel managers and corporate officers rose fastest throughout the war, however, and did keep pace with inflation. Boards of directors were quick to grant these wealthy men's requests for raises. Chief Financial Officer Hans Lohnert's 1917 appeal to the board of Aschinger's Incorporated was typical: "In light of the considerable increase in my activities ... of the unusual growth of my responsibilities on account of myriad laws and regulations, and of annual profits having far exceeded those of all past years, I am ... requesting an augmentation of my income by way of [a bonus] in proportion to gross annual profits."³⁸ Although Lohnert was correct – profits had indeed risen – he had not accounted for the need, under these conditions, to divert those profits from salaries and dividends to procurement and capital projects.

In real terms, in fact, profits were paltry, and given wartime inflation as well as the uncertainty of the future, there was good reason to invest profits immediately in aging plants and furniture, as some hoteliers already understood.³⁹ Yet Lohnert and other elites at Berlin's largest hotel corporations saw and seized the opportunity to argue for bonuses.⁴⁰ Indeed, it became standard during and after the war for a portion of a Berlin grand hotel manager's pay to be tied to annual profits. The 1918 contract of Ewald Kretschmar is representative, promising him a salary-plus-one-percent package at war's end.⁴¹ Kretschmar and others

³⁶ Jay M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (Oxford: Equinox, 1988), 15.

³⁷ Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 26.

³⁸ Lohnert to the board of Aschinger's Incorporated, May 2, 1917, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 396.

³⁹ "Notstandsmaßnahmen für die deutsche Hotelindustrie," *Das Hotel*, December 31, 1915; "Notstandsmaßnahmen für die deutsche Hotelindustrie," *Das Hotel*, April 13, 1917; "Die neuesten Vorschläge zur Umwandlung unseres Wirtschaftslebens," *Das Hotel*, January 31, 1919.

⁴⁰ On the uneven effects of wartime economic dislocations, see Matthias Blum, "War, Food, Rationing, and Socioeconomic Equality in Germany during the First World War," *Economic History Review* 66 (2013), 1065.

⁴¹ Employment contract between Kretschmar and the Hotel Management Corporation, February 10, 1918, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 987.

justified their requests for higher salaries and profit-sharing by claiming that with so many clerks, bookkeepers, and secretaries called up, managers now had to work longer hours.

Although only a few of the managers and corporate officers of Berlin's grand hotels served in the field, many of their white-collar subordinates did. Their absence proved a major difficulty. The mobilization of bookkeepers, for example, made for hazy accounting.⁴² With the onset of conscription, still more white-collar employees of fighting age left for the front. Women replaced a small number of these men but usually in back-office positions.⁴³ (The Kaiserhof presented an exception, however, with female reception clerks.⁴⁴) Among hotel managers, the replacement of men with women was an act of desperation. The consensus was that a trained man would always be preferable to a woman.⁴⁵ In practice, moreover, hoteliers opted for an untrained man over a trained woman.

For those male white-collar workers who retained civilian status and their jobs, salaries rose but did not keep pace with the mounting cost of living, nor did they reflect the extra hours that understaffed managers demanded. What is more, these white-collar workers who, unlike much of the hotel staff, lived off-site and had to contend with associated deprivations, fell through the net of wartime relief directives. To make matters worse, men such as these, of the petty bourgeoisie, were least inclined to accept support from the state. They went home to communities, some to wives, some to families, feeling cold, hungry, frightened, and proud.⁴⁶

The war was even more disruptive at the next level down, among workers. Harsh conditions and punishing hours aside, hotel workers had the advantage of upward mobility, however limited and slow. Present hardships could pay off later, when a floor servant might be promoted to assistant waiter, an assistant waiter to waiter, a waiter to senior waiter, a senior waiter to headwaiter, a headwaiter – in extremely

⁴² Central-Hotel management to the board of the Hotel Management Corporation, June 10, 1915, in LAB A Rep. 225-01, Nr. 1.

⁴³ Report on employment figures, 1911–1917, n.d., prepared by the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080. On women replacing men at work, see Karen Hagemann, introduction to *Home/Front: The Military, War, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (New York: Berg, 2002), 3; Birthe Kundrus, “Gender Wars: The First World War and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Weimar Republic,” in *Home/Front*, 159–79.

⁴⁴ “Berlin Calls Women to Tasks of Men.”

⁴⁵ Report on employment figures, 1911–1917.

⁴⁶ Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, 78–86.

rare cases – to a restaurant manager with an income to rival that of the hotel manager himself. Leaving a job in hotel service thus had a high opportunity cost for some – while cashing in on short-term opportunities, one cheated oneself out of long-term rewards. High-paying munitions factory jobs lured few workers away from the grand hotel's ladder, steep and truncated as it was. In most cases, when workers left, they went to the fronts.

By 1915, sourcing labor became a hotelier's "most difficult task by far," according to an Aschinger's Incorporated annual report.⁴⁷ The reports of all the major hotel corporations cited labor shortages as their greatest difficulty, above even food and fuel shortages and government regulations. As workers vanished, hoteliers scrambled to replace them, only to find that "equally [capable] replacements were not possible," according to the employers at Aschinger's Incorporated.⁴⁸ Many of the new workers lacked the skills of the regular staff.

The disappearance of experienced workers placed strains on interactions between staff and guests. When familiar waiters left service, the loss of longstanding relationships, cemented through the practice of tipping, were felt keenly by customers. For a *New York Times* correspondent, it was as if the war had robbed him of the return on his investment. Relationships had to be built anew, this time with a "frail," "old," or "young" ersatz-servant, as yet untrained, sufficiently malleable in the case of the young ones – at a price – but nonetheless wanting. "This mustering-out process," wrote a *New York Times* correspondent of the disappearance of workers from a Berlin hotel in mid-1915, "has been speeded up to such an extent that for the first time you can observe here and there a slight strain on the complicated machinery of modern life."⁴⁹

The *New York Times* correspondent noted that "familiar faces have been disappearing with increased frequency. The elevator boy at your hotel grins hopefully and announces that this is his last night on duty. He has been 'eingezogen' or pulled into the army."⁵⁰ Five months later, in November 1915, the conscription age dropped to eighteen, making cannon fodder of still more elevator boys, servants, and trainees. In December 1916, the Auxiliary Service Law introduced compulsory labor service for boys and men aged sixteen to sixty. Experienced hotel porters now

⁴⁷ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1915.

⁴⁸ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1917, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 635.

⁴⁹ "Berlin Calls Women to Tasks of Men."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

left in disquieting numbers. The Auxiliary Service Law and regular conscription ensured that the bulk of the staff of a grand hotel stood to be conveyed either to the front or the factory.⁵¹

By the implementation in 1917 of the Hindenburg Program, the state's effort to channel the entirety of the German economy into the war effort, 300,000 more workers were drafted into munitions production. The ensuing pressure on the labor market revealed itself in short order to the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, which had to raise premiums charged to employers to cover the costs of its employee-placing service now that workers were so hard to find.⁵² Meanwhile, in spring 1917, on the heels of the Turnip Winter, 200,000 Berliners went on strike; the following January, when coal briquettes ran out, 500,000 would leave their posts.⁵³ These disturbances were rehearsals for the massive, uncontained strikes in autumn 1918 that helped bring down the regime. Yet, even as the economy approached and attained full employment, and workers came to demand more in this newly advantageous labor market, hotel workers refrained from agitating for higher pay or better working conditions.

There are a few explanations for hotel workers' docility during World War I. They were faring relatively well, after all, with food on their plates and heat in their quarters. Yet even if they had wanted to organize, their remoteness from other communities of workers and from the imaginations of labor union leaders kept hotel workers outside the mainstream of solidarity movements. Most importantly, the proportion of workers of foreign extraction, recruited from neutral or allied countries, shot up during the war.⁵⁴ A staff divided by nationality, in addition to gender, age, and skill, would not organize easily. Stratified and diverse, hotel workers lacked a common standpoint until the mass strikes of late 1918 and early 1919 extended to every industry in the country.

THE CARTEL AS A SOLUTION

Where workers declined to organize, their employers jumped at the chance. The Association of Berlin Hoteliers provided the forum and framework. A creation of the prewar period, the association continued to

⁵¹ Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 8, 14.

⁵² Annual report of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers for 1917.

⁵³ On the strikes in 1917 and 1918, see Hagemann, introduction to *Home/Front*, 7; and Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 41.

⁵⁴ "Vereinsnachrichten: Verein Berliner Hotelbesitzer," *Das Hotel*, May 21, 1915.

bring hoteliers together to set prices, standardize policies, lobby against regulations, and find staff. In its early days, the association's members were generally owners of the city's mid-sized hotels; owners of grander establishments such as the Adlon tended to opt out. Grand hoteliers began to join only after the outbreak of war. In 1914, the directors of the Hotel Management Corporation signed up. By 1916, the association's roster included representatives of all the city's grand hotels.⁵⁵ Their participation ensured a united front toward the authorities as well as the possibility of benefitting from and influencing collective negotiations and decision-making. The war had transformed the Association of Berlin Hoteliers into the governing body of a cartel that kept prices stable and consistent while also restricting competition.

Officials communicated with hoteliers through notices to the association, which in turn bundled the concerns and grievances of all hoteliers and brought them to the government as resolutions.⁵⁶ Through its leader, Ernst Barth, the association also engaged in formal and informal negotiations with the police, the magistrate, and the military command for the Berlin region. To accomplish all of this, in 1917 representatives began to meet monthly rather than yearly and assumed increasing authority over members.⁵⁷

The association mostly failed in its efforts to help members manage wartime difficulties. Even the grand hotels, with far better access to capital, inventory, and economies of scale than their middling counterparts, became subject to the avalanche of regulations and ordinances that the Bundesrat, the magistrate, and the police heaped on the economic life of Berlin and especially the hospitality industry. In the course of the war, authorities placed legal limits on "celebrations": The timing, outlay, and magnitude of these events would now be prescribed by rules and susceptible to official scrutiny.⁵⁸ The authorities also curtailed nightlife, reduced public transportation, and banned many kinds of advertisements. These measures – in addition to the ordinances and regulations around food, materials, fuel, and labor – prompted the board of Aschinger's Incorporated to declare that "the practical transfer of the

⁵⁵ Annual report of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers for 1916, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080.

⁵⁶ On cartels and the state, see William O. Henderson, *The Industrial Revolution on the Continent: Germany, France, Russia, 1800-1914* (Oxford: F. Cass, 1961), 60.

⁵⁷ Minutes of a meeting of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, February 2, 1917, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

private economy to the state economy” by way of “the pileup of laws and directives” had made it “impossible” to do business as usual.⁵⁹

Where Barth, the hotelier association’s leader, did succeed against the state, it was usually in the case of decrees that excessively inconvenienced guests. For example, he managed to persuade the police to postpone the implementation of a proposed requirement that foreigners go in person to the police station to register rather than fill out the customary police registration card at reception. The police even dropped the proposed requirement that guests, foreign and domestic, go to offsite offices of the Bread Commission (Brotkommission) to obtain daily ration cards. But with the arrival and progress of the dictatorship of the German Army Supreme Command (Oberste Heeresleitung) in 1916 and 1917, Barth lost room to maneuver. Most of his appeals to the authorities in 1917 and 1918 went “unheard,” he reported.⁶⁰ By 1918, the authorities extended their activities into the business of the association itself. Most of its decisions now had to be approved by the police.⁶¹

The cartel of hoteliers, such as it was, could not protect the industry when the Hindenburg Program was implemented in spring 1917.⁶² This dictatorship of the Army Supreme Command enjoyed popularity among the public, who hoped that autarky might ease shortages of fuel, food, and materials.⁶³ The effects were rather more mixed than had been hoped, however. The program called for the requisition of most of the horses, few at this point, still in private service. Thus, in addition to having no fuel for motor trucks and vans, hoteliers were forced to rely on a skeleton crew of starving beasts or else pay steeply rising delivery costs.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, to save coal, the authorities declared that all restaurants and cafés would close at 11:30 p.m., when the trams stopped running.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1916.

⁶⁰ Minutes of a meeting of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers, February 2, 1917.

⁶¹ Barth to the Berlin Police Presidium, September 13, 1918, in LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Nr. 1594.

⁶² On the Hindenburg Program and the advent of total war in Germany, see Jürgen Kocka, *Facing Total War: German Society, 1914–1918*, trans. Barbara Weinberger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 36.

⁶³ Davis, *Home Fires Burning*, 114–15; Robert Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York: W. Morrow, 1991), 320–21.

⁶⁴ Annual report of Aschinger’s Incorporated for 1917.

⁶⁵ Annual report of the Association of Berlin Hoteliers for 1917.

Further regulations gummed up the works in the cellars. Bones, for example, had to be separated from the remaining gristle, boxed, labeled, and sent to the magistrate. The Bureau of Clothing (Reichsbekleidungsstelle) reduced hotels' access to new linens. Bedsheets frayed and blankets went threadbare. As paper, too, came under tighter control, chefs de reception complained of a lack of bill forms and bookkeepers scrounged for scraps.⁶⁶ All these difficulties caused the Association of Berlin Hoteliers to recommend price increases. Placards were distributed to member hoteliers with the words, "In accordance with the decision of the Association, a cost-of-living supplement of 10% of the room price will be added to hotel bills." The rarified, hyper-polite culture of the grand hotel had slowly but surely chipped away over the course of the war to reveal a business model that could not survive the ordeal intact.

HIDDEN COSTS

Shortages, regulations, and hoarding remade hotels' balance sheets and business practices. As the black market expanded over the course of the Turnip Winter (1916/17), anything a hotel purchased elsewhere became the exception to the rule, according to the business reports of Aschinger's Incorporated, which owned the Fürstenhof and, by now, the Palast-Hotel.⁶⁷ Other hospitality and gastronomy corporations would be prosecuted after the war for black marketeering.⁶⁸ To pay for goods and materials largely unavailable by licit means, hotels moved money from funds budgeted for the regular purchase of new furniture, further depleting the value of their assets, and sold off the choicest bottles in their extensive wine stores.⁶⁹ These were short-term solutions with long-term consequences.

Such deleterious business practices began in the first months of war, when rising wholesale prices for foods, and the attendant efforts not to pass these costs on to consumers, occupied the attention of chefs,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1917.

⁶⁸ Internal report submitted to the board of directors of the Hotel Management Corporation, January 13, 1920, in LAB A Rep. 225-01, Nr. 2; Heinrich Kreuzer, transcript of a speech, "Preispolitik im Hotelgewerbe: Vortrag gehalten auf der I. Hauptversammlung des Verbandes der Hotelbesitzervereine Deutschlands am 7. Dezember 1920 in Berlin," in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 893, f. 10.

⁶⁹ Annual report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation for 1916, in LAB A Rep. 001-02, Nr. 2080.

restaurant managers, and corporate boards of directors. Meanwhile, the initial dip in the number of guests – which lasted only a few months – limited hoteliers' ability to raise prices to cover mounting expenses. The industry-wide response was to hunker down for the duration by reducing liabilities and halting investment. Carpets frayed, beds sagged, paint crumbled, facades cracked, roofs leaked, machinery broke. Instead of upgrading any one of these features or systems, owners paid off loans, paid down mortgages, and even postponed previously funded renovations until "the arrival of normal conditions."⁷⁰ When normal conditions never came, and credit became tighter, hoteliers found themselves standing empty-handed amid broken furniture, rusting radiators, and inoperative machines.

The officers of Berlin's hotel corporations consistently failed to account for the insidious impact of the conflict on the long-term value of assets. Managers who sold much of their wine stores at the latest, highest prices to replace revenue lost from dining concessions realized only after the war that they might never again be able to afford the bottles they had offloaded. Those who reallocated cash from funds for new furniture to offset losses in food and drink sales, moreover, diminished the total assets of the corporation. And with the exception of the Palast-Hotel, which did have its renovations finished during the war, all renovations halted, yet managers failed to predict the long-term costs their aging plants would incur. Finally, and most damagingly (though it was beyond the control of managers and owners) was the personnel problem. The loss of armies of trained, experienced workers and white-collar employees was irredeemable. Short-term successes, such as full occupancy, obscured the trouble that lay ahead for Berlin's grand hotels.

The last year of the war, November 1917 to November 1918, was a disaster for Berlin's hotel industry, even as properties continued to maintain full occupancy. Increasing hardships – resulting from shortage, regulation, and government interference; skyrocketing prices; steadily falling revenues; and mass closures of hotels as they were converted to the offices of an engorged state bureaucracy – all helped dismantle the prewar grand hotel. To make matters worse, the winter of 1917/18 saw a complete breakdown in the coal supply. The coke and hard coal that most hotels needed to fire their furnaces fell to one-third of their required levels.⁷¹ Although supplies reappeared at the end of January 1918, the

⁷⁰ Annual report of the Berlin Hotel Corporation for 1914.

⁷¹ Triebel, "Coal and the Metropolis," 354.

shortage of brown coal briquettes, required to heat most of the city's residential buildings, persisted.⁷² The worst ensued: coal hoarding, a crisis of confidence, and widespread unrest. Half a million workers went on strike in January 1918, exacerbating the labor shortage that had presented the single greatest challenge to hoteliers in wartime.

CONCLUSION

The scarcity of labor, food and materials, and the government's rationing schemes and decrees, brought mounting – eventually insupportable – difficulties for hoteliers. Rationing and government regulations around all matters of commercial life meant increased interference from the authorities. Enforcement was left up to hotel staff, however. This new role for waiters and others effectively upended relations between staff and guests. Then, the disappearance of skilled, experienced workers and employees further disrupted relations not only between staff and guests but also internally, among staff, management, and the corporations that owned most of the hotels. Owners and managers' business strategies, which included cartelization, black marketeering, and the sale of precious inventories, were short-term solutions that compromised the viability of the businesses in the long run. While at present the managers could enjoy the elimination of competition after waves of hotel closures, they failed to see that this situation would not outlast the decade and that its effects were detrimental to the health of the industry. The steady breakdown of grand hotels' defenses continued until, by the end of the war, the hotels' cultures of cosmopolitanism, luxury commercial hospitality, and spectacular conspicuous consumption had fallen away.

At war's end, Berlin's grand hoteliers got a nasty surprise. Instead of something approaching normal conditions, the peace brought violence and destruction.⁷³ In the Kaiserhof banquet hall, drunken vigilantes swung from chandeliers. In the Adlon dining room, a prince of Prussia and his supporters beat a diplomat senseless. In the vestibule of the Eden Hotel, a soldier bludgeoned a woman in front of a crowd. She fell to the floor – it was Rosa Luxemburg – but someone hauled her up again.

⁷² Jon Lawrence, "The Transition to War in 1914," in Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities at War*, 1:155.

⁷³ On the violent peace more generally, see Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), especially 118–32.