

Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I*

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On October 1, 1915, a market day, a rebellion broke out in the town of Bogorodsk. Located in Moscow's hinterlands in Bogorodskii county, a long-standing center of textile manufacture, Bogorodsk was the site of the Morozov cotton mills, which employed about fifteen thousand workers. Thirty women workers had come to the market to purchase sugar, and when they learned that sugar had already sold out, they grew angry and began to accuse the local merchants of trading underhandedly (*nedobrosovestnost'*) and engaging in speculation. The police quickly appeared on the scene and forced the women away from the shops, but the women simply returned to the town square where they continued to rail against tradespeople, their numbers steadily growing until they reached several thousand people—primarily women and youths, but also workers as well as peasants who had come to the market from nearby villages. The people moved off to the shops to vent their anger. Members of the crowd hurled stones through a shop window, then broke into the shop and threw its goods into the street where others carried them off. Clearly outnumbered and unwilling to use weapons against women and youths, the local police proved helpless to stop them. In the following days the disorders spread as rioters targeted local grocery shops and purveyors of clothing and other manufactured goods, but the unrest came to a bloody halt on October 4 when Cossack forces arrived and fired into the crowd, killing two people and seriously injuring three more.¹

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¹ The two who were killed were an unskilled male worker, age twenty, ascribed to the peasantry, and a female textile worker, age twenty-three, also ascribed to the peasantry. The three who were seriously injured were a twelve-year-old girl, daughter of a factory guard; a peasant woman from Dankovskii district, located in the south of the neighboring province of Riazan; and a man who apparently lacked identification. Also injured were a peasant woman from Riazan who had taken up residence in Bogorodsk and a peasant girl of fifteen who lived in a village in Bogorodskii county.

By then, unrest had spilled over onto the nearby factory floor. On October 2, workers employed at the Morozov weaving mill left their stations, and over the next few days thousands of their workmates joined them, as did tens of thousands of other workers in the neighboring factory settlements of Pavlovsk, Obukhov, and Orekhovo. At the height of the unrest a total of approximately eighty thousand workers were out on strike, according to police reports. The workers' primary demand was for higher wages to compensate for the increasing cost of living. They remained on strike until October 7, when they received a 20 percent raise. But discontent among women workers at the mill in Bogorodsk continued for several more weeks, finally erupting on October 30 in a strike initiated by about twelve thousand women workers that lasted for several weeks.²

These events occurred a little over a year after the outbreak of World War I. They provide a kind of overture to the far more dramatic and well-known events that began in Petrograd on February 23 [March 8] of 1917. On that date, International Woman's Day, thousands of housewives and women workers defied the appeals of labor leaders to remain calm; they poured into the streets, enraged over the need to stand in line for hours in freezing cold in order to purchase bread. Shouting, "Down with high prices" and "Down with hunger," they called to male workers to join them. The following day, about 200,000 workers went on strike, and the demands of the crowd became more overtly political, with people shouting such slogans as "Down with the tsar" and "Down with the war." Soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, including some Cossack units, defied orders to suppress the rebellion, and on February 27 many went over to the rebels' side.³ Bereft of support, Nicholas II was forced to abdicate on March 2. Most of the elements that emerged in February are foreshadowed in Bogorodsk: there is the anger over short supplies and a declining standard of living; there is hostility toward tradespeople; there is resistance to the authorities; and there is the direct link between marketplace and factory floor. As an overture, the Bogorodsk events lack only two vital elements that another fifteen months of warfare and deprivation would supply: an explicitly political and antiwar coloration and a reluctance to fire on the part of the Cossack troops.

It is virtually an axiom that wartime scarcity and inflation contributed decisively to the downfall of the tsar. The extent of the crisis is demonstrable, especially in Russia's two most important cities: in the first two years of the war,

² Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv gorod Moskvyy (hereafter TsGI-AgM), fond 17, op. 84, d. 888, ll. 1–43.

³ Steve A. Smith, "Petrograd in 1917: The View from Below," in *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below*, ed. Daniel Kaiser (New York, 1987), p. 61; Robert McKean, *St. Petersburg between the Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries, June 1907–February 1917* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), pp. 460–70.

the prices of essential goods rose 131 percent in Moscow and more than 150 percent in Petrograd.⁴ Historians have chronicled the suffering engendered by the shortages of supplies and escalating prices. By December 1915 in Petrograd, for example, “women had to stand in line for hours in subzero weather to buy pitifully small quantities of sugar and flour”; within a year of the war’s outbreak the “desperate search for scarce supplies of fuel and comestibles at soaring prices became an insufferable feature of everyday life.”⁵ We know that the resulting discontent eroded support for an autocracy that sent men off to war and failed to provide for the people. Not long after the events themselves, Leon Trotsky described the connection between hunger and discontent in characteristically trenchant terms: “From criticism the masses pass over to action. Their indignation finds expression first of all in food disturbances, sometimes rising to the height of local riots.”⁶

Yet despite the proliferation of scholarship on the social history of the revolution, the substance and character of consumer disaffection during the war years have received virtually no sustained scholarly attention. During the past two decades, students of the Russian Revolution have turned away from elites to explore the genesis and development of the revolutionary process from below and in settings other than the cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and they have begun to attend to women workers and to the issue of gender as a factor in working-class identity.⁷ Nevertheless, they have found it difficult to

⁴ Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), p. 55.

⁵ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Passage through Armageddon: The Russians in War and Revolution* (New York, 1994), p. 207; McKean, p. 34.

⁶ Leon Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution: The Overthrow of Tsarism and the Triumph of the Soviets* (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), p. 36.

⁷ This literature has become so substantial that I include only key books: E. N. Burdzhakov, *Russia’s Second Revolution: The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987); Theodore Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1989); Graeme Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution* (London, 1979); Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, 1981); McKean; John Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York, 1976); Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1981); David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime: From the February Revolution to the July Days* (London, 1983); Donald Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986); Norman Saul, *Sailors in Revolt: The Russian Baltic Fleet in 1917* (Lawrence, Kans., 1978); Lewis Siegelbaum and Ronald Suny, eds., *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Steve Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge, 1983); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1972); Allan Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers’ Revolt (March–April 1917)* (Princeton, N.J., 1980). The best review of this literature remains Ronald Grigor Suny, “Revising the Old Story: The 1917 Revolution in Light of New Sources,”

shift the focus away from the workplace and onto other sites of social expression and identity formation, or to ask not only about scarcity and deprivation but also about the meanings ordinary women and men attached to these experiences.⁸ In this article I will look closely at subsistence riots. While they were neither as numerous nor as influential as the work-related actions that have claimed so much attention from historians, they do cast fresh light on the frame of mind and aspirations of Russia's lower classes and on the determinants and evolution of lower-class women's attitudes toward the state, about which we still know remarkably little. Because one of my concerns is the nature and evolution of popular opposition to autocracy, the article will end with the February revolution and the fall of the tsar, although popular dissatisfaction over subsistence issues most certainly continued thereafter.⁹

In a pioneering article published in 1993, to which this article is very much indebted, the Russian historian Iurii Kir'ianov first drew attention to the extensiveness of subsistence riots in Russia during the war years and to the leading role women played in them. Sifting through archives and published materials, Kir'ianov uncovered dozens of acts of popular protest. In these "bazaar disorders," "hunger riots," "pogroms," and "women's riots" (*bab'i bunty*), people clashed with traders and shopowners over the price and availability of goods. In his article, Kir'ianov focuses on subsistence riots in which the actors were primarily, although not necessarily exclusively, members of the working class—either workers themselves or members of their families—riots in which, as he puts it, "the influence of the worker's milieu . . . was unquestionable." He contends that while subsistence riots were an elemental and spontaneous form of social protest, aimed at those deemed most directly responsible

in Kaiser, ed., pp. 1–19. On women workers and gender before the revolution, see Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861–1914* (New York, 1994); Rose Glickman, *The Russian Factory Woman: Workplace and Society, 1880–1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984); and Steve Smith, "Class and Gender: Women's Strikes in St. Petersburg, 1895–1917, and in Shanghai, 1895–1927," *Social History* 19 (May 1994): 141–68.

⁸ This may be why even such sensitive and careful historians as Koenker and Rosenberg have misread changes in the popular mood during 1917, attributing to the events of that year a level of female militance and degree of anger over the gap between the privileged and the needy that, I will argue, was evident at least two years earlier. "Indirect evidence suggests that women were becoming mobilized for activism in 1917 to a far greater extent than ever before in Russia, despite the obstacles of their own traditional deference to authority and the lack of attention paid them by male organizers. Women played an important role in food disorders and other urban episodes of protest beginning with the February strikes and continuing in the street disorders in Moscow in late summer and early fall" (Koenker and Rosenberg, p. 315; emphasis added).

⁹ Mary McAuley, "Bread without the Bourgeoisie," in *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History*, ed. Diane Koenker et al. (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), pp. 158–79.

for popular deprivation, they were significant because they attracted to the struggle against merchants, the government, and the war, sectors of society that had never before taken action. Thus, the riots both reflected and contributed to the larger crisis engulfing Russian society.¹⁰

The argument I will pursue here does not fundamentally challenge Kir'ianov's thesis, but it does shift the emphasis away from the working class as such. While it is rarely possible to establish with precision the social identity—or, more commonly, identities—of all participants in subsistence riots, the actors who are identified in accounts and who figure in this essay are workers, male and female, and the wives of workers; the wives and mothers of soldiers; and peasants, male and female. Because one of my points is the extent to which the boundaries separating members of the industrial working class from these other groups had dissolved in the cauldron of war, I will sometimes group these disparate but related groups together under the labels “lower classes” and “popular classes.”¹¹ I want to explore, in greater depth than Kir'ianov, the language and mode of popular resistance, and to that end I will compare unrest in Russia with subsistence riots elsewhere, both in earlier times and in other combatant nations, Germany in particular. I will also attend, more closely than Kir'ianov, to the gendered nature of popular actions.

Wartime subsistence riots in Russia bear more than a passing resemblance to the bread riots that were common in Western Europe in the era preceding and immediately following the French Revolution. In England and France of that time, scarcity and inflation prompted popular action against those middlemen, merchants, and shopkeepers who raised prices beyond what the people considered “just,” or who failed to supply the goods that the people required

¹⁰ Iurii Kir'ianov, “Massovyie vystupleniia na pochve dorogovizny v Rossii (1914–fevral' 1917 g.),” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (May–June 1993), pp. 3–18.

¹¹ Although Russia's social structure had become highly complex by the early twentieth century, in the internal passports that Russians carried they continued to be identified by an increasingly anachronistic system of estates (*sosloviia*). In this system, there was no classification for worker. Workers were most likely to be ascribed either to the peasantry or to the *meshchanstvo*, which can roughly be defined as urban lower class. Such anachronistic terms were often used by officials to identify the individuals involved in subsistence riots, but officials might identify people by their work roles, too. In the documents that treat the riot with which I begin, e.g., some participants are identified as factory workers (such as the thirty factory women who initiated events), some as peasants, and some as both factory workers and peasants. Although not identified as such, some of the women were undoubtedly soldiers' wives as well. On the problem of social identities, see Gregory L. Freeze, “The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,” *American Historical Review* 91 (February 1986): 11–36; and Leopold H. Haimson, “The Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth Century Russia,” *Slavic Review* 47 (Spring 1988): 1–20.

for survival. In prompting people to take action, scarcity itself was usually less important than the meanings people attached to it. According to E. P. Thompson, to whose study of the moral economy of the English crowd my own analysis is indebted, rioters drew on long-standing notions of justice that included the right to subsistence and the affordability of essential goods even in times of scarcity. These notions, which gave meaning to the experience of scarcity, were upheld by the informal community politics that they also served to constitute. Thus, to the bread rioter, defense of the community and its values, of “traditional rights or customs . . . supported by the wider consensus of the community,” was as important, or more important, than need or hunger itself. So when women and men took direct action, they were prompted by “an outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation.”¹²

Rooted in a face-to-face community whose members were accustomed to exerting leverage on purveyors of essential goods, the traditional food riot heralded the intrusion of more anonymous market forces. The frame of mind of the food rioter, which gave priority to “the use needs of an interdependent community” instead of the individual’s right to profit from, exchange, or enjoy abstract property rights, was profoundly at odds with the mechanisms of this market economy.¹³ Such community-based food riots most commonly occurred in pre- or protoindustrial settings before industrialization and urbanization fully eroded the household and subsistence economy and before a wage-based industrial order drew men into more formal modes of social protest such as the strike.

What moral assumptions shaped the lower-class response to scarcity in early twentieth-century Russia? Many rioters brought to the experience of scarcity and deprivation the values of the peasantry from which they derived. The vast majority of Russia’s population were ascribed to the peasantry, and most members of the urban lower classes had been born and raised in peasant villages. Historians of the Russian peasantry usually emphasize the strength of collective ties and the peasants’ concern with meeting the subsistence needs of members of their communities (*mir* or *obshchina*). By custom, the community held land collectively and allocated it to peasant households according to the number of male workers (in some areas, according to the number of consumers or “eaters”), periodically reapportioning the land to reflect changes in household composition and need. Similarly, tax burdens were allocated by ability to pay.

¹² E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present*, no. 50 (February 1971), pp. 78–79.

¹³ John Bohstedt, “The Myth of the Feminine Food Riot: Women as Proto-Citizens in English Community Politics, 1790–1810,” in *Women and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution*, ed. Harriet Applewhite and Darlene Levy (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1990), p. 38.

The system operated to ensure the survival of the community as a whole rather than the material interests of its individual constituents.¹⁴

Peasants were prepared to defend their communities against tsarist officials, rural police, and other outsiders who threatened to undermine community ties or to upset the peasants' precarious subsistence economy by depriving them of the little they had. Peasants generally fought back when they were pushed too hard or thought they could get away with resistance. The need for community solidarity intensified toward the close of the nineteenth century as a result of external pressures. Only such solidarity "could effectively combat increasing government interference and mitigate the challenges to traditional life posed by economic changes," the intrusion of the market economy foremost among them.¹⁵ In peasant villages, the community usually provided the basis for resistance: women and men acted "together with the *mir* and in the name of the *mir*."¹⁶

¹⁴ Virtually all historians of Russia's peasantry concur on the importance of collectivism in shaping peasant outlook and way of life, although interpretations of its extent and consequences vary. An argument for thoroughgoing peasant collectivism is made in Boris Mironov, "The Russian Peasant Commune after the Reforms of the 1860s," *Slavic Review* 44 (Fall 1985): 438–67. Other representative works in English include Roger Bartlett, ed., *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia: Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society* (New York, 1990); Stephen Frank, "Popular Justice, Community and Culture among the Russian Peasantry, 1870–1900," *Russian Review* 46 (July 1987): 239–65; Esther Kingston-Mann, "Peasant Communes and Economic Innovation: A Preliminary Inquiry," in *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800–1921*, ed. Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixter (Princeton, N.J., 1991); Moshe Lewin, "Customary Law and Rural Society," *Russian Review*, vol. 44 (January 1985); Teodor Shanin, *Russia as a Developing Society: The Roots of Otherness: Russia's Turn of Century* (New Haven, Conn., 1985); Christine Worobec, *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period* (Princeton, N.J., 1991). On the debates concerning the character and circumstances of peasant life, see Ben Eklof, "Ways of Seeing: Recent Anglo-American Studies of the Russian Peasant (1861–1914)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 36 (1988): 57–79. In 1907, Piotr Stolypin initiated reforms aimed at undermining this collectivity and encouraging private farming, but the reforms encountered substantial resistance from the peasantry. Nevertheless, by the outbreak of World War I the reforms had succeeded to a limited degree. How much they had changed peasant consciousness remains a question, however. On the Stolypin reforms, see S. M. Dubrovskii, *Stolypinskaia zemel'naia reforma* (Moskva, 1963). Dorothy Atkinson, "The Statistics on the Russian Land Commune, 1905–1917," *Slavic Review* 32 (December 1973): 733–88, argues that even Dubrovskii's relatively low figures on private farming are inflated.

¹⁵ Christine Worobec, "Horse Thieves and Peasant Justice in Post-Emancipation Imperial Russia," *Journal of Social History* 21 (Winter 1987): 288.

¹⁶ M. M. Gromyko, "Sem'ia i obshchina v traditsionnoi dukhovnoi kul'ture russkikh krest'ian XVIII–XIX vv.," in *Russkie: Semeinyi i obshchestvennyi byt*, ed. M. M. Gromyko and T. A. Listova (Moscow, 1989). Teodor Shanin likewise argues that the community was the basis of peasant rebellion during the revolution of 1905–7 in *Russia*,

The peasant community did not encompass the urban or semiurban settings in which most subsistence riots occurred. But there is much evidence of a comparable sense of solidarity and belief in the right to subsistence in accounts of popular unrest. In early July 1915, for instance, women shoppers outraged about the high price of new potatoes initiated a food riot at the Taganskii market in Moscow. The women's vocal dissatisfaction drew a sizable crowd of people, who then refused to disperse until the price of potatoes was lowered to a price the crowd agreed was fair—in this case, a ruble a measure. Intimidated by the presence of the threatening crowd, the merchants submitted to the demand.¹⁷ A food riot that occurred in the town of Kamennyi Zavod, Perm province, in December 1915 proceeded along much the same lines. Waiting to receive their benefits, about two hundred soldiers' wives (*soldatki*) from surrounding villages got to talking. Having shared their anger over the rising cost of daily life, they decided to take matters into their own hands. They went off to the nearest shop and demanded that the price of flour be lowered by sixty kopeks a pud (thirty-six pounds), and when the merchant resisted, the women threatened to take the flour without any payment whatever. One of them grabbed a sack of flour and shouted, "Drag it off, girls!" (*Tashchite, devki!*), at which point the merchant agreed to lower the price. They repeated the successful performance at shop after shop.¹⁸ Rioting *soldatki* in Morshansk, Samara province, having broken into a shop and stolen bolts of overpriced fabric, went off to someone's house and divided the goods equally among themselves.¹⁹ In these instances, as in many others to follow, women of the lower classes demonstrated their capacity to recreate collective ties in order to defend their perception of justice, not only in small rural towns but even in the setting of a major city such as Moscow.

Violence or the threat of violence was an important weapon in the popular arsenal. John Bohstedt has argued that in England the level of violence in food riots was a function of social instability: in stable communities, as in small agrarian villages, medium-sized towns, and rural industrial communities, violence was insignificant and consisted of coercion of persons or minor property

1905–7: Revolution as a Moment of Truth (New Haven, Conn., 1986). Further development of the points concerning family and community can be found in Barbara Alpern Engel, "Women, Men, and the Languages of Peasant Resistance, 1870–1914," in *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. Stephen R. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg (Princeton, N.J., 1994), pp. 34–53. The ubiquitous conflicts within villages rarely interfered with the need to demonstrate communal cohesion in the face of outside pressures.

¹⁷ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), Departament Politsii (hereafter DP), 4 D-vo, 1915, delo 130, ch. 1, l. 54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 2, ll. 95–97.

¹⁹ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Rossii v 1914–1917 gg.* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1965), pp. 363–65.

damage; but in industrial boomtowns and in cities such as London, the majority of riots involved more serious violence, including personal assault and significant damage to property.²⁰ These distinctions are difficult to apply in the Russian context. Food riots could be nonviolent even in a large city such as Moscow; more often, however, they escalated into violence whatever their setting. Consider what happened in the industrial town of Orekhovo (on the border between Moscow and Vladimir province), where most workers came from local villages, and factory and rural life had developed in “symbiotic rapport.” On May 30, 1915, a crowd of local women from Orekhovo, mostly *soldatki*, wrecked the stalls in the trading rows in protest against the high price of eggs and other products.²¹ Similarly, a crowd of roughly one thousand women rioted in the town of Gordeevka in Nizhnii Novgorod province in early June 1916. Angered by the escalating prices for basic goods such as milk and salt, the women walked from the town of Kanavin to the nearby town of Gordeevka. Intending to verify tradesmen’s claims that they had sold out of sugar, the women went from shop to shop demanding that shopkeepers open their store-rooms. As the day wore on, the crowd grew in size until it numbered perhaps ten thousand people, still mainly female according to the police report. When the police arrived, they proved too few to be effective, but their presence further antagonized the crowd. People threw stones and boards at them and then broke into the shops, stealing sugar and other goods.²² A week later, a riot broke out in the town of Khokhloma, located in the same province. A crowd of local people and peasants (gender unspecified) who had come to market from nearby settlements became violent and ended up destroying the shops of three merchants and stealing goods worth about fifty-eight hundred rubles. They also disarmed the policeman who attempted to stop them and beat him up, although not too seriously. Later that July, women rioted at bazaars in three other towns in Nizhnii Novgorod province causing similar damage to property, although not to persons.²³ The apparently greater readiness to employ violence

²⁰ Bohstedt, pp. 43–46.

²¹ GARF, DP, 4 D-vo, 1915, delo 130, ch. 1, l. 23. Quotation from Chris Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers and the New Economic Policy: Shop Floor Culture and State Policy, 1921–1929* (New York, 1990), p. 33.

²² *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v N. Novgorode i Nizhegorodskoi gubernii (1907–fevral’ 1917 g.). Sb. dokumentov* (Gorkii, 1971), p. 268.

²³ *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie*, pp. 329–31. In many towns and market villages such as these, merchants purveyed their goods in bazaars and fairs held on particular days of the week or during particular times of the year. The rural population had too little disposable income to warrant their keeping shop on a regular basis. On the eve of World War I, about 30 percent of trade still took place in market stalls with very little inventory. See Arcadius Kahan, *Russian Economic History: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1989), pp. 35–38. It may be that the peripatetic nature of trade in these areas undermined the kind of reciprocal relations that elsewhere ensured more peaceful negotia-

is one of the ways in which food riots in Russia during the war years differed from their preindustrial European counterparts.

How to account for the difference? In part, it appears related to the Russian peasant tradition of *bunt*—that is, the uncoordinated act of mass violence.²⁴ But much more significantly, the difference is due to the massive inroads that the market economy and industrial development had made on rural ways of life by the early twentieth century. By 1914, Russia had ceased to be a preindustrial society, even if people continued to adopt preindustrial forms of collective action in response to particular situations. Thus, for example, industrial workers were often an important factor in bread riots, their more “modern” forms of struggle on the factory floor coexisting with the struggle in the market over the price of food, rather than displacing it.²⁵

Sometimes, as in the account that introduces this article, factory workers remain in the background of the bread riot, as potential or actual allies of bread rioters, their strike-readiness threatening to expand and deepen the significance of actions that commence at the marketplace. The threat was particularly great in rural areas. When factories were situated in or near peasant villages, as were the majority of textile mills, industrial wage-labor and the traditional peasant subsistence economy existed in a kind of symbiosis. Some members of the household continued to work the land; others earned wages in an industrial setting but remained members of a family economy. These “peasant workers,” to employ the term adopted by historians Douglas Holmes and Jean Quataert, contributed a substantial portion of their earnings to the family and returned home after work or on weekends.²⁶ The ties between factory and village meant

tions between purveyor and consumer; on the other hand, violence also erupted in permanent market settings.

²⁴ I use this term with some caution. The term *buntarstvo* often has derogatory overtones. It is usually employed by contemporaries or historians for the purpose of condemning particular actions as “elemental,” lacking in coordination and rooted in an essentially backward peasant consciousness. Much of recent scholarship on the Russian peasantry has challenged this interpretation either implicitly or explicitly (see n. 14 above). Nevertheless, because the term was and is employed so widely to describe common peasant patterns of action, I employ it in this context. On lower-class violence in Russia, see Daniel Brower, “Labor Violence in Russia in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Slavic Review* 41 (Fall 1982): 417–31; and Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900–1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).

²⁵ Bohstedt (n. 13 above), p. 50. His discussion of the relationship between labor protest and the food riot presumes a comparatively orderly progress from a politics rooted in moral economy and community to a politics of protest in a setting where formal, impersonal, and capitalistic relations prevailed. In Russia, things seem much messier, but as Belinda Davis observed when commenting on this article, they may well have been messier elsewhere, too.

²⁶ Douglas Holmes and Jean Quataert, “An Approach to Modern Labor: Worker Peasants in Historical Saxony and the Friuli Region over Three Centuries,” *Comparative*

that the “informal community” that supported bread riots at the marketplace extended to the factory floor. That was the case in Bogorodsk, where many of the seventy people whom the police identified as ringleaders of the Morozov strike were local folk, thirty-seven of them female.²⁷

The links between the factory floor and the larger community unnerved the authorities. When unrest broke out in the marketplace of the industrial town of Kineshma in Kostroma province in late June and early July 1916, the governor immediately alerted his superiors. The incident began when a pregnant woman went to the marketplace to buy a spool of thread and discovered that the price was eighteen kopeks, two kopeks higher than it had been just the day before. The shopper attempted to pay at the previous price of sixteen kopeks, and when the tradeswoman insisted that she pay the higher amount, violence broke out. Exactly what happened next is unclear. According to one account, the tradeswoman beat the pregnant woman, having caught her in the act of stealing the spool. According to another account, the shopper spit on the money and the tradeswoman responded by slapping her. Whatever the truth, the eruption of violence between the two women suggests the degree to which the most ordinary acts of buying and selling had become infused with a potential for conflict. The resulting fracas drew a crowd of about four thousand women who circulated through the marketplace and forced proprietors to sell their goods at a lower price. Fearing that unrest would spread to the surrounding factory regions, the governor of the province informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs that he was keeping troops in readiness for action.²⁸

In some cases, the industrial worker and the bread rioter were one and the

Studies in Society and History 28 (April 1986): 191–217. For a discussion of the relationship between village workers and peasant villages, see Ward, pp. 31–35; and Engel, *Between the Fields and the City* (n. 7 above), chap. 4. In the central industrial region, where most rural factories were located, land did not produce enough to feed the population year-round; hence the need for other sources of income and the presence of peasant women and men in the marketplace as consumers.

²⁷ About half of the women appear to have derived from the town of Bogorodsk itself or from nearby villages; some lived in factory housing; others resided at home with their peasant families. The two women treated most severely by the authorities were Praskovia Sukhova, a twenty-five-year-old weaver who lived in her native village and commuted to work; and Maria Krolikova, a thirty-one- or thirty-four-year-old weaver (the record is contradictory), originally from Smolensk, who lived with her husband and three small children in their own house in the town of Bogorodsk. See TsGIAgM, fond 17, op. 84, d. 888, pp. 54–55. The high proportion of women identified as ringleaders reflects their predominance in the labor force: even before the war took husbands, fathers, and brothers off to the front, women workers outnumbered men in rural textile mills.

²⁸ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1916, delo 30, ch. 3, ll. 4–10.

same person.²⁹ Take, for example, an incident that occurred on August 7, 1915, in Kolpino, an industrial suburb of Petrograd and the location of the Izhorsk Works, one of the giant shipbuilding plants of the Naval Ministry. It began after female shoppers, mainly workers' and soldiers' wives, became outraged at escalating prices, and their audience with the manager of the factory led only to empty promises. Dissatisfied with the outcome, the women took direct action, going about the city and forcibly closing shops. About two thousand men joined them when their shift ended, and at that point the crowd became genuinely violent. Members of the crowd attacked the shops and threw stones when police tried to restrain them. When the riot came to an end around 10 P.M. that same evening, fifteen shops had been wrecked, their contents stolen or destroyed.³⁰ On January 19, 1916, the governor of Moscow warned the Minister of Internal Affairs of the danger of a pogrom by workers in the Presnia district of the city. According to his report, about sixty-five hundred workers at the Prokhorov textile mill and several nearby factories, displeased by rising prices for essential products, were planning to destroy local shops. In the hope of alleviating their dissatisfaction, the governor had urged the factory administration of the Prokhorov mill to increase supplies of reasonably priced products in the factory store and also to open a meat shop in Presnia district.³¹ Factory workers also participated in unrest in mid-July 1916 in the industrial village of Rodniki, in Kostroma province. Angered by inflated prices and the absence of sugar at the marketplace, factory workers joined local people (gender unspecified) to gather near a local candy shop and demand that prices be lowered, declaring their readiness to take the candy by force. An expanded police detachment was dispatched and local officials urged the traders to lower their prices, which the tradespeople did.³²

In the vast majority of food riots in which the gender of the rioters can be ascertained, lower-class women predominated. This was the pattern elsewhere in Europe, too. In Olwen Hufton's classic formulation: "Predominantly, the bread riot was female, or rather maternal, terrain." The war surely intensified

²⁹ It is not always possible to establish the gender of these workers. In Russian, feminine endings can denote the generic woman worker (*rabotnitsa*) and women plying particular trades, but because the words *rabochie* and *rabotniki* refer both to male workers and to workers as a group, they are the words that most often appear in accounts of unrest unless the female participants clearly outnumbered the male.

³⁰ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1916, delo 130, ch. 2, l. 68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, l. 98. Documents do not specify gender, but because women predominated in the textile trade it is likely that a substantial number of these workers were female.

³² *Ibid.*, ch. 3, l. 12. Rodniki was the location of the Krasil'chikov weaving mill, which drew much of its work force from nearby peasant villages. Here, too, women were likely to have constituted a significant part of the crowd.

this pattern in Russia and, no doubt, elsewhere as well, by drafting the fathers, sons, and husbands who had customarily mediated women's relations to the public sphere and to the state. With their menfolk absent, women had no choice but to act on their own behalf.³³

Perhaps more important, the war profoundly transformed the status of the *soldatka*, the soldier's wife. By contrast with soldiers' wives elsewhere in wartime Europe, in Russia the soldier's wife belonged to a distinctive legal as well as social category, a result of the *sosloviia* system. Until the military reforms of 1874, soldiers (primarily peasants) served in the army for twenty-five years, becoming social outcasts and leaving their wives in much the same position. Having lost the labor of the conscript, the peasant household usually ejected the *soldatka* as a burden and an extra mouth to feed. Even after the military reform of 1874 reduced the period of active service to six years, with an additional nine years in the reserves, and extended the draft to include other social groups besides the peasantry and urban lower class, *soldatki* remained a marginalized group.³⁴ World War I shifted the position of the *soldatka* from the margin to the center. By the end of 1916, the number of men called into service had reached the staggering figure of 14,600,000, including young men who had been the sole breadwinners for their families. About one-third of all peas-

³³ Olwen Hufton, "Women in Revolution, 1789–1796," *Past and Present*, no. 53 (November 1971), pp. 90–108. See also Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910–1918," *Signs* 7 (Spring 1982): 545–66. Bohstedt has challenged the notion of the bread riot as maternal terrain. Such riots, he contends, were not spontaneous but planned and represented acts of plebeian social solidarity: they were "complex assertions of shared memberships, beliefs, and obligations, not instinctive 'rebellions of the belly.'" Accordingly, men were equally or more likely than women to defend the family economy at the marketplace, and when women did so, it was as breadwinners as well as bread rioters, "proto-citizens and constituents of the local polity and economy." See Bohstedt, p. 38. Accepting Bohstedt's thesis concerning the early modern period, Lynne Taylor argues that later on the situation changed. Drawing on a range of secondary sources as well as her own research into riots in the twentieth century, she contends that by the twentieth century, food riots had become exclusively female affairs because women had taken over household management and lacked alternative modes of action, having been excluded from the formal politics in which men now participated. See "Food Riots Revisited," *Journal of Social History* 30 (Winter 1996): 483–96. None of these models quite fits the Russian case, however, as Russian men sometimes engaged in subsistence riots during World War I, while at least some female participants had access to other modes of action, the strike in particular.

³⁴ The fact that *soldatki* were disproportionately represented among prostitutes in the late nineteenth century is but one measure of their vulnerability. On *soldatki*, see Beatrice Farnsworth, "The Soldatka: Folklore and the Court Record," *Slavic Review* 49 (Spring 1990): 58–73. Much work remains to be done on this marginal social group that became central in the revolutionary period.

ant farms had lost all their male laborers; by early 1917 just under half (47.8 percent) of the able-bodied rural male population had been called to war.³⁵ This meant that virtually every village woman was related to a soldier—as mother, sister, or daughter, if not as wife.

These peasant women were unlikely to find consolation in the notion that they sacrificed their menfolk for a worthy cause. Even in the first, wildly enthusiastic days of the war, there appears to have been little prowar sentiment among peasant recruits, whose apathetic response or outright resistance to mobilization contrasted markedly with the demonstrative patriotic fervor of the educated public. Mobilized peasant reservists sometimes went on rampages; when breadwinner husbands were inducted, their wives occasionally rioted as well.³⁶ Like their husbands, *soldatki* were disposed to view the war as a fruitless and costly venture from the outset.

Efforts to mobilize public opinion in favor of the war effort left *soldatki* unaffected. Official government propaganda in Russia was weak and ineffectual; it had little impact on wartime culture or the mentality of the lower classes. And while unofficially generated patriotic motifs circulated widely in Russia during the first months of war, building a “thematic bridge between high and popular culture in the face of a common enemy,” these unofficial patriotic efforts were neither long-lasting nor successful in forging a unified patriotic culture for the duration of the war. While it was relatively straightforward to identify an enemy that all Russians might agree to hate—the kaiser, German aggressors—it was far more difficult to determine what it was that Russians should fight for. The tsar? The flag? Folk culture and heroes? The war revealed the enormous diversity of patriotic self-definition and, in the case of much of the lower class, the absence of patriotic self-definition altogether. Hubertus Jahn sums up the situation this way: “Most Russians did not see themselves as loyal subjects of the empire. There existed no functioning integrative ideology of a common nation, no ‘deliberate political option’ for it—which, according to Eric Hobsbawm constitutes a nation and distinguishes free citizens from mere subjects of a state.”³⁷ Nor did government wartime propaganda successfully integrate women into the nation by offering them new

³⁵ Because of enormous military losses, in August 1915 the Duma changed the law that had previously exempted sole breadwinners from service. See Wildman (n. 7 above), pp. 95–96; Emily Pyle, “Village Conflicts Involving State Aid Recipients, 1914–1917” (paper presented at the Midwest Russian History Colloquium, East Lansing, Mich., October 15, 1993), p. 5.

³⁶ Wildman, pp. 77, 97–99.

³⁷ Quotations treating wartime culture are from Hubertus F. Jahn, “For Tsar and Fatherland? Russian Popular Culture and the First World War,” in Frank and Steinberg, eds. (n. 16 above), pp. 132–33, 146.

public roles, as the United States had done as early as its civil war, as governments did elsewhere in wartime Europe, and as the Bolsheviks would do both in imagery and in action during the civil war in Russia.³⁸

World War I did, however, both raise and frustrate the *soldatka's* expectations. In 1912, the government had assumed responsibility for caring for the families of men called to active duty, establishing an obligatory state allowance to be distributed to their wives and children. On August 11, 1914, just days after the war broke out, a Supreme Council for the Care of Soldiers' Families and of the Families of the Wounded and the Dead was formed under the presidency of the Empress Alexandra. Lacking both the personnel to administer the system properly and fairly and the vast sums of money required to keep up with inflation, however, the government proved unable to fulfill its promises under the extreme circumstances of war. The entire system for awarding stipends virtually collapsed beneath the weight of the bureaucratic hierarchy established to administer it. Despite the failure of the system to provide adequately for them, this public acknowledgment that *soldatki* had particular needs and that their husbands had certain rights, "fed 'apocalyptic hopes' for relief from the state" and gave the *soldatka* a new sense of entitlement.³⁹

During the course of the war, *soldatki* mobilized to an unprecedented degree. As individuals, they bombarded officials with letters and petitions setting forth their economic circumstances and demanding that the state fulfill its promises.⁴⁰ They also acted as a distinctive group, identified specifically by the

³⁸ On the absence of women from Russian patriotic culture, see Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), pp. 42, 70. During the U.S. Civil War, "discussions of gender appeared in almost every mode of communication within the Confederacy," according to Drew Gilpin Faust, "Confederate Women and Narratives of War," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, 1992), p. 187. Although citizen rights in Germany were also very limited, during the war the German government's concern for the needs of the consumer, defined as female, gave German women a voice and a way to act on behalf of their own concerns. See Belinda Davis, "Food Scarcity and the Empowerment of the Female Consumer in World War I Berlin," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria DeGrazia and Ellen Furlough (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), p. 296. On the Russian Civil War, see Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (New York, 1997), chap. 4.

³⁹ Pyle, p. 67. The discussion of government policy toward *soldatki* is based primarily on Pyle's unpublished paper. See also Alfred G. Meyer, "Impact of World War I on Russian Women's Lives," in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine Worobec (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), p. 211; Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J., 1990), p. 305; Wildman, p. 78.

⁴⁰ The content of these letters and petitions is discussed in Pyle.

sources as *soldatki*. These group actions occurred mainly in small towns and district centers, to which the women sometimes had to travel to complain about their treatment or to receive their stipends. There was, for example, an incident that took place in Kamennyi Zavod, Perm province, in December 1915, in which about two hundred soldiers' wives engaged in a food riot led by Paraskeva El'tseva, a woman with both sons in the army.⁴¹ Such outbreaks multiplied dramatically during 1916. On June 27, a group of fifty to sixty *soldatki* in the village of Morshansk, Samara province, having received their government stipends, went to the dry goods shop of a local merchant and demanded that he sell them fabric at prewar prices. While he argued with them, the size of the crowd grew and the women became increasingly insistent. Eventually, one of the *soldatki* leaped up onto his counter and began to throw bolts of fabric onto the floor; others followed her example. The women carted off the goods and then proceeded to another shop where they repeated their actions.⁴² Three days earlier, in the town of Taganrog in the Don region, a crowd of over one thousand people, identified as mainly *soldatki*, commandeered stores of sugar held by local merchants and distributed them among themselves. Then, when the supply ran out, they set about breaking into shops. The crowd dispersed only after troops were called in and ordered to fire. A few weeks later, unrest flared up again in Taganrog when about eighty women, likewise identified as *soldatki*, broke into a general store and destroyed or stole close to nine hundred rubles worth of goods (the amount reported by the proprietor).⁴³ Word of their actions quickly spread. In Astrakhan province, it prompted women from five villages to head for the marketplace and force several local merchants to halve the price of fruitdrops, which villagers consumed with their tea in the absence of sugar. When one of the merchants resisted and summoned the local police, some men became involved and violence ensued. The unrest continued for a week. Upward of five hundred women were involved.⁴⁴ On July 14, a crowd comprised mainly of *soldatki* rioted in the village of Losevo in Voronezh province. About fifteen women entered a shop and one of them asked to buy a length of Chinese calico at fifteen kopeks an arshin (.71 meters). The shopkeeper replied that that was no longer the price of calico and when the woman insisted on paying the old price, he took her by the elbow and led her from the shop. Or at least that was what he claimed to have done. The woman, however, screamed that he had beaten her badly (thereby,

⁴¹ GARF DP, D-vo 4, 1915, delo 130, ch. 2, ll. 95–97.

⁴² *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie* (n. 19 above), pp. 363–65. Several similar incidents occurred in this region more or less simultaneously, all of them connected to the high price of goods and the absence of sugar for sale.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 304–5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 282–85.

presumably, violating the unwritten rule that permitted only a woman's husband to lay hands on her). Her screams quickly drew a crowd of about three hundred, mainly women, who went about breaking into shops and stealing goods. The officer who described the events reported a rumor that soldiers at the front were sending letters to their wives urging them to riot (*buntovat'*) so that the soldiers would be sent home.⁴⁵ Massive unrest erupted all over the empire in the spring of 1916, and one of its "typical features" was the participation of the wives of men called into service.⁴⁶

Although the majority of *soldatki* belonged to the peasant *soslovie* and lived in the village, and their unrest involved subsistence issues, their actions differed from peasant women's activism of even a few years before. I have found no evidence of subsistence riots in the years after the emancipation of the serfs (1861) or during the upheavals of 1905–6. Before 1905, peasant women and men primarily engaged in conflict with outsiders who posed a threat to village well-being; during the revolution of 1905–6, they became more aggressive and engaged in unprecedented assaults on landlords' property. But in both these periods, peasant women acted primarily to defend kin and community, and they drew for legitimacy on their maternal role, emphasizing their pregnancies, clasping infants to their breasts, or thrusting children before them.⁴⁷ By contrast, infants and small children do not figure in the wartime resistance of *soldatki*, and references to the threat of children's starvation are rarely found in the records. By 1915–16, it was evidently sufficient to be the wife of a man fighting at the front to feel entitled to justice. "They should know at the front what's happening back in Russia," one *soldatka* reportedly wrote to her husband in a letter describing the riots that had occurred in Losevo, Voronezh province, in July 1916.⁴⁸ When a cossack ataman threatened cossack wives who had started a food riot in the Don region in August 1916, the cossacks restrained him. The ataman had no right to raise his sword against women whose husbands were fighting in the army, the men insisted.⁴⁹ Toward the close of 1916, the governor of Tomsk complained that "soldiers' wives have come to believe that they deserve concessions in everything (*dolzha byt' vo vsem*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292. See also pp. 301–3 (Don region: grocery and manufactured items, shoes); p. 332 (Orenburg: sugar); pp. 361–65 (Samara: sugar and other items); p. 366 (Saratov: sugar); pp. 374–78 (Stavropol: manufactured goods, mainly shoes and leather goods; to a lesser extent, grocery items); pp. 385–91 (Tomsk: manufactured goods, food such as dried bread and spice cakes [*prianiki*]); and pp. 406–7 (Kherson: chicken).

⁴⁶ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1915, delo 130, ch. 3, l. 141.

⁴⁷ Engel, "Women, Men, and the Languages of Russian Peasant Resistance" (n. 16 above).

⁴⁸ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, p. 292. The hardship endured by their families was in fact deeply disturbing to soldiers at the front. See Wildman (n. 7 above), pp. 108–9.

⁴⁹ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, p. 332.

ustupka) since their husbands had been sent to the front and were shedding their blood.”⁵⁰

When they engaged in food riots in rural areas or provincial townships, *soldatki* stood out as a particular group and observers could identify them as such. However, there were many other women, not so readily distinguishable, who were likely to have shared the expectation that the government owed them something in return for sending their husbands and sons to war. The mobilization of millions of men in 1914 sent millions of women out to work for the first time, in order to compensate for the loss of their husbands' incomes, swelling the ranks of the already sizable female industrial workforce. Some of the new women workers left the village for the factory; others already lived in an industrial town or city and began to work when their husbands or fathers went off to war; still others moved from the relatively low-paid textile trade into better-paying positions, in the metalworking industry in Petrograd in particular, where the proportion of women workers rose sixfold during the war.⁵¹ Between 1914 and 1917, the percentage of women in Russia's industrial labor force rose from 26.6 to 43.2 percent.⁵² In cities and industrial towns, a sizable proportion of married women workers must have been soldier's wives.

This was a particularly volatile mix of identities. From the 1880s onward, women had provided a growing proportion of Russia's unskilled, cheap factory labor. Women workers were paid a fraction of men's wages and valued for their “submissiveness.” Like male workers, most factory women were of peasant origin and derived from the village; initially, patriarchal traditions seemed to weigh heavily on them. Women workers were slower to organize and less ready to strike than their male counterparts. However, over time women workers grew more self-assured and militant. During the revolution of 1905 they showed an unprecedented capacity for action on their own behalf, participating in strikes and labor stoppages in a variety of settings. In the final confrontations with the authorities in December, they joined men on the barricades to defend the revolution. Beginning in 1912, the number of strikes in which women played a dynamic role markedly increased. Women strikers often demanded

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 388. A comparison of Russian women's actions with the better organized but maternalist resistance of New York housewives in 1917 suggests the essentially strategic nature of maternalist rhetoric. See Dana Frank, “Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests,” *Feminist Studies* 11 (Summer 1985): 255–85.

⁵¹ Meyer (n. 39 above), p. 214. McKean hypothesizes that most of the newcomers to the Saint Petersburg labor force were peasants, but acknowledges “the absence of solid and reliable statistical data” that might establish with certainty the proportions of particular groups. See McKean (n. 3 above), p. 330. A similar lack of data makes it impossible to speak with confidence about the composition of the female workforce in wartime Russia.

⁵² Meyer, p. 214.

polite treatment from supervisory personnel, evidence of their growing resistance to pervasive humiliation and insults. Although the outbreak of World War I briefly put an end to strikes, they resumed in the second half of 1915, and by 1916 women's participation had attained prewar levels.⁵³ As the events in Bogorodsk demonstrate vividly, connection to a peasant household or residency in a peasant village was no bar to working women's activism. Whether she was a newcomer to the labor force or a well-established woman worker who had lost her husband to war, the *soldatka* who worked in a factory was part of a female workforce increasingly disposed to fight for its rights.

The *soldatka's* sense of entitlement is likely to have exacerbated the woman worker's grievances and deepened the social antagonisms that already divided urban society as a whole, setting "us" (the lower class and the working class) against "them" (the privileged orders).⁵⁴ From the first, the question of supply had a social dimension in Russia. Lars Lih has noted that "speculation" soon became an important rhetorical device that permitted the authorities to explain shortages and rising prices and to rationalize requisitioning of products.⁵⁵ However, among the lower classes, the rhetoric concerning speculation had a life of its own, reflecting lower-class hostility to market forces that placed profit above the popular right to subsistence. Lower-class people attacked shops because they suspected that merchants or tradespeople had raised prices or held back goods in order to increase their profits. In October 1915, such suspicions led women workers in Bogorodsk to attack the local shopkeepers. Likewise, during a food riot in Kineshma, another industrial town, people in the crowd shouted, "The traders themselves rob the buyers," and "Give us sugar, the traders steal, there's nothing to eat!" as they stole sugar from one of the stalls. In his report, the governor of Kostroma observed that the population was very hostile to the tradespeople and added that, in his opinion, there was good reason for their hostility.⁵⁶

The government's failure to establish an effective rationing system that provided equal access to desirable goods meant that wartime suffering was far

⁵³ Glickman (n. 7 above), chap. 6; Smith, "Class and Gender" (n. 7 above), pp. 144–45.

⁵⁴ I draw here on Heather Hogan, "Class Formation in the St. Petersburg Metal-working Industry: From the 'Days of Freedom' to the Lena Goldfields Massacre," in Siegelbaum and Suny, eds. (n. 7 above), p. 98.

⁵⁵ Lars Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990), p. 12. Hostility to profiteers and speculators played a role in wartime popular culture, too. See Jahn, *Patriotic Culture* (n. 38 above), p. 91.

⁵⁶ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1916, delo 30, ch. 3, ll. 7, 10. See also the explanation for the riot of April 1915 in Moscow and concern about workers' hostility to tradespeople in *ibid.*, 1915 delo 130, ch. 1, ll. 5, 24; and at the Sormovo plant in Nizhnii Novgorod province, in *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v N. Novgorode* (n. 22 above), p. 249.

from equally shared.⁵⁷ Those with money were able to buy what they wanted, even when the goods were scarce. As a result, the well-to-do also became targets for popular resentment. A report of the Petrograd police, dated December 1915, described the mood of women standing in food lines in the following terms: "All these women, freezing in twenty-degree weather for hours on end in order to receive two pounds of sugar or two to three pounds of flour, understandably look for the person responsible for their woes." Among those the women held responsible were "'the ladies [*baryne*]' [the well-to-do consumers] who are able to buy goods from the salesmen at once, even if the goods cost one hundred rubles, thus contributing to the disappearance of goods."⁵⁸ The scarcity of meat on the eve of Christmas further exacerbated social tensions in Petrograd that year, enraging lower-class women against "the well-to-do public who have the opportunity to buy substantial quantities of meat and do so before the very eyes of the poorest sectors of the population," in the words of a police report.⁵⁹ Such tensions were not unique to Petrograd. A riot that occurred in the town of Kimry, Tver' province, a major center of artisanal shoe- and bootmaking, revealed precisely the same social antagonisms. In October 1916, a crowd of mostly female shoppers broke into a shop whose owner had refused to sell them sugar, claiming that he had none in stock, and destroyed or walked off with everything in sight. Several days later, in reply to a police official (*ispravnik*) who urged them to obey the law, members of a crowd of women shouted that they were starving, that no one gave them sugar, and that merchants sold it instead to "well-to-do people [*sostoiatel'nyim liudiam*]" for one ruble, sixty kopeks a pud. The *ispravnik*'s explanation that there simply was no sugar to distribute, and his assurances that the state would investigate abuses, fell on deaf ears. Not until a substantial contingent of armed forces appeared was peace restored in the town.⁶⁰

Such encounters demonstrate a striking lack of respect for the authorities and absence of faith in their ability or desire to mediate fairly between social groups. Wartime shortages severely undermined the legitimacy of officials and of the police. Early in 1915, the chief of the Moscow police reported the spread

⁵⁷ On the government's failure, see Lih, chaps. 1–2.

⁵⁸ Quoted in B. Grave, *K istorii klassovoi bor'by v Rossii v gody imperialisticheskoi voiny: Iul' 1914 g.-fevral' 1917 g.* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926), pp. 156–57.

⁵⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 158.

⁶⁰ Unable to believe that the crowd had arrived at such a radical viewpoint by itself, the police investigated to see whether some political propagandist or agitator (a certain Pletnev, a member of the local supply committee) had put them up to it, but were forced to conclude that the cause of unrest was simply anger at the rising price of essential items and the fact that refined sugar was no longer being sold in the shops; even lump sugar was increasingly difficult to find and, in any case, was rarely used when people drank their tea. See GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1916, delo 73, chap. 3, ll. 1–10.

of rumors that certain ranks of the district police were helping speculators to conceal food in order to maintain high prices and that the police were “rewards for this by the speculators.” He also reported widespread allegations that the police demanded bribes from individuals who wanted to transport food into the city.⁶¹ According to a Petrograd police report of September 1915, the lower classes explained high prices and lack of supplies as the “inability or unwillingness of the central government to regulate these issues.” As a result, “in the vast majority of cases they have adopted a very negative attitude. They also distrust local officials and they openly blame the police for blatantly taking bribes and assisting the speculators . . . instead of helping ordinary people in their struggle with the pillagers.”⁶² In addition to well-to-do buyers, policemen also became the targets of popular rage in Petrograd in December 1915 because the poor believed that the police “permitted some people to enter the shops but not others, and thus acted as a kind of ‘ruler of the subsistence question’” in the capital.⁶³ If Robert Thurston is correct to call the ordinary policeman at his post “the lowest and most visible tsarist official, the one who most often enforced the authority of the state” and who was most likely to suffer when that authority declined, then criticisms of the integrity of the police acquire a political dimension in themselves.⁶⁴ So do physical attacks against the police, which occurred in many of the instances described in this article, including the incident with which it began, when the crowd threw stones and shouted, “Down with the police!” Rioters often responded to police efforts to protect shopkeepers or quell popular discontent by stoning the police, or by attacking them with rakes, fists, sticks, stones, or whatever else came to hand.⁶⁵

By the second half of 1916, the political dimension of some food riots had become overt. In July, the wives of soldiers in the Don region tore down a portrait of the tsar while pillaging the shop of a local merchant. In a reversal of the elite discourse that blamed the “German” empress Alexandra for Russia’s military failures, the women placed responsibility squarely on the tsar. Having smashed the frame and thrown the tsar’s portrait on the floor, they stomped on it and shouted, “Trample him; he’s taken our husbands off to war.” One of the women jumped up on the counter and, breaking the glass of a portrait of the empress that hung on the wall, cried out, “The empress is innocent, but the tsar

⁶¹ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1915, delo 130, ch. 1, l. 12.

⁶² Grave, p. 155. See also pp. 157–58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁶⁴ Robert W. Thurston, “Police and People in Moscow, 1906–1914,” *Russian Review* 39 (July 1980): 330.

⁶⁵ TsGIAgM (n. 2 above), l. 18; *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v N. Novgorode*, p. 268; *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie* (n. 19 above), pp. 283, 292, 362.

has taken our husbands. Trample him.”⁶⁶ In early November, as the bread crisis became desperate, the governor of Moscow wrote that for three days there had been insufficient bread to feed the population in the village of Ozerakh and, as a result, everyone, including the workers at the local factory, had turned against the war. Although the governor’s account says nothing about the gender of the discontented villagers and workers, their complaints are in the female voice and, in particular, that of the *soldatka*: everywhere you can hear people saying that “they are slaughtering our husbands and sons at the front, while at home they want to do us in with hunger [*na voiny kolotiat muzhei i detei, a doma khotiat golodom umorit*],” he reported.⁶⁷ Thus, subsistence crises contributed to and deepened the polarization of Russian society in the war years by making the conflict between “us” (the lower class and the working class) and “them” (not only privileged society but also, and at last, the tsarist state) a matter of life and death.

CONCLUSION

The unprecedented success of the subsistence riot that brought down the tsar is partly the result of an unusual historical conjuncture. Historians usually portray community-based subsistence riots as occurring in pre- or protoindustrial settings where informal community politics prevail, upholding a moral economy that places human survival above market values. By ushering in more formal modes of protest, industrialization supposedly renders the food riot obsolete or at least ineffective, because in the large towns and cities of the emergent industrial order rioters no longer have a supportive social milieu to enforce demands for a “just price” on shopkeepers and tradespeople. Under these circumstances, Bohstedt tells us, although women might continue to lead bread riots, “they were left marooned in a traditional form of protest, while their brothers and fathers formed more modern political and labor associations to take up their cudgels on the front of the capitalist labor market.”⁶⁸

Developments were not always so straightforward, however. By providing women with new social roles, modern warfare gave new meanings to the subsistence riot. In Germany, for example, wartime propaganda conferred social power on women in their capacity as consumers. Because the urban public had come to perceive consumer sacrifices as emblematic of the civilian contribution to the war effort, the public actively sympathized with female bread rioters, making their actions singularly effective. Widespread public sympathy

⁶⁶ *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie*, pp. 303–4.

⁶⁷ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1915, delo 130, ch. 4, l. 235.

⁶⁸ Bohstedt (n. 13 above), p. 50.

forced the German government to take control of the market in order to ensure the women's equal access to scarce goods. Belinda Davis suggests that it was the authorities' continued, if inadequate, attentiveness to consumer needs that helped stave off revolution in Germany.⁶⁹

In Russia, the war also transformed women's social roles. Hundreds of thousands of women became industrial workers, and millions became *soldatki*. Between 1914 and 1917, hundreds of thousands of newcomers took the places of workers sent off to the front. The majority of these new workers were female, and an unknown number of them were also soldiers' wives. Those who came from the village brought traditional expectations concerning the right to subsistence and the affordability of essential goods, as well as a more modern sense of entitlement derived from their connection to men at the front. They joined a female workforce whose capacity for militancy and self-assertion had become manifest by the eve of the war. The combination was a particularly volatile one. The participation of female and male workers added a new dimension to the subsistence riot, which acquired the potential to spill over into and combine with more "modern" forms of protest, as occurred in Bogorodsk in 1915 and again in February 1917 with such dramatic consequences.

Yet even as subsistence riots provide evidence of resistance to market forces on the part of Russia's lower classes and at least a sector of its industrial workforce, riots also demonstrate the degree to which these very rioters had learned to take market products for granted. In the Europe of earlier times, subsistence riots had occurred in response to the scarcity or high prices of bread and grains—the very staff of life. During World War I, the goods Russians sought at just prices were often the very goods that the market had made available to them in the first place. In the majority of the incidents discussed in this essay, sugar or other products were far more likely than bread or flour to be the bone of contention.⁷⁰ Although the massive protests that emerged everywhere in the empire in the spring of 1916 were usually termed "hunger riots," in fact the

⁶⁹ Davis, "Food Scarcity and the Empowerment of the Consumer" (n. 38 above), pp. 287–310, and Belinda Davis, "Reconsidering Habermas, Gender and the Public Sphere: The Case of Wilhelmine Germany," in *Society, Culture and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoffrey Eley (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1996), p. 425. Elsewhere, rationing also succeeded in quelling popular discontent. See Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis, "Feeding the Cities," in *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London and Berlin, 1914–1919*, ed. Jay M. Winter and J.-L. Robert (Cambridge, 1996), p. 326.

⁷⁰ In his article on food riots, Kir'ianov included a table in which he has classified riots in 1916 according to their date, place, region, and the goods whose scarcity or high price precipitated the unrest. He was unable to identify the goods in seven of forty-four incidents he includes; sugar played a role in nineteen of the remaining thirty-seven, either alone or in combination with other items, whereas such staples as bread, flour, or potatoes were a factor in only ten. Anger over the price or availability of dry goods contributed to the unrest in nine of the incidents enumerated in the table, including the

population was reacting “not only to the high price of such grocery items as sugar, flour, etc., but also to the growing expense of items necessary for daily life, such as shoes, manufactured goods and soap,” reads a report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁷¹ The fact that the scarcity or high price of items such as meat, soap, calico, and leather, or even sugar, prompted the lower classes to rebel suggests the extent to which popular expectations had risen by the outbreak of the war. Sugar was a relative latecomer to the diet of the peasantry, but by the early twentieth century many peasants had adopted the practice of consuming it regularly with tea. The diet of the factory worker was more varied than that of the peasant. Although bread and grains continued to dominate workers’ diets, most consumed tea with sugar daily and ate meat much more regularly than villagers, who consumed it primarily on feast days.⁷² Workers also preferred leather boots or shoes to the felt boots or woven bark shoes worn by peasants, mass-produced fabrics to homespun, and soap to the lye and ashes that peasants used for cleaning. It may well have been the case that lower-class people in large cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg had little choice, having become entirely dependent on what they could buy in the marketplace, by contrast with the peasants, who in a pinch could subsist on what they produced at home. Thus, for example, in March 1916 we find twenty-five women workers “rioting” over the price of calico in the Moscow suburb of Podol’sk. Having just been paid, they were walking home from work past the trading rows when one of the workers went into a shop to inquire about the cost of a length of calico. When she heard the price (thirty kopeks), she seized the goods from the counter and tossed them outside to the other women; a few of them entered the shop to assist her. The incident lasted less than five minutes and was limited to the theft of these goods.⁷³ It may also be the case that anger over the difficulty of obtaining sugar reflected the extent to which workers were substituting tea with sugar for more substantial fare in their diet, thus providing indirect evidence of a real decline in their standard of living.⁷⁴

riot that eventuated in the February revolution. See Kir’ianov, “Massovye vystupleniia” (n. 10 above), pp. 12–13.

⁷¹ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1916, delo 42, ch. 3, l. 1; delo 130, ch. 3, l. 141.

⁷² R. E. F. Smith and David Christian, *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink in Russia* (New York, 1984), pp. 251–66; Iurii Kir’ianov, *Zhiznennyi uroven’ rabochikh Rossii* (Moscow, 1979), pp. 186–87.

⁷³ GARF, DP, D-vo 4, 1916, delo 42, ch. 3, l. 1. The riot that erupted in Kineshma, Kostroma province, the following June (discussed earlier in this article) began with a quarrel over the price of a spool of thread and involved conflict over soap as well as other products.

⁷⁴ On tea and sugar as a food substitute, see Kir’ianov, *Zhiznennyi uroven’*, p. 171; Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985), p. 149. The authorities accepted these expectations, identifying such items as sugar and leather as being of “prime necessity.”

But, in fact, rioters over goods such as boots, fabric, and soap included people who continued to have access to homemade products, people who lived in or near their native villages. Residents of industrial towns such as Kineshma and Podol'sk or of market villages such as Bol'shoi Maresev, Nizhnii Novgorod province, had grown accustomed to consuming manufactured goods and goods of urban provenance, and in these and similar places the growing cost of such items contributed to popular outrage over the declining standard of living. Or, to put it a little differently, the popular definition of "justice" had come to include access to goods that still remained luxuries for much of the peasant population. This was true even of workers and their families who were newly arrived from—or, in the case of rural factories, still resident in—the peasant village. Riots thus suggest the degree to which, not only in cities but also in small towns and industrial villages, the tastes of lower-class Russians had become more demanding and more dependent on a market economy. They also confirm the observation of Thierry Bonzon and Belinda Davis that in the case of subsistence riots there is no simple and unequivocal relation between the material difficulties encountered by the population and the level of discontent aroused.⁷⁵ At least until the bread crisis became real and pressing, loss of a respectable standard of living—that is, loss of newly acquired status—seems to have motivated popular resistance as much as deprivation itself.

So did the unequal character of that deprivation in Russia. One of the salient features of wartime Germany is the extent to which social differences became muted. All urban residents came to identify themselves as consumers, this new image superseding "the fractionated and weak pre-war class-based image."⁷⁶ Precisely the opposite took place in Russia. There, the privileged access of consumers with money to goods unavailable to those without it exacerbated the already substantial antagonisms between the privileged and unprivileged sectors of Russian society, and the government's manifest failure to deal effectively with the situation or to mediate fairly between social groups contributed greatly to its downfall.

In terms of the number of people involved, subsistence rioting pales in significance before the strike movement that gained momentum as the war continued. And it is hardly news to conclude, as I have done, that by the end of 1916 social polarization had deepened and lower-class women and men had grown severely alienated from the tsarist regime. Nevertheless, a closer look at subsistence riots is valuable for what it tells us about lower-class views on the eve of

⁷⁵ Bonzon and Davis, p. 339. Elsewhere in Europe and in the United States, too, "what were considered basic necessities by the working population in the early twentieth century would have been considered unattainable luxuries in the early nineteenth century—meat, eggs, milk and butter, for example." See Taylor (n. 33 above), p. 486.

⁷⁶ Davis, "Food Scarcity," p. 289.

revolution and about the social bases of discontent. The riots indicate that, in many cases, people in the marketplace and on the factory floor belonged to the same informal community, with a shared notion of justice that included the right to consume market products. The riots also reveal a shared hostility toward people whose money gave them privileged access to scarce goods and toward the policemen, officials, and, eventually, the ruler who failed to ensure equality in deprivation. In addition, the riots demonstrate that the war increased the sense of entitlement of the many lower-class women who were soldiers' wives, and that other people recognized this change in the women's status and acknowledged their claims. Indeed, it is worth revisiting the case of the Don Cossacks who in August 1916 restrained their ataman, insisting that he had no right to raise his sword against women whose husbands were fighting in the army. Could it be that Cossack restraint in February 1917 was also due, at least in part, to their awareness that the women massed on the streets of Petrograd were the wives and mothers of men at the front?

Finally, examining the motivations of the food rioters to whom historians so often refer in passing suggests that popular desires and expectations were more complex than they usually acknowledge. After February 1917, the material needs of Russia's lower classes were summed up in the word "bread," as in the Bolshevik slogan "Peace, Land, and Bread," and in fact, by 1917 the bread crisis had become truly desperate. However, at least until the end of 1916, many members of the urban lower classes expected to live by more than bread alone—they wanted sugar with their tea, meat on their table, boots on their feet, and a length of Chinese calico for a skirt or dress. These aspirations for a better or more comfortable material life have left little trace in histories of the Russian working class around the time of the revolution. Nevertheless, along with hostility toward tradespeople, toward the "bourgeoisie" as a group, and toward the autocracy, such aspirations remain part of the story of the revolution.