

tumors), and heart and vascular disease. Wirz complained that 17 percent of German military recruits were unfit for military duty in 1937, and that many of those were disqualified for dental problems—which could also lead to cancer, in his view. Lambasting the one-sided “materialistic” focus on calories in nutritional theory (*Kalorienlehre*), he argued that nutrition should never be left up to science alone.¹⁰

The dietary naturalism of this era was almost always tempered by the view that natural foods made economic sense. For Wirz, as for Liek and other food Nazis, proper nutrition was a matter not just of health but of economic efficiency. White bread, for example, was inferior to whole-grain bread on both counts: white bread was a “French revolutionary invention” and a bleached-out “chemical product” (Gerhard Wagner’s derogation)¹¹—but it was also more costly to produce. Lowering Germany’s consumption of meat, sugar, and fat would result not just in health benefits but in financial savings: a reduction of meat consumption from 56 kilos per person per year to about 30–35 kilos, for example, would allow Germany to export meat, saving valuable hard currency. Germans would be both healthier and wealthier if they would stop bleaching their bread and canning their foods; Wirz also urged his countrymen to drink skim milk.¹² Much of this he couched in terms of a quest for “nutritional freedom” (*Nahrungsfreiheit*)¹³—the slogan often used in connection with the plan to eliminate German dependence on foreign imports.

Healthy food was supposed to make economic sense, but the reverse was not necessarily the case, and there were many even at the time who recognized that the rapid militarization of the German economy was threatening to degrade the German food supply, as we shall see in a moment.

MEAT VERSUS VEGETABLES

Dietary theories of cancer were most often accompanied by the argument that cancer was a disease caused not by particular germs or chemical agents but by some kind of general bodily disfunction.

Cancer was brought on by improper diet or stress—the theory being that anything which weakened the body as a whole would encourage cancer. Researchers’ failure to find a “cancer germ”—the great hope of cancer theorists circa 1900—had given rise to suspicions that there was not in fact a single cause of cancer; Liek had made this point, and many physicians followed suit (Fritz Lickint and Friedrich Kortenhaus, for example). Cancer in this view—challenging Virchow’s theory of cancer as the product of “local irritation”—was best understood as a constitutional disease, a “disease of the body as a whole” (*allgemeine Krankheit*), having multiple causes, including genetics, diet, stress, and much else besides.¹⁴

Those who subscribed to this “general dysfunction” theory tended to argue for a diet low in fat, sugar, and protein, and high in fruit and fiber.¹⁵ This was the view presented by the German Hygiene Museum in its cancer exhibit; it was also the view of many of the homeopathy-oriented writers for *Hippokrates* magazine. Cancer was notorious—and much feared—for striking the well-fed and apparently healthy; perhaps a periodic fasting or other steps to limit what we eat could help prevent cancer. Hunger cures of diverse sorts were popular at this time—judging from the outpouring of books on the topic.

For those who upheld the dietary theory, excess consumption of meat was one of the most likely culprits. In the Nazi era, meatophobia was bolstered by the fact that several prominent leaders—notably Hitler and Himmler—were hostile to flesh eating, but worry about overzealous meat eating was also a popular theme of pre-Nazi organic literature. The *Lebensreform* movement of the Weimar era had urged moderation in this area; what was new in the Nazi period—or newly stressed—was the idea that “natural living” would augment military prowess.

A mid-1930s Hitler Youth manual, *Health through Proper Eating*, for example, includes an entire section under the rubric “Too Much Meat Can Make You Sick.” The manual talks about the dangers of “empty calories” and champions soybeans as a wholesome (*vollwertig*) substitute for meat. High-fiber whole-grain bread is endorsed, with support in the form of the anticonstipation slogan “He who rests, rusts” (*Wer rastet, der rostet*). Young Nazi readers