For two-and-a-half years the Finnish Army occupied the positions it had captured in autumn 1941 in Eastern Karelia and north of Leningrad. Although Finland’s war had turned into trench warfare, it still called for considerable resources. The Finnish leaders wished to maintain the army’s capability at the highest possible level. When it came to making peace, Ryti reminded Mannerheim, only those countries that had their own armed forces would be taken into consideration. In April 1943, the Finnish armed forces comprised 420,000 men and 26,000 women. This was more than 12 per cent of the total population of 3.7 million. The majority of the women serving in the armed forces were members of the voluntary *Lotta Svärd* organization. The duties they carried out mainly involved nursing, supplies, communications and various administrative tasks. There were about 130,000 people working in the munitions industry, over half of them women. All this labour was thus absent from the normal production on which the nation’s subsistence depended.

At that time Finland was still very much an agricultural country. Farming and forestry had constituted over a third of the country’s total production before the war, and more than half the population gained their living by them. The towns were small; even the largest city, Helsinki, had only 290,000 inhabitants. The country had reached a state of near self-sufficiency with regard to agricultural produce in the late 1930s, although this was dependent on imports of fertilizers and, moreover, weather conditions in those years had been particularly favourable. Agriculture was unmechanized and thus extremely labour-intensive. In the Peace of Moscow, the fertile fields of Karelia – about 10 per cent of all the arable land in the country – had been lost, and agricultural production fell by about a quarter in 1940. This was partly...
caused by the decrease in fertilizer imports and by a drought. In that year, the most important foodstuffs were rationed, first cereal products in May, then fats, meat and milk.

Finland had embarked on the new war in June 1941 confident that it would be a short one. So much of the human work force, the horses and the vehicles had been requisitioned by the army that the country’s economy could not last without them for long. But that was no problem – after all they’d all be back in time for the harvest. The crop was again poor because of an exceptional drought, and with most of the workforce away – up to 70 per cent according to some estimates – there were difficulties in harvesting it. By using the labour of women, children and even old men, most of the crop was harvested, but some of the potatoes and other root vegetables got left in the ground because of the early arrival of winter frosts, and only about half of the autumn ploughing was done. The following winter brought a real food crisis to the country, and at times there were only a few days’ supply of foodstuffs in the stores. The plight of the people was further exacerbated by bitter frosts and a shortage of heating materials. It clearly demonstrated just how inadequate the Finns’ own resources were in a prolonged war.

After coming through the difficult winter, the Finnish economy enjoyed something of a respite. Some of the reservists were demobilized, and resources were allocated to civilian production. The proportion of military appropriations in the gross national product went down from 40 per cent in 1940 to 25 per cent in 1943, which was lower than the corresponding figures of, for example, Great Britain or Canada at that time. Industrial production and supplies were adapted to suit the conditions of a prolonged war. Apart from the rationing of food and clothes, controls were imposed on prices, wages and rents. This did not, however, curb inflation. At home, a kind of wartime ‘normality’ prevailed. The front was far away, and there were few air raids on Finland before February 1944.

After spring 1942, the food situation became tolerable thanks to imports. The staple foodstuffs of the great majority of the people before the war had been rye bread and potatoes and milk or butter-milk. During the war, too, the sustenance of the Finnish people was to a great extent dependent on bread and potatoes. Agricultural produce was requisitioned, and the procurement quotas imposed on the farmers were strictly adhered to. The distribution of food was carried out by the authorities of the Ministry of Supply in cooperation with Supply Committees established by local councils. Probably no organization in Finland has ever been so roundly abused as the supply