



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Danish citizens resist the Nazis, 1940-1945

1940

to:

1945

Country: Denmark

Goals:

To refuse to assist the Nazi war machine using nonviolent means

A later goal was to save Danish Jews from being sent to concentration camps

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 037. Singing
- 049. Camouflaged meetings of protest
- 055. Social boycott
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 055. Social boycott

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 055. Social boycott

Methods in 4th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 048. Protest meetings
- 055. Social boycott
- 097. Protest strike
- 117. General strike › localized
- 136. Disguised disobedience
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

Methods in 5th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 048. Protest meetings
- 055. Social boycott
- 097. Protest strike
- 117. General strike
- 136. Disguised disobedience
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

Methods in 6th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 055. Social boycott

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 061. Boycott of social affairs › Refusing to attend concerts of German military music

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- mostly Danish factory workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Danish Freedom Council: a group of patriotic Danish citizens who united to lead the movement against the Nazi war machine.

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

The Churchill Club, KOPA, BOPA, group Holger Danske, Information (an illegal press agency), illegal press coordinating committee, Danish Youth Cooperation Movement

Involvement of social elites:

King Christian X- continued his weekly horse rides through the streets which served to reinforce Danish national pride

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- BOPA
- Illegal Press Coordinating Committee
- KOPA
- The Churchill club

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Factory workers began to strike

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 year*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Nazi occupation government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None known

Campaigner violence:

Some strikers responded with violence when attacked by German troops.

Repressive Violence:

Numerous arrests and killings

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although their nonviolent methods of resistance had not ended the occupation, through this resistance the Danes had achieved several goals. Most prominently they had protected Danish Jews, maintained the sovereignty of their national government throughout the occupation, and limited the amount of resources that Germany was able to draw from Denmark.

The campaign spread from small resistance groups and individual factories to hundreds of factories and the entire nation's population

In 1940, at the brink of World War II, Denmark found itself declaring neutrality and cutting its troops in half. Despite this, the German war machine was not to be stopped. The German army invaded Denmark offering an ultimatum demanding submission. To minimize Danish casualties at the hand of a superior German army, the Danish King Christian submitted. Although it was occupied by German troops, Denmark had not surrendered and remained a sovereign state.

In 1940, a seventeen-year-old student named Arne Sejr created the Ten Commandments for Danes, in which he described the

characteristics that make a “good Dane.” His leaflet called for a refusal to work for the Germans, minimal effort in assisting the Germans, the destruction of German machinery and tools, a boycott of German goods, and the providing of protection for anyone oppressed by the Germans. Although this document started off as a pamphlet to be distributed to local leaders in Sejr’s town, it eventually became an essential representation of Danish resistance to the Nazis.

A strong national identity was created in Denmark as a result of the Nazi occupation. On July 4, 1940, approximately 1,500 people gathered to sing songs remembering the 1864 war with Germany and the valor of Danish soldiers. Such musical gatherings continued throughout August and September, with 750,000 people singing in various festivals as a nonpolitical demonstration of national pride and unity. By singing songs about Danish culture and history instead of political angst, such gatherings protested German occupation in a manner that would not cause German repression.

The patriotic unity that arose among the Danish with the Nazi occupation only spread as time went on. Although the Nazis demanded that nothing be published by Danish newspapers and journals without prior German approval, by 1941 an underground press was spreading anti-German publications. By 1943, illegal publications reached a total circulation of 2.6 million copies.

On March 23, 1943, Germany allowed Denmark to hold parliamentary elections in an attempt to illustrate that it valued Denmark’s autonomy. Many of the Danish resistance groups supported democratic parties. The Danish Youth Cooperation Movement distributed over 1 million voter badges which served as symbolic gestures supporting the Danish resistance campaign against the Nazis, and also persuaded would-be abstainers to participate in the election. What resulted was 89.5 percent voter participation and 141 out of the 149 seats in Rigsdag going to the coalition parties. This showed all Danes that they had an opportunity to make a difference.

The voting action empowered Danes and encouraged resistance against the Nazis. As a result, sabotage increased and workers began to strike. After a sabotage attack on a German cruiser in an Odense shipyard, German troops entered the area and Danish shipyard workers went on strike and walked off their jobs. Word of this spread throughout the city, and factory workers across Odense walked off their jobs in solidarity. When word traveled to Esbjerg, all workers, from fishermen to police, stopped work, closed their doors, and gathered in the center of the city. German troops responded by instigating a curfew, which was ignored by the resisting Danes. For five days, workers refused to go back to work until the curfew was finally lifted.

On August 28, 1943, the Germans provided the Danish government with an ultimatum: prohibit strikes, public meetings of 5 or more persons, and any private meetings in closed rooms or the open air; impose a night curfew; collect all weapons; turn censorship over to the Germans; establish summary courts to deal with any infractions of these rules; and impose the death penalty for sabotage, defiance of the German military, and weapons possession. The Danish government refused and the following day the German troops occupied key facilities and arrested influential figures of the resistance, such as professors and newspaper editors. There was a complete military takeover by the Germans.

On September 8, 1943, a roundup of the Danish Jews was called for by the German troops. However, when word of the plan became known, Danes united and spread warnings to members of the Jewish population. The Danes offered their homes and offices as hiding spots for the Jews. After a German decree declared that all non-Jews turn over the Jews to authorities, it became clear that Jews were no longer safe hiding in Denmark. Fishermen volunteered to move the Jews to Sweden, and all but a few hundred were safely removed from Denmark.

Building on this sense of national unity, the underground Freedom Council responsible for organizing many acts of resistance won agreement of the Danish army to recognize the Council as a temporary government, until the king could form new one. The Danish Freedom Council became a public force to be reckoned with.

Following this, sabotage continued and another curfew was imposed between 8:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. to punish the Danish population. In response to this, Danish workers left work during the day, using the excuse that they were leaving early to cultivate their gardens, since the curfew did not allow enough time for gardening after work. Rather than watering flowers,

Danish workers gathered in mass numbers in the streets and rallied against the Germans. Two-minute-long stoppages were symbolic of national unity against the Germans. The day after the first “go-home early” campaign, word spread across Denmark and strikes were declared as the most effective weapon against the Germans.

The German troops responded to these strikes with increased arrests, violence, and heightened numbers of German troops. Danish police were arrested for failing to stop sabotage, and the German troops took over controlling the cities of Denmark. In response to the arrest of police workers, the Danish Freedom Council called for another nationwide strike to take place later that week. In Copenhagen a general strike lasted from June 30-July 4, 1944, in protest of the implementation of martial law. As the war began to come to an end, desperate attempts were made by the Germans to arrest prominent members of the Danish Freedom Council, threatening the resistance movement.

When word of Hitler’s suicide spread across Europe on May 1, 1945, Danes knew the occupation would soon end. Although their nonviolent methods of resistance had not ended the occupation, through this resistance the Danes had achieved several goals. Most prominently they had protected Danish Jews, maintained the sovereignty of their national government throughout the occupation, and limited the amount of resources that Germany was able to draw from Denmark.

Research Notes

Influences:

Strikes influenced by a 1920 nationwide general strike that had been called by labor leaders who demanded constitutional change (see "Danish workers strike for electoral reform (Easter Crisis of 1920), 1920").

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

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