



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Germans defend Ruhr Valley from French and Belgian invasion (Ruhrkampf), 1923

Time period notes: Resistance continued sporadically at the grassroots after the government officially ended the campaign, but it turned more towards violence and away from the previous dedication to nonviolent resistance

January 11,
1923

to: September 26,
1923

Country: Germany

Location City/State/Province: Ruhr Valley

Goals:

To stop the seizure of coal and other assets for reparations and to end the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr valley. Also, to prevent France from annexing the Ruhr Valley at a time of German weakness; it is not clear the French aimed at this but it was widely feared in Germany.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 023. Destruction of own property › removing rails from the railroad to prevent transport of coal
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 094. International sellers' embargo
- 097. Protest strike
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 115. Selective strike › Rail workers refused to transport goods for the French
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents › Providing false information
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents › removing and hiding files
- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 136. Disguised disobedience

- 160. Reverse trial
- 197. Work-on without collaboration

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 115. Selective strike › Rail workers refused to transport goods for the French
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 197. Work-on without collaboration

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 115. Selective strike › Rail workers refused to transport goods for the French
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 197. Work-on without collaboration

Methods in 4th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 115. Selective strike › Rail workers refused to transport goods for the French
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 197. Work-on without collaboration

Methods in 5th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 115. Selective strike › Rail workers refused to transport goods for the French
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 197. Work-on without collaboration

Methods in 6th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 045. Demonstrative funerals
- 105. Establishment strike
- 106. Industry strike
- 115. Selective strike › Rail workers refused to transport goods for the French
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 036. Performances of plays and music

- 037. Singing
- 055. Social boycott › of Germans that fraternized with French soldiers
- 055. Social boycott › of occupying soldiers
- 056. Selective social boycott
- 071. Consumers' boycott › refusal to ride on French run trains
- 126. Boycott of government departments, agencies, and other bodies › Refusal to eat at soup kitchens set up by the occupiers
- 197. Work-on without collaboration

Notes on Methods:

Most methods from the first segment were likely used in all later segments, but the exact timing is not known.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- government officials
- mine and industrial owners
- nearly all German citizens
- workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

German Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno

Individual resistance organizations at a more local level

Partners:

Labor Unions, owners of companies with industry in the Ruhr valley, newspapers

External allies:

United States and British governments

Involvement of social elites:

Elected and appointed government officials provided support and minimal planning for the campaign. The same was true for the owning class.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Owners

- Railway workers
- mine and industrial workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Many workers exit

Segment Length: *Approximately 2.5 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

French and Belgian national governments

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

During this period of nonviolent resistance, there were some minor acts of violence. After the campaign was officially abandoned (September 23, 1923) the resistance turned to greater violence against French troops.

Repressive Violence:

French troops arrested resisters, and sometimes even killed them.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The German resistance largely prevented profitable seizure of coal and other products from the Ruhr to make up for the reparations on which Germany had fallen behind. The resistance by itself, however, could not oust the French and Belgian troops, who stayed seven months beyond the government's declaration of the end of the resistance campaign. Nevertheless, the Dawes Commission which then intervened in the situation not only facilitated the troop withdrawal but also facilitated a renegotiated schedule of reparations payments, in the favor of the Germans (and one of Berlin's main goals). Taking these factors together, and calculating that none of these positives from the Germans' point of view could have happened without the nonviolent resistance, I assign a 5 to degree of achievement. [George Lakey, Manager.]

Despite the move towards sabotage, the organizations leading the resistance survived.

The campaign grew largely, especially in the number of strikes and strikers, until the nonviolent campaign ended in September 1923.

Following a loss in World War I, Germany was charged to pay reparations for their destructive role. The bill was \$33 billion. Germany had been weakened by the war and paying the reparations at the rate in which they were due would have completely crippled the country. Germany therefore tried to gain more time to pay. The Germans set forth a proposal for U.S banks to loan funds for the reparations and for France to reevaluate the reparations. At this point, rhetoric was already building for the upcoming French occupation, and this was a final attempt by Germany to curtail any forceful action that might occur. France refused to compromise with the Germans and decided to seize coal and other products in the Ruhr in lieu of reparations, using Belgium and Italy as allies. A commission finding Germany in intentional default of wood and coal reparations further assured French plans.

The reasoning behind France's seemingly harsh decision to pursue its reparations through non-diplomatic means does need some perspective. The Ruhr Valley represented German might, as it was the basis for Germany's coal and wood industries. The valley served as a symbol of German military capability and, furthermore, the materials and wealth to be found in that region could be useful in rebuilding damaged parts of France. The Ruhr region also had proximity to Belgium and France, which made occupation sensible in order to prevent German remilitarization of the region. Germany and France also had a history of geographical disputes, and, while it is not entirely clear whether France hoped for the chance to annex the Ruhr Valley for itself, such an intention was widely feared in Germany.

France began the occupation on January 11, 1923. German Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno called for resistance. Having just lost the war, Germany could not resist militarily. Instead, the resistance was to be nonviolent. Acts of protest began on the day of the invasion

German government officials called for a "passive resistance" in the region. No prescribed method was ordered per se; instead a reliance on the ingenuity of the populace calling on "their own intelligence, their knowledge of the details and facts" to resist was requested. The German Reichstag voted to support the resistance financially. Soon, the struggle began to pick up strength. The railroad industry refused to cooperate, and coal companies moved from the Ruhr region into Hamburg, out of jurisdiction of the occupation. That way, the occupiers had no access to files or personnel. All coal payments and deliveries for France were stopped. In addition, postal telephone and telegraph personnel were ordered not to cooperate.

France stepped up its military occupation by operating the railroads, punishing dissenters and those who disobeyed official orders, and installing barriers to control movement around the region. On January 20, French soldiers arrested five leading coal company owners for their refusal to deliver coal to the French. Two days later, in response to these arrests, 75,000 miners from mines and steel mills throughout the Ruhr began a strike. During the trial of these owners, thousands protested outside of the courthouse, and the defendants used the opportunity to denounce the occupation.

In order to prevent transportation of coal when it was seized by the French, German railway workers removed rails and blocked the railroads with idle train cars and lumber.

As the resistance continued some sabotage entered the mix of tactics. By April, France had finally begun to receive some coal and coke from the Ruhr Valley, despite major losses until that point. Some workers returned to their jobs while other German groups began to sabotage equipment, communications devices, and transportation channels. Saboteurs blew up bridges. If caught, military courts had the authority to sentence them to death, and did in some cases. In late March, French soldiers had killed thirteen resisting workers in the Ruhr in the "Bloody Easter on the Ruhr." This event helped fuel further protest as well as increased sabotage.

The new German prime minister, Gustav Stresemann, announced the official end of resistance on September 26. Britain and the U.S. intervened to set up the Dawes Commission to facilitate negotiations among the conflicting parties. With this external pressure French and Belgian troops left the Ruhr and Germany's debt was reduced, both of which were primary goals of the government in Berlin.

Research Notes

Influences:

This campaign was influenced by the German defense against the Kapp Putsch (see "German citizens defend democracy against Kapp Putsch, 1920")(1).

Sources:

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Maurice Weeks and Max Rennebohm, 21/07/2008 and 10/09/2011

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-paradox-repression>