

A French Bicycle Brigade Rides through Essen (1923)

Abstract

On January 11, 1923, five French divisions and a small number of Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr region, the center of Germany's heavy industry. The occupation was prompted by the Allied Reparations Commission's finding that Germany was late in delivering reparations to France. According to the Versailles Treaty, late or unfulfilled reparations were liable to sanctions. The French government under Minister President Poincaré was convinced that Germany was stalling out of unwillingness to fulfill its obligations and thus decided to occupy the Ruhr region as a security for outstanding deliveries of coal and wood. The issue of reparations was important to France, not least because France depended on German reparations in order to repay its own war debt. The occupation met with resolute resistance both from the German government and the local population. On the same day that the occupation troops marched in, Reich President Ebert called for passive resistance and ordered the immediate suspension of coal deliveries to France and Belgium. The labor unions called a general strike, in which postal and railroad workers also participated, meaning that the local economy and transportation came to a standstill. Meanwhile, the German government granted financial support to striking workers. In the end, the policy of passive resistance failed due to the unstoppable inflation and the attendant suffering of the population. Only once American intervention promised a more realistic schedule for the fulfillment of reparations, as well as an end to the Ruhr region's occupation did the situation quiet down. The occupation forces left the region in June 1925 as scheduled.

This photo shows a bicycle brigade of French occupation troops riding through the occupied city of Essen, one of the Ruhr region's main industrial centers. A total of 60,000 French soldiers were deployed to the Ruhr region.

Source



Source: A French Bicycle Brigade Rides through Essen.

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