

Newsreel Report about the Silesian Uprisings (1921)

Abstract

Following the First World War, the victorious Allies placed the German province of Upper Silesia—a land that included both Germans and Poles— under the temporary administration of the League of Nations, pending the results of a plebiscite in which the region’s residents would decide whether the territory should remain part of Germany or become part of the newly independent state of Poland. When that plebiscite finally took place on March 20, 1921, nearly 60 percent of the population voted to stay in Germany. In the eastern regions of the province, though, a majority voted to join Poland, highlighting the complex local variations. Six weeks later, on May 3, Polish partisans launched an armed uprising in an effort to attach those areas of Upper Silesia with a substantial Polish population to Poland itself. The German population had formed armed units, too, and they received additional support from *Freikorps* detachments, many of which came over from neighboring Lower Silesia. This 1921 segment, from the *Messter* newsreel company, presented this complicated and long-simmering conflict between two intertwined and aggrieved communities from a clearly German perspective. Meanwhile, the Inter-Allied Commission of France, Britain, and Italy had already started negotiating a partition plan for Upper Silesia as soon as the March plebiscite had concluded, seeking to assuage Polish and French interests. On October 20, 1921, after multiple plans and months of haggling, the Allies announced the division of Upper Silesia in two parts, instead of returning the entire province to Germany. Germany received a larger portion of the province, but it consisted mostly of agricultural land, whereas Poland took control of the region’s industrial heartland in eastern Upper Silesia. The German government of Chancellor Joseph Wirth resigned five days later in protest against what it saw as a disregard for the plebiscite’s results, but that did nothing to alter the Allies’ decision, and Germany ultimately recognized the partition on May 15, 1922, when it signed the German-Polish Convention on Upper Silesia.

Source

Krappitz. The Polish riots and marauding in Upper Silesia: German refugees save the remains of their household goods.

Neustadt (Upper Silesia). Volunteers are trying to reach their besieged home villages without weapons.

Neisse (Upper Silesia). The gymnasium as a gathering point for the local home guard [*Selbstschutz*].

Expelled railway officials have moved into freight cars.

The home guard drives towards the Polish insurgents.

Source: *Messter-Woche* (clip), 1921. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 22787,
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/22787/630637>

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