

Reichstag Hearing on the Occupation of the Ruhr (January 17, 1923)

Abstract

After the Allied Reparations Commission had determined that Germany was in arrears with its reparations at the end of 1922, French and Belgian divisions marched into the Ruhr area on January 11, 1923 and imposed a state of emergency. The French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré's goal in occupying the Ruhr area, which was the heartland of Germany's heavy industry, was to push Germany's western border further east. In this excerpt from the Reichstag debate on January 17, 1923, which is reproduced here, Reichstag President Paul Löbe (SPD) first describes the violence that occurred during the occupation. He then announces the adoption of an Enabling Act that was intended to avert the dangers resulting from the "economic and social emergency." Enabling acts were used to resolve state crises and required a two-thirds majority and the approval of the Reichsrat. They were usually limited in time and could be repealed by the Reichstag.

Source

289th session.

Wednesday, January 17, 1923.

President: The session is declared open.

The following telegram has reached us from Salzburg:

The repeated, unlawful violation of Germany by the French occupation of the Ruhr ordered under spurious and hypocritical pretexts fills the Salzburg parliament with deep sadness, sincere feelings of fraternal sympathy and a great concern about the future. May this adversity unite the German people in this difficult time and show them the way to liberty!

(Enthusiastic applause from all sides)

Breitenfelder, Parliamentary President.

(Renewed applause)

We thank the Salzburg parliament for this demonstration of solidarity in our difficult situation.

In the meantime, ladies and gentlemen, there can no longer be any doubt—it is even confirmed by official dispatches—that the military subjugation of the Ruhr Basin has claimed its first human life ...

(The assembly rises)

and resulted in severe injuries to other of our countrymen. The reason the son of a train driver in Bochum was murdered was that the conquerors heard songs they believed were directed against them.

(General commotion and cries of "boo.")

This was sufficient grounds for the foreign soldiers to shoot into the crowd

(Disquiet)

and stain their hands with the blood of the innocent. However, responsibility is borne by the men sitting in Paris,

(General agreement and cries of “bravo!”)

who initiated this military action against unarmed and defenseless people.

(Agreement from the right, the center and the United Social Democrats; calls from the Communists: “And the Pan-German rabble-rousers!”; general commotion.)

With a heavy heart, I repeat my appeals to our fellow countrymen in the Ruhr. However, we also repeat our warning to those wielding power, who must understand that they are risking dreadful consequences if they fail to check these developments—and who must understand that the daily expansion of the occupation will not lead to greater reparations but to vastly greater hatred and exasperation.

(Enthusiastic agreement.)

In this connection I am requesting the authority to place a motion by the parties on the agenda as the fourth item we shall address today. This motion will be handed out in about half an hour but I wish to draw your attention to it now:

Enabling Act.

The Reichstag has passed the following act, which is hereby proclaimed with the approval of the Reichsrat:

§ 1.

The Reich government is empowered, with the approval of the Reichsrat, to order the legal measures required to counter the dangers arising to the general public from the economic and social adversity.

The Reichstag must be promptly informed of the regulations passed by the Reich government, which are subject to repeal at the Reichstag’s request.

Source of original German text: *Verhandlungen des Reichstags. I. Wahlperiode 1920*, vol. 357, 289th Session, January 17, 1923, *Stenographische Berichte* (Berlin: Norddeutsche Buchdruckerei und Verlags-Anstalt, 1923) 9454.

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