



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Austrian Social Democrats general strike to prevent civil war, 1927

July 15,
1927

to: July 18,
1927

Country: Austria

Location City/State/Province: Vienna

Location Description: Vienna was the capital city and most powerful federal state in the Republic

Goals:

The Social Democrats called the general strike to prevent further violence following the riots on July 15th.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 065. Stay-at-home
- 106. Industry strike › Communications strike
- 117. General strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 065. Stay-at-home
- 106. Industry strike
- 117. General strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 065. Stay-at-home › ends Sunday July 17, 1927
- 106. Industry strike
- 117. General strike › ends Sunday July 17, 1927

Methods in 4th segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 106. Industry strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 106. Industry strike › ends noon Monday July 18, 1927

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Human Rights

Peace

Group characterization:

- Socialist Republican Guard
- industrial workers
- members of the Social-Democratic party

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Social Democratic Party Executive leadership and the leadership of the Trade Union Council, including Vienna mayor Karl Seitz

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Industrial Workers
- Socialist Republican Guard
- members of the Social-Democratic Party

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 11 hours*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Police, bourgeoisie, rural fascist-sympathizers, the Front-Fighters

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Aside from incredible violence and rioting that motivated the call of the general strike on Friday July 15, 1927, violence during strike appears to be minimal. Some accounts mention violence Saturday, July 16, stating that six communist youth are killed, perhaps by the Socialist Democratic Republican Defense League, though the SDRDL reportedly patrolled the streets that Saturday to help enforce the general strike and prevent violence.

Repressive Violence:

Not known during strike, incredible police brutality during riots on Friday July 15.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Social-Democratic party showed gains in votes and representation following 1928 elections in provincial municipalities. Riots of July 15th did not lead to civil war.

In Vienna in the summer of 1927, the Social Democrats represented a local majority, but faced resistance from the federal government and many rural fascist-leaning areas. In July, a federal court found the Tscharnon brothers and Julius Pinter, members of the militaristic Front-fighters (a group opposed to the Social Democrats), not guilty for the murder of a worker and eight-year-old boy during January demonstrations by the Socialist Republican Guard. Viennese workers heard of this acquittal early in the morning on Friday, July 15, 1927. Workers left their posts, held meetings, and agreed to march on the Parliament building. From eight to nine that morning, the power station workers decided to strike and no trolleys ran in the city.

When the workers reached the Ringstrasse plaza in front of the parliament building, Chancellor Seipel ordered out mounted police. Violence erupted on both sides, and it is unclear who instigated the first attack. Police fought with sabers and revolvers and protestors began to scavenge materials from nearby construction sites to wield against the police and make barricades. At one point, it is alleged that the chief of Police ordered his men to cease, but to no avail.

The workers penetrated police forces and entered the Ministry of Justice, destroying property and setting fires. Reports indicate that the fire brigade was called, but could not reach the flames due to the crowd.

The national government called in militia forces and protestors and police escalated violence. Protestors attacked offices of “bourgeois” newspapers, and lit fire to the house where the acquitted had been staying.

At 7pm on that Friday the Social Democratic party Executive Council and Trade Union Council called for a general strike to prevent the wild protest from ending in civil war and revolution. For one day, they demanded all workers in Vienna to stay home and quietly protest. They specifically appealed to workers not to demonstrate in the streets or clash violently with the police.

During Saturday, July 16, the Social Democratic party reported that the general strike was continuing successfully and that workers should be wary of communist agitation. Stories circulated that communists had instigated the Friday riots and were urging for the arming of the working class, though when examined, actual evidence does not seem to corroborate this rumor.

During the Saturday strike, six communist youth were killed, though the circumstances of their deaths are unclear. The Social Democrats Republican Guard may be implicated, though their mission for Saturday was to patrol the streets to enforce the strike

and prevent violence.

On Sunday, July 17, the general strike ended. News came in from rural districts that the fascist-leaning Heimwehr (a militia force sympathetic with Seipel's government) were organizing and intending to come to Vienna by rail should the communications strike continue. After requests from Graz and other regions, the Social Democrats announced at noon that the communications strike would end on Monday, July 18 at midnight. The Social Democrats then entered into conversation in a special session of Parliament to decide responsibility for the July 15 riot. During the riot police and protestors killed over 100 people and destroyed over 35 million dollars of property.

The general strike was successful at preventing open civil war between the Viennese Social Democrats and the Austrian national government, and the Social Democrats actually gained votes and representation in many rural areas in the 1928 elections.

Research Notes

Sources:

Crook, Wilfrid Harris. "Vienna in 1927." *The General Strike: a Study of Labor's Tragic Weapon in Theory and Practice*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1931. 586-95. Print.

Lewis, Jill. "The Year of the General Strike, 1927." *Fascism and the Working Class in Austria: 1918-1934 : the Failure of Labour in the First Republic*. New York U.a.: Berg, 1991. 122-46. Print.

Additional Notes:

Due to the incredibly brief nature of this strike, and the violent, more publicized context in which it occurred, information on the strike itself was somewhat difficult to find. Information posted here draws deeply on Wilfrid Harris Crook's "The General Strike" pages 586-595.

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

Pauline Blount, 08/11/2011

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