



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Luxembourgers general strike against Nazi occupation, 1942

Time period notes: *The exact end of the campaign is not known, but it was probably under 6 days. A period of six days is considered here.*

August 31,

1942

to: September

1942

Country: Luxembourg

Goals:

To resist Nazi German occupation, especially against forced military service into the German Wehrmacht (armed forces)

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 097. Protest strike
- 117. General strike
- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 028. Symbolic sounds
- 117. General strike
- 119. Economic shutdown
- 134. Nonobedience in absence of direct supervision
- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 117. General strike
- 134. Nonobedience in absence of direct supervision
- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Methods in 4th segment:

- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

Methods in 5th segment:

- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

Methods in 6th segment:

- 135. Popular nonobedience
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 140. Hiding, escape, and false identities

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 065. Stay-at-home

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Luxembourger people
- industrial workers
- postmen
- students
- teachers
- town officials

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Wiltz town officials Michel Worré (head of the local economic council) and Nicolas Müller (secretary of the local authority);
Hans Adam of Schiffflange

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Not Known

Involvement of social elites:

Not Known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Students
- Teachers
- Workers outside of Wiltz
- postmen
- workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Hans Adam

Groups in 4th Segment:**Groups in 5th Segment:****Groups in 6th Segment:**

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 day*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Nazi German Occupiers

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

Military rule, deportation of school children to re-education camps in Germany, mass arrest, executions, deportation to concentration camps, torture, forced labor

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The general strike in Luxembourg was violently suppressed by Nazi forces. Leaders were executed and hundred of other were arrested and deported, some to concentration camps. After the strike in 1942, Nazi occupation continued to deport thousands

and subject countless Luxembourgers to torture, execution, and oppressive Nazi rule until Allied forces liberated the country years later. One point is awarded for the fact that almost 40 percent of Luxembourg men drafted for service in the German Wehrmacht refused and went into hiding, thus preventing a large amount of conscription.

Before being violently suppressed, the general strike did manage to spread throughout the small country of Luxembourg with participants striking in many cities within a couple days. This growth was almost immediately, violently halted by the Nazi regime

In the 1940s, Nazi Germany under the government of Adolf Hitler was advancing its conquest of Europe during the Second World War. By May 1940, Luxembourg, a small neutral country bordering Germany, was placed under military occupation by forces of the Third Reich. The meager resistance made by local police forces and customs officers at the border crossing was quickly crushed by the German Wehrmacht, the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany.

Strong Luxembourg nationalistic sentiment, a dedication to the monarchy and the Luxembourgish language, was quickly tested. In October 1941, a vote was issued questioning popular dedication to nationality and mother-tongue. German officials made it clear that to answer 'Luxembourgish' to any questions was strictly prohibited in an attempt to forcefully legitimize the occupation. This attempt to impose German nationality and language was surprisingly a failure: nearly 97% responded 'Luxembourgish' in an initial stand of resistance to German occupation.

In August 1942, German authorities announced the formal annexation of Luxembourg by the Third Reich into Nazi Germany. Following the announcement was a program of 'Germanization,' or the forceful imposition of the German language. At all levels of the administration, important positions went to German nationals and very rapidly the Nazi Party machinery assumed far-reaching control of all aspects of social and family life.

On August 30, Gustav Simon announced that all Luxembourg males of military age were to be conscripted into the Wehrmacht to fight against Allies. It was this decision that motivated the people of Luxembourg from anger to action, sticking to their national motto, "Mir wolle bleiwe waat mir sinn" (We want to remain what we are).

The Luxembourg population responded quickly against the forced conscription. Within hours citizens began organizing a general strike. On August 31, the strike officially began in the town of Wiltz. Local town officials, Michel Worré and Nicolas Müller, gathered other officials and refused to go to work. Slowly they were joined by other workers as the movement spread. Leaflets were printed and distributed secretly throughout the country.

Soon after the striking in Wiltz, workers from the southwestern industrial towns of Schiffflange and Differdange were alerted and also refused to go to work. In Schiffflange, Hans Adam, a worker of German origins sounded an alarm across the valley to alert all workers. In Differdange, news of the strike spread by word of mouth and increased in intensity. On September 2, over 150 Differdange mill workers refused to take their shifts, inciting death threats from the German director of the mill. Approximately 50 workers still refused and declared that they were on strike.

The strike spread also to Esch-sur-Alzette, the capital of the Luxembourg mining area. Here, all aspects of the economic life were paralyzed, including administration, agriculture, industry, and education structures. The central post office in Luxembourg received formal confirmation of the strike soon after. Few mailbags were even opened as a mere semblance of work continued. At the approach of any German employee, the postal workers dispersed back to their work-places and pretended to work. Only letters and packages clearly addressed to Luxembourgers who had been deported to Germany for forced labor, were handled with care.

Throughout the country, schoolchildren were kept away from school, teachers refused to teach, laborers refused to work, there was little or no production of steel, milk, and other products. News outlets in Allied countries began covering the protest as the first general strike to be held in a German-occupied territory. For the rest of the world, it exposed German propaganda, which claimed that the people of Luxembourg were voluntarily joining German forces.

German authorities, alert to any sign of resistance and fearing further escalation of protests, mobilized immediately. An order declaring a state of emergency and introducing martial law was signed by the Chief of Civil Administration, Gustav Simon, threatening that strikers were to be immediately shot.

Beginning September 1, German officials began arresting strike leaders. Within days, 21 leaders, many of whom were teachers, were arrested for interrogation and then executed. This group included six leaders from the Differdange mill and Michel Worré and Nicolas Müller, from Wiltz. Most were tried by a military tribunal, sentenced to death, and deported to the Hinzert concentration camp where they were shot. According to a German officer who witnessed the executions of Worré and Müller, their last words were, "Vive Lëtzebuerg" (Long live Luxembourg!). Hans Adam, who had sounded the alarm in Schifflange and had German origins, was considered to be a traitor and was decapitated. Many of the leaders' families were sent to prison and work camps in Germany.

At least 200 other Luxembourgers were arrested. Over 80 were further tried by the special tribunal and transferred to the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police. Hundreds of high school children were arrested and sent to re-education camps in Germany along with several dozen industrial worker trainees and several young postmen.

There is little information available about any further organized striking after German suppression. The strike was effectively halted. A series of posters were later posted throughout Luxembourg announcing the death of the strikers as a consequence of the strike, bearing the names, occupation, and residency of each victim. Although the exact number of strikers is unknown, the movement did mark Luxembourg's resistance to the German occupation, gaining attention worldwide.

Of the Luxembourg men drafted for service in the German Wehrmacht, about forty percent refused and went into hiding, half of them within the country's borders. Some escaped to Britain and joined the Allied forces to fight against Germany and the Axis powers.

After the 1942 general strike, German occupation continued to repress the Luxembourg people. Thousands were arrested and tortured and hundreds died in concentration camps. Whole families were deported to East Germany and replaced by German families.

Luxembourg was liberated by Allied forces in September 1944. The Germans retreated without fighting. During a German offensive known as the Battle of the Bulge, northern Luxembourg was again briefly captured. In March 1945, the Allied forces liberated the country for the second time.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

Edited by M.R. (20/05/2011)

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

Zein Nakhoda, 21/2/2010

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