

Police in exile

In 1919, the young Weimar Republic was held liable by the victorious powers for the damage caused abroad by the First World War, which Germany had started. Germany was contractually obliged to pay high reparations to its wartime enemies. France in particular insisted that reparations be made quickly and consistently. Since it was foreseeable that Germany would not be able to pay reparations in money, reparations were demanded in kind (steel, coal, wood, etc.). Germany repeatedly fell behind with its obligations. Finally, in March 1921, French and Belgian troops entered the demilitarised Rhineland with tanks and strong units of men to press home the demands. The cities of Duisburg and Mülheim, among others, were occupied by the allied soldiers. After a short time, the occupation spread to other cities in the Ruhr region.

The coexistence of the Germans and the occupiers was full of conflict. Both civil society and the authorities were unwilling to cooperate smoothly with the French and Belgians, some of whom harassed the population. From the ranks of the police, numerous officers and also police chiefs were punished and arrested for, for example, refusing to salute the occupying officers or to carry out orders. Some police stations were occupied by soldiers and vandalised. The police headquarters in Essen was also affected. The occupying forces became increasingly harsh towards the unruly police in the Ruhr region and finally even ordered the expulsion of entire police forces from the cities. From then on, police work in the Ruhr cities had to be done by firemen and hastily recruited auxiliary police officers who were not trained for police work. Some of the police officers were not allowed to return from exile until two years later, when the occupation of the Ruhr ended.

The photo shows five officers of the Essen police force who had been sent into exile in Upper Silesia to Annaberg in 1923/24 and had to spend their time there. (Photo: Kawelovski)