

DANISH RESISTANCE TO GERMAN OCCUPATION: SURVIVAL THROUGH NONCOOPERATION

SUMMARY

Even though Denmark had declared neutrality in the Second World War, on April 9, 1940, Germany invaded, taking the country without firing a shot. The Danish government remained largely intact. At the time, it seemed Germany would win the war and while some in the Danish government were actually Nazi sympathizers, many believed that cooperation was the best way to protect the people. However, many Danes felt the lack of opposition to the take-over jeopardized the soul of the nation.



Source: pinterest.com

Resistance quickly sprang up in different forms. Over two months in 1940, 750,000 people gathered to sing nationalist songs. While not directly confrontational, this set the groundwork for people to unite and take action. Over the next five years, Danes used the power of group action to impact the Nazi war machine. This began as song festivals and street marches but soon turned to noncooperation tactics like strikes, work slow-downs, and "go-home early" campaigns, as well as acts of sabotage.

Eventually, the Nazis insisted on terms that Danish government officials could not justify and in 1943, the entire government resigned, putting Denmark under direct Nazi rule. By this time, resistance groups existed in more than 100 communities and soon an umbrella group called the Danish Freedom Council became the de facto government. Council members argued that everyone should be able to participate in the resistance and that if the entire society withdrew its cooperation, the Nazis could no longer govern. At times, noncooperation brought the entire country to a standstill, and it became clear that this, rather than sabotage, was their most effective weapon. In the face of an increasingly violent occupation, the Danes used strength in numbers to creatively resist, bolstered by the fact that they were more valuable to the Germans as workers than dead. Throughout the war, they protected most of their citizens from the occupying forces, including almost all Danish Jews.

ISSUE

Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II. Farms and factories were taken over to supply the German army. The Danish government at first used a policy of cooperation, but workers and resistance fighters pushed back through widespread non-cooperation and, at times, sabotage.

WHO

The Danish people

WHERE

Across Denmark, especially in Copenhagen

GOALS

- For the Danish population to survive German occupation (including around 8,000 Jews)
- To interfere as much as possible with the Nazi war machine



Source: historymuseum.ca

STRATEGY

To use widespread noncooperation tactics and sabotage to slow down production in factories critical to the German war effort. Also, to lessen the removal of resources from Denmark.

PLANNED OR SPONTANEOUS?

For many Danes, the fact that Germany had occupied the country without firing a shot was unacceptable. Resistance began with less confrontational displays of nationalism, but steadily grew. Some acts were planned and others spontaneous. Resistance groups using noncooperation tactics eventually operated in more than 100 localities.

LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS, ALLIES INCLUDING ELITES

Leaders and Participants:

- Danish Freedom Council – a group of seven men representing various resistance organizations that became the de facto government
- The Danish people – participating in the resistance en masse
- The Churchill Club – youth engaging in acts of sabotage, their slogan saying, "If the adults won't do something, we will."
- KOPA (Communist Partisans)/BOPA (Middle Class Partisans) and Hogler Danske – sabotage groups who attacked Nazi war materials and production
- Danish Youth Association – dedicated to preserving Danish identity and democracy
- Members of the Communist Party – part of the early resistance as they had been targeted by the Nazis and Danish government
- Clergymen and women – using their pulpits to denounce the occupation, as well as churchgoers who joined the ranks of resistance groups in large numbers



Source: en.wikipedia.org

Allies and Elites:

- Danish King Christian X – his horseback rides through the streets were accompanied by huge crowds, becoming a symbol that embodied the nation
- John Christmas Moeller – exiled Parliamentarian who made rousing radio broadcasts from London, encouraging the Danes to rise up and take action
- Some government officials – pushing back on cooperation with Nazis
- Georg Duckwitz (surprise ally) – Danish Nazi sympathizer who leaked critical information to Danish officials that were part of the resistance, allowing Jews to escape
- Danish military forces and police – many won over to the movement, allowing the Freedom Council to govern and not actively opposing resistance activities



Source: <http://my-ear-trumpet.tumblr.com>

TARGET

German and Danish officials

OPPONENT(S)

- Officials in the Nazi occupation government
- German troops including the Schalburg Corps and, in the beginning, Danish police (they later at times joined the strikes and tens of thousands were eventually arrested by the Germans for not maintaining order)
- Danish government officials early on engaging in a policy of Nazi cooperation

TACTICS

Displays of nationalism: These did not directly challenge the occupation, but they united the Danish.

Songs: Huge groups of people gathered to sing anthems about Danish history.

National pride in the King: Crowds gathered as he took his daily horse rides through the streets.

Marches: People marched in the streets at times after leaving on strike, often met with violence.

Slow downs: Workers delayed and stalled production of Nazi war materials.

Sabotage: Several sabotage groups formed that targeted Nazi production and engaged in tactics like burning freight trains, blowing up and raiding factories, destroying train tracks.

Strikes: Workers went on strike across the country, walking off the job completely, or sometimes for part of the day. Often work stoppages would start at a factory and spread to include fishermen, police, firefighters, office workers, civil servants, etc.

Two-minute strikes: At various points, the Freedom Council would call for everyone to stop whatever they were doing for two minutes. Entire cities would come to a standstill with no one or nothing moving. This demonstrated to the Nazis a united display of solidarity and strength and empowered the Danes themselves.

"Go-home early" campaigns: When strikes had been banned, workers creatively said they needed to go home early to water their gardens. Called the "People's Strike," this turned into street protests that lasted for many days, only ending with concessions from the Nazis.

Protecting Jews: One of the greatest Danish accomplishments was protecting almost all 8,000 Jewish Danes. When word was leaked that the Jews would be rounded up, a messenger service was organized in one day to sound the alarm. Thousands of non-Jewish Danes stepped in to hide them and fishermen smuggled to Sweden all but around 400 Jews.

Military Intelligence: Members of the small Danish military made contact with British Intelligence in Sweden and provided critical information about the Germans' war plans.



Source: en.wikipedia.org



AFP/Getty Images

RESPONSE BY OPPONENT

After first agreeing to many changes demanded by the Nazis, all Danish government officials eventually resigned after a Nazi ultimatum came in 1943 to enforce eight specific measures: *Prohibit strikes, ban public meetings of more than five people, prohibit private meetings in closed rooms or outside, impose a night curfew, confiscate all weapons, put censorship in German hands, establish a court to deal with infractions of these demands, and impose the death penalty for sabotage.*

At one point, the Nazis cut off all water, gas, and electricity to Copenhagen and many times strikes and marches were violently repressed, incurring Danish deaths and casualties.

Part way through the occupation, much of the Danish police force shifted their allegiance to the resistance. Close to 10,000 policemen were arrested by the Nazis who began infiltrating and arresting resistance groups, burning out their hideouts, and torturing and executing even teenagers.

MEDIA & MESSAGING

Early on, journalists resisted Nazi censorship by using sarcasm and creativity (e.g., printing

articles double-spaced to hint that people should read between the lines). An underground press began in 1941, including an influential publication started by anti-German politicians and newspapers. In 1942, an illegal press agency began gathering and distributing news reports. By 1943, a combined circulation of illegal publications was reaching 2.6 million people (the entire adult population of Denmark) and a student information service called Studenternes Efterretningstjeneste published tens of thousands of banned books.

OUTCOMES

Five years of largely nonviolent resistance in Denmark kept most Danes from being brutalized by the Germans. They survived the occupation with incredible national unity and their noncooperation tactics contributed to the World War II victory more than any number of weapons could have. Most significantly, they protected almost all Danish Jews and greatly limited the resources Germany took from Denmark for the war.

Teenager Arne Sejr produced a flyer called the Ten Commandments for Danes. He originally printed twenty-five copies for influential citizens in his small town. Before long, the document was passed from hand to hand across the country, considered a revered roadmap for resistance.

“Ten Commandments for Danes”

- 1) You must not go to work in Germany and Norway.
- 2) You shall do a bad job for the Germans.
- 3) You shall work slowly for the Germans.
- 4) You shall destroy important machines and tools.
- 5) You shall destroy everything which may be of benefit to the Germans.
- 6) You shall delay all transport.
- 7) You shall boycott German and Italian films and papers.
- 8) You must not shop at Nazis' stores.
- 9) You shall treat traitors for what they are worth.
- 10) You shall protect anyone chased by the Germans.

Join the struggle for the freedom of Denmark!