During January and February of this year more than two million workers engaged in protest demonstrations in the American and British Zones of Germany. Some of these were citywide stoppages of an hour, a few hours or a day. Bavaria had a one-day strike of about 1,000,000 workers, and about the same number of workers a few days later staged a 24-hour stoppage in the other states of the American Zone and in the British Zone.

These stoppages have been called hunger strikes by some, radical uprisings by others, but they have also been called a form of democratic expression on the part of German labor. Almost without exception, these were orderly demonstrations. If, for example, a stoppage was scheduled for one hour, the workers were back on their jobs an hour later.

Before considering the reasons for these strikes, and their meaning, it is important to note that they had not been called in violation of law. Military Government did not prohibit them. In the western zones of Germany the right of the workers to strike is recognized. They served as a means of expressing a grievance and, as we shall note, they served a democratic purpose.

In these protests, the employers were not involved. Blame was not heaped upon them for the unhappy working conditions in many German enterprises. Little mention was made of the wages and hours issue, nor the right to join a union or the right of unions to bargain collectively. These rights are established by law in all of Germany, and the laws are conformed with in the western zones where unionism is still democratic.

There was no discussion in these demonstrations about the closed shop or the collection of union dues by employers. Also absent in these stoppages were those issues involving inter-union struggle.

German trade unions are fully recognized by the occupying powers and under German law. They have a place in the German economy. In the western zones the trade unions do have their differences with the employers' associations regarding the part that organized labor will play in directing and planning the German economy, but these issues were not prominently evident in the food strikes.

Except indirectly, the occupation powers were not involved in the food strikes, although the KPD (Communist Party) tried to make it appear that the United States was to blame for the winter's food shortage. As far as the responsible trade union leaders were concerned, these demonstrations were aimed at the German authorities. Departments of German government responsible for food supply in the American and British Zones were charged with a lack of initiative and diligence in:

1. Collecting available food supplies from German farmers.
2. Apprehending and punishing Germans who were allegedly traffic-

Koenig Place, Munich, was thronged last winter with Germans who gathered to hear labor leaders protest against the food rationing program in Bavaria.

(Signal Corps photo)
ing in food on the German black market.

3. Failing to equitably distribute the food stocks on hand.

The strikes brought into the open the age-old clash of interests between rural producers and urban consumers of food. The industrial part of the population, the “non-self-suppliers,” were convinced that the farmers were not delivering their required quotas, that too much German-produced food was entering illegal channels out of reach of the industrial workers who have nothing to trade in the black market.

And while it must be recognized that German farmers also have their troubles, the fact remains that they were being blamed, and this attitude of blame was being agitated into unrest by KPD members. There was also evidence that the German officials were hesitant about taking firm action relative to the control of German-produced food.

The trade unions demanded more firmness. If the existing laws did not permit effective food control, they demanded that new laws be enacted. They called for a public program of searching for hidden stocks of food. Perhaps the German public officials needed such demonstrations to goad them into action, possibly as justification for action in the emergency.

Whereas the rural-urban rivalry came into the open on the economic issue, the strikes also had a rural-urban political importance. It was to be expected that old political rivalries would come to the fore in mass demonstrations involving so many people. However, it is not necessary here to review the rural-urban political implications of the strikes, because other political implications were present in a more urgent sense.

Moreover, the political urgency of the strikes was less concerned with the issues of government than with the challenging problem of union control. Most German union leaders in the American and British Zones are defenders of democratic unionism. Many of the leaders in the western zones, because of their democratic convictions, spent years in the Nazi concentration camps. But there is a Communist minority that is active in a militant effort to control the German trade unions. This tribe of comrades has no interest in democratic unionism except as a means of gaining power.

The food strikes, which could not be postponed, were a showdown between the democratic union leaders and the Communists for control of the unions. The democratic leaders came out stronger, and they were able to balk the now well-known sabotage plans of the Communist functionaries. The Communists suffered defeat, but their drive for political power in the ranks of labor goes on.

When the half-million workers of Wuerttemberg-Baden left their jobs for the day on February 3, the union’s strike order exempted workers in hospitals, gas, water, and electric power plants “and all enterprises in which work stoppages would lead to the loss of food.” The order observed:

“Even though all astute and clear-thinking persons know that work stoppages or strikes do not create or make available even one additional gram of fat, one pound of potatoes, one slice of bread, or one piece of meat, this protest action has nevertheless been agreed upon. Therefore, there must still be other reasons for it.”

There were, of course, the stated reasons, to force a thorough collection and an equitable distribution of food. There was also the unstated reason; to save the morale of the workers and frustrate Communist agitation. Unrest was increasing. An organized, disciplined demonstration was decided upon. Otherwise the unrest might have broken out in many minor, unauthorized demonstrations.

It is impossible to know how much of a food supply increase the average German striker hoped to realize by the protest. Judging from the placing of emphasis, it is apparent that the urgent concern was about the fairness of distribution. Workers unable to trade in the black market were embittered by the knowledge that Germans having goods to trade were eating better than they.

The “Pantry Law” which resulted from the strikes and which is being put into force, will doubtless bring out some food that had been hoarded or is being traded in the black market. Only in a few minor demonstrations were the strikers actually led by the
Communist elements. These elements were generally active, but they elected to stand back. They were loud in defining the issues, brewing unrest and stirring up discord.

It is generally known that these promoters of unrest had been encouraged to believe that the food strikes would demoralize the workers, that through the multiplying of strikes the food deliveries would be interfered with, and finally a condition of chaos would prevail.

But the workers remained orderly. Great numbers gathered for public demonstrations; 70,000, for example, met to hear speeches at Munich. Thus the food issue, pushed by the Communists to the striking point, spent itself in disciplined demonstrations.

The "wildcat" strikes planned for by the Communist functionaries during January and February did not come to pass. It is understandable why they later called the strikes "pointless."

BEFORE CALLING the strikes, German labor leaders were confronted with the fact that the workers and their families were getting short rations. There was increasing evidence that the limited supplies available were not being efficiently and fairly distributed. And although the labor leaders strove to bring about a correction of such conditions, progress was slow. The functionaries of revolution, aware of the attempts to improve the food-handling machinery, worked hard to frustrate these efforts.

Thus the trade union leaders faced the choice of taking action or risking the loss of control by attempting to hold the union locals in line. It was for them a choice between risks. Not to take the lead might result in their leadership being repudiated by a rash of unauthorized "wildcat" strikes and leaderless mob demonstrations.

They elected to stage the strikes and risk the possibility of releasing the worker tensions through orderly actions. Not only did it prove a wise choice, but the union leaders emerged stronger than they have been since the war. The Communist sabotage program failed and Communist influence declined noticeably.

Although the sabotage strategy of the Communists was thrown off schedule, their objectives to undermine industrial revival in western Germany have not changed. They set out to make the most of Germany's food shortage this winter. They will carry on because they still get some encouragement out of the fact that the food shortage continues.

It remains to be seen whether German labor leaders are able to keep political climbers out of the German labor movement. They understand that the most dangerous of these are the Communists.

Can the democratic trade union leaders hold the gains they have won? The outlook seems favorable.

The Protest Demonstration in Bavaria

By Edward L. Deuss

Chief, Reports and Statistics Branch,
OMGUS

THE STATE-WIDE 24-hour protest demonstration of the Bavarian Trade Union Federation and its affiliates on Friday, Jan. 23, was the largest of the German food strikes of the winter of 1948. The demonstration, which involved 1,000,000 workers in 22 cities, was viewed by trade union leaders as a necessary outlet for relieving the pent-up resentment of the workers and less damaging to industrial production than the sporadic wildcat strikes which were breaking out throughout the state.

Military Government, appraising the strike as a protest against German governmental administration and an affirmation by labor of its claim to a more equitable share in the products of agriculture, did not interfere.

The strike was impressive because of the workers' voluntary discipline. They agreed to keep all plants, or portions of plants, operating where a sudden stoppage would halt production or injure machinery. For example, a large rayon plant near Augsburg, which normally employs 2,100 workers, had 600 on the job the day of the strike to keep the viscose liquid from hardening in vats and spindles.

One coal mine was continued in operation in the Upper Bavarian state-owned bituminous fields to keep open the power plant, which provided electrical energy for all the mines.

Edward L. Deuss based his article, The Protest Demonstration in Bavaria, on a voluminous report of the Bavarian food strikes which he compiled for the Manpower Division, OMGUS. Mr. Deuss was in Bavaria when the strikes broke out, and much of his information is first hand. A former newspaperman, he has been in Government service since 1943.

Railway men agreed to move trains coming into Bavaria to their destinations rather than stop them at the state borders. Skeleton signal crews remained on the job.

Military and MG installations were exempted from the strike order as were gas, water, and electrical plants, hospitals, press, and security services. At MG suggestion the telephone service also was exempted.

FOR THE first time in German history, 65 to 80 percent of the German civil servants in Bavaria joined the "strikeis. This included locomotive engineers, post office employees, and street car conductors.

Many higher ranking government civil servants also joined, despite an announcement by Finance Minister Kraus that in striking they would be violating their "oath to the public."

While the demonstrations did not result in any immediate tangible gain to the workers, trade union leaders reported that subsequently the govern-

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