

Ruhr Commercial War Question of Bankruptcy, Ernest Hemingway

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French Will Have Won When the German Lemon Is Squeezed Dry—Berlin Using Up Its Gold to Carry On Fight.

GERMANS STOP TRAINS TO HINDER FRENCH

The following is the fourth of a series of articles on the Franco-German situation by Ernest M. Hemingway, staff correspondent of The Star.

By ERNEST M. HEMINGWAY. Special Correspondence of The Star.

Offenburg, Baden, April 12.—Offenburg is the southern limit of the French occupation of Germany. It is a clean, neat little town with the hills of the Black Forest rising on one side and the Rhine plain stretching off on the other.

The French seized Offenburg in order to keep the great international railway line open. This line runs straight north from Basle in Switzerland through Friburg, Offenburg, Karlsruhe, Frankfurt, Cologne, Dusseldorf, to Holland. It was the main artery of communication and commerce in Germany.

According to the French their occupation was to ensure the safe passage of coal trains on the main line between the Ruhr and Italy. They feared the Germans might shunt the cars off at Offenburg and ship them on a branch line up into the Black Forest, and eventually back into the industrial district of what French papers refer to as "unoccupied Germany."

Offenburg Without Trains.

Germany denounced the occupation of Offenburg, located in the Duchy of Baden in the far south of Germany, some hundreds of miles from the Ruhr, as a breach of the treaty of Versailles. The French replied by expelling the burgomaster and some two hundred citizens who had signed the protest, from the town. The Germans then informed the French that no more trains would run through Offenburg on the great main Rhineland railway.

For almost two months now not a train has run through Offenburg. I stood on the bridge over the right of way and looked at the four wide gauge tracks stretching to Switzerland in one direction, and Holland in the other, red with rust. Trains stop three miles each way from Offenburg, north and south. Passengers get out with their baggage, and if they are Germans, can ride into Offenburg in a motor bus and get another bus to take them the three miles the other side of the town where they can continue their journey. If they are French they are allowed to walk, carrying their baggage.

No Coal Has Gone Through.

No coal has gone through since the town was seized. Now the French face the problem—if they want to control the Rhine railway—of occupying every town along the whole length of it at an expenditure of at least four hundred thousand men, and then running the trains themselves. Otherwise the Germans say they will run trains to just outside the limit of the French occupation, and then stop them. It is their answer to the strategists who put their fingers on the map and said, "It is very simple. We will take this town here and that will control this railway. It will only take a few men, etc."

The Franco-German commercial war has settled down to a question of which government goes absolutely broke first. All the Germans I have talked to say, "We could not do anything without our government. The government pays all the people who lose their jobs through the occupation. It pays all those who are expelled from the town. It pays the unemployed."

How Germany is Using Gold.

The German government is now using up the gold to stabilize the mark that it ordinarily paid over to the reparations commission. It is using these marks that it buys at the fixed price of 20,800 to the dollar to fight the occupation. It is also already using a good portion of its hoarded gold. When through the crippling of German industries and the exhaustion of the gold supply the German government is no longer able to fight the occupation by putting the government resources back of the individuals who suffer by the occupation, and making good their loss with government money, the French will have won the struggle of attrition. But Germany's gold will have been used up before she quits, her industries ruined, and she will be as profitable to France as a squeezed lemon.

On the day before I left Paris M. Poincare asked the chamber of deputies for 192,000,000 francs for the expenses of the first four months' occupation of the Ruhr. Four months more of that, and if the German government goes under, the French government will have won a commercial victory at the cost of biting off its own nose to spite Germany's face.

The Unlucky Brother.

From Offenburg to Ortenberg, where there was a train. I rode in a motor truck. The driver was a short, blonde German with sunken cheeks and faded blue eyes. He had been badly gassed at the Somme. We were riding along a white, dusty road through green fields forested with hop poles, their tangled wires flopping. We crossed a wide, swift clearly pebbled stream with a flock of geese resting on a gravel island. A manure spreader was busily clicking in the field. In the distance were the blue Schwarzwald hills.

"My brother," said the driver, guiding the big wheel with one arm half wrapped around it. "He had hard luck."

"So?"

"Ja. He never had no luck, my brother."

"What was he doing?"

"He was signal man on the railroad from Kehl. The French put him out. All the signal men. The day they came to Offenburg they gave them all twenty-four hours."

"But the government pays him, doesn't it?"

Can't Live on Pay.

"Oh yes. They pay him. But he can't live on it."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, he's got seven kids."

I pondered this. The driver went on in his drawling south German. "They pay him what he got, but the prices are up and where he was signal man he had a little garden. A nice garden. It makes a difference when you got a garden."

"What's he do now?" I asked.

"He tried working in the sawmill at Hausach, but he can't work good inside. He's got the gas like me. Ja. He's got no luck, my brother."

We passed another lovely clear stream that curved alongside the road. It had clear, gravel bottomed ripples and then deep holes along the bank.

Why There's No Trout.

"Trout?" I asked.

"Not any more," the driver laughed. "When we had the revolution nobody knew what to do. It was in the papers and it was posted up. They sang in the streets and said 'Down with the kaiser,' and 'Hoch the republic,' and there was nothing more to do. But they had to do something, so because it was always trouble to get fishenkarten (fishing licenses), they went out to the stream with hand grenades and killed the trout and everybody had trout to eat. Then the police came and made them stop and put some in jail and the revolution was over."

"Herr Canada," said the driver, "how long do you think the French will stay in Offenburg?"

"Three or four months maybe. Who knows?"

The driver looked ahead up the white road that we were turning to dust behind us. "There will be trouble then. Bad trouble. The working people will make trouble. Already the factories are shutting down all around here."

"It won't be like the other revolution?" I asked.

The driver laughed, a hollow-cheeked, skin drum-tight, hollow-eyed laugh. "No they won't throw any grenades at the trout then." The thought amused him very much. He laughed again.

The End