German Political Violence and the Border Plebiscite in Upper Silesia, 1919–1921

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Central European History / Volume 21 / Issue 01 / March 1988, pp 56 - 98
DOI: 10.1017/S0008938900012668, Published online: 16 December 2008

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0008938900012668

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German Political Violence and the Border Plebiscite in Upper Silesia, 1919–1921

T. HUNT TOOLEY

The fixing of the disputed Polish-German border in Upper Silesia by referendum in 1921 has generally stood in a second rank behind other dramatic and difficult episodes of peacemaking and stabilization. Set in calmer times, the phenomenon of 1.2 million voters deciding whether their region would belong to one state or the other might reasonably rate as a remarkable event. Indeed, the German plebiscite victory in the face of an actual majority of “ethnic” Poles, the ensuing paramilitary war (May to July 1921), and the eventual partition of the province provide ample historical drama.

Upper Silesia was one—and perhaps the most important—of three disputed German border regions for which the Versailles Treaty prescribed plebiscites,1 intending to implement thereby a peculiarly pure form of self-determination by calling on the inhabitants to vote whether the region should join the revived Polish state or remain German. Still, stipulating such border plebiscites was one thing, carry-

1. The Versailles Treaty called plebiscites in Upper Silesia, North Schleswig, and the adjacent East and West Prussian districts Allenstein and Marienwerder, areas amounting to some 12,000 square miles and inhabited by 3.3 million people. The indispensable work on the plebiscites—including those prescribed by the other treaties of Paris—is Sarah Wambaugh’s excellent early history, Plebiscites Since the World War, with a Collection of Official Documents, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933). My own “Fighting without Arms: The Defense of German Interests in Schleswig, East and West Prussia, and Upper Silesia, 1918–1921” (unpub. diss., University of Virginia, 1986) deals exclusively with the German plebiscites. On the Upper Silesian referendum, Rudolf Vogel, Deutsche Presse und Propaganda des Abstimmungskampfes in Oberschlesien (Leipzig, 1931), and Manfred Laubert, Die oberschlesische Volksbewegung: Beiträge zur Tätigkeit der Vereinigung heimatreuer Oberschlesier 1918–1921 (Breslau, 1938), stand out as the most extensive German works. From the Polish side, Casimir Smogorzewski, “La plebiscite et la partage de la Haute Silésie,” in La Silésie polonaise (Paris, 1932), 237–448, is a careful monograph which represents the prewar Polish view; for an introduction to the postwar Polish literature, which has grown quite extensive, see Tadeusz Jędruszczak, Polityka polski w sprawie Górnego Śląska 1918–22 (Warsaw, 1958), and Władysław Zielinski, Polska i niemiecka propaganda plebiscytowa na Górnym Śląsku (Wrocław, 1972).
ing them out in a manner which might be regarded as "fair" quite another. Perhaps the most obvious threat to the fairness of the vote was intimidation of voters by means of physical violence, terror in the parlance of the day. From the outset, Upper Silesia offered extraordinary problems of physical security for the vote, and the Germans and Poles were hurling charges of political violence at each other even before voting day.

The outbreak of spectacular, if brief, hostilities between Polish and German irregular forces in Upper Silesia a few weeks after the referendum seemed to many observers simply an escalation of the violence which had influenced the voting, though the determination of which side had influenced the vote by violence lay largely in the eye of the beholder. Thus, Poles and their partisans tended to blame the Germans for unfair influence, Germans and their partisans, the Poles.

The subsequent history of the Polish-German border has also cast its shadows backwards. The violent tendencies of postwar Germany and the growing willingness to accept violence as a legitimate mode of political action have been well chronicled and analyzed. Indeed, as the politics of the Weimar Republic, after a brief respite, became increasingly violent toward its end, many contemporary commentators pointed to the Upper Silesian paramilitary war, and incidentally to the Upper Silesian plebiscite, as occasions on which violence had provided at least partial political solutions. Throughout the interwar period, moreover, German-Polish border relations remained at best uneasy, and relatively low-level irritations eventually gave way in the thirties to increasingly acrimonious disputes which helped provide the casus belli in 1939 and thus justification for invasion, partition, and occupation. Perhaps it is for this reason that some recent commentators

2. The terms terror and terrorism are used here in a broad sense to describe roughly what Europeans meant by these terms in the postwar period: namely, organized or unorganized violence, or the threat of it, which espouses political ends. Since 1919 the meanings of these words have, of course, narrowed to cover more specific activities; the term political violence would therefore be more accurate from a late twentieth-century standpoint. Two works provide thoughtful definitions and discussions of both terms and bibliographies on terrorism in general: Walter Laqueur, The Age of Terrorism (Boston, 1987), esp. 1–13 (this is a revised edition of his earlier Terrorism and contains an updated bibliography); and the collection edited by Peter Merkl, Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations (Berkeley, 1986).

3. Of the many pertinent works, see especially the older classic, Robert G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Freikorps Movement in Postwar Germany 1918–1923 (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), and the more recent comprehensive analysis, James M. Diehl, Paramilitary Politics in the Weimar Republic (Bloomington, Ind., 1977).
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seem to associate the vote itself with subsequent developments and rely on the simple assertion that the substantial plebiscite vote of ethnic Poles for Germany stemmed from German “terror” or the threat of it.\(^4\)

Yet it is by no means clear from the evidence now available that German political violence before the plebiscite was as potent, as systematic, and above all as effective as many have suggested. Indeed, it is instructive to trace the development of the German terror and its contribution to the balance of forces in the Upper Silesian referendum campaign which culminated on 20 March 1921.

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In dealing with the policies of Berlin regarding the violent eastern borderlands, Upper Silesia in particular, it is necessary to make some chronological distinctions at the outset. From November 1918 to the late spring of 1919, the Germans dealt with Polish “agitation” in Upper Silesia virtually unimpeded: it was still German soil, after all. This it continued to be after June 1919, when the Treaty stipulated a border referendum for the area; but all observers were henceforth aware that the Allies would be watching the region carefully, even before the entry of the Interallied occupation force. Once the Interallied Commission and its 20,000 troops arrived in February 1920, the opportunity for terrorism by either side diminished, even as the approach of voting day would seem, in the view of those behind the violence on both sides, to have dictated its escalation.

From the Armistice onward, military and paramilitary presence in Upper Silesia formed an important agenda in Berlin’s consideration of border policy. Some early meetings of the revolutionary provisional government (the Council of People’s Commissars) were given over entirely to discussing the extreme instability of the vital Upper Silesian coal district, instability resulting chiefly from the deprivation of foodstuffs and other necessities.\(^5\) During the war, the lack of provi-

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\(^4\) See, for example, Anna M. Cienciala and Titus Komarnicki, From Versailles to Locarno: Keys to Polish Foreign Policy, 1919–1925 (Lawrence, Kans., 1984), 41–90. In this case some of the authors’ assumptions about the “unfairness” of the vote were subsequently challenged by Richard Blanke in a review in the American Historical Review 90 (1985): 976–77. See also Richard Blanke, “Upper Silesia, 1921: The Case for Subjective Nationality,” Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism 2 (1975): 243–344.

sions and draconian war measures had combined to produce massive strikes—even larger and more frequent than in Germany’s other industrial centers—which at times almost shut down Silesian coal production. The number and scope of work stoppages had grown with each year of the war. When the November Revolution heightened worker expectations yet failed to relieve physical shortages or difficult working conditions, waves of strikes engulfed the coal mines in late November and again in late December 1918, many of them turning violent.\(^6\) No one disputed the opinion of August Müller, State Secretary of the Reich Economic Office, when he told the People’s Commissars: “If we lose the Upper Silesian coal, then Germany will fall apart completely.”\(^7\)

The Majority Social Democratic press labelled these events “pure Bolshevism and anarchy,” and officials in Berlin generally assumed that the strikes had resulted in part from Bolshevist agitation.\(^8\) Yet the ethnic character of the turmoil was also manifest from the outset, since the Upper Silesian miners were predominantly ethnic Poles. Indeed, the ethnic division in Upper Silesia (almost sixty percent of Polish extraction) coincided roughly with the class division. Hence, Polish Upper Silesian miners, organized in their own unions, found themselves fighting the German mine administrations and the local authorities in the name of workers’ rights. The Germans thus came to see the Polish national movement behind all the strike activity. This went for the Majority Socialists—almost always anti-Polish in the interwar period—as well as members of bourgeois parties.\(^9\)

The provisional government in Berlin vacillated in responding with force to the strikes until the Independents had dropped out of the Cabinet at the end of December 1918. Immediately thereafter, the federal and Prussian governments appointed Otto Hörsing as State Commissar to handle the affairs of the troubled district. Hörsing—former metal worker, union functionary, and staunchly patriotic Social

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\(^{7}\) Cabinet meeting of 21 Nov. 1918, Miller and Potthoff, eds., *Regierung der Volksbeauftragten*, 1: 114–23.


Democrat of the Noske stamp—coordinated the suppression of the strikes with regular and volunteer troops. Work stoppages continued through May, but the presence of growing numbers of local volunteer Border Guard (Grenzschutz) troops attached to regular units made the threat of general and violent labor disruptions seem less immediate.10

The Upper Silesian labor disruptions were still frightening to the leaders of the new republic, but this unrest was at least an internal problem which seemed to admit of internal solutions. Berlin found itself helpless, however, when a large stretch of the eastern border crumbled under pressure from without; that is, as the greater part of the Prussian province of Posen (Poznań) tumbled into the hands of insurgent Poles. Ignace Paderewski’s visit to the city of Posen on 27 December had triggered the uprising, which almost immediately spread to most of the province. In the German view, a coalition of Posen and Warsaw Poles had planned the revolt; and in fact, many of its leaders and most of its weapons came from Poland. Though the fighting between the insurgents and the remnants of the German army continued until February 1919, it soon became apparent that most of Poznań (as the Poles now officially called it) was lost for the foreseeable future.11

Although official German acceptance of Woodrow Wilson’s Thirteenth Point, requiring Polish access to the sea, and Allied affinity for the new Polish state had left the Germans little hope that they would retain the large parts of Poznań in which ethnic Germans were in the minority, the fait accompli in Poznań became a standing admonition against overly nice compunctions about breaking rules in the struggle for the eastern borders. Later, when the Allies made no attempt to rectify in the Treaty what the Germans considered the illegal seizure of Poznań, the pattern was rendered concrete in German thinking, and the phrase “the Posen pattern” achieved common usage in the discussion of Germany’s border problems.

The turbulent Upper Silesian border region seemed the most likely domino to fall next, for one reason because the local Polish movement


there was crystallizing rapidly. In past decades, owing to the predominance of political Catholicism in the region, Upper Silesian politicians of Polish extraction had tended to work within the framework of the Center Party, even if they supported the Polish Party on specific issues. This situation began to change in 1903, when Wojciech Korfanty, a fiery young Kattowitz journalist who had been elected to the Reichstag, forsook the Center for the Polish Party. Korfanty was able to merge social and ethnic issues to gain a large following, especially in industrial eastern Upper Silesia. Rallying around him, the party garnered forty percent of the vote in the 1907 Reichstag election and with over thirty percent elected five of the region's twelve national deputies in 1912.¹²

War privation, the enhancement of Polish organization connected with wartime strikes, and the rebirth of the Polish state provided ample political infrastructure for a postwar movement led by Polish Party politicians. In mid-November 1918, the Polish delegates in the Prussian Parliament and the Reichstag organized a People's Council for Upper Silesia as a component of the Supreme Council for Prussian Poland, a body comprising Polish Party parliamentarians from throughout the Prussian east. Working with Warsaw, the group intended to oversee the transfer of political authority from Germany to the new Polish state in the German territories which were to go to Poland. By the end of January, the Upper Silesian Polish People's Council had organized political, financial, and press functions down to the precinct level. It had representatives in Paris working for the cession of Upper Silesia and was making a strong appeal to local officials who could speak Polish, urging them to enter the Polish administration when the time came. The Council called a boycott of the German National Assembly election of 19 January 1919, though this proved more successful in the rural areas (as low as ten percent voter participation) than in the cities (up to seventy percent).¹³

Of the many pro-Polish organizations created at this time, the most significant for the present study was the Polish Military Organization


(Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, or POW). An underground group whose existence became known to the Germans soon after its founding in February 1919, the POW was estimated to have 14,500 members by April, many of them armed. The political goals of the organization were ambiguous: individuals of all political persuasions joined up simply to fight against German domination. As for the group’s connection with the national Polish movement, Polish sources have insisted that the POW was completely indigenous, both in conception and membership. Whether or not this was the case, later events would demonstrate that Poznań and Warsaw maintained communications with the planning levels of the POW as surely as they would also reveal the weakness of control the national Polish movement could muster over that colorful group. 14

German Upper Silesians had also seen it in their interest early on to organize in the attempt to shape their political future. Although a strong localist, anti-Prussian, Roman Catholic autonomist movement made an early bid to capitalize on the uncertainty by promoting an independent Upper Silesia, a “Belgium of the east,” 15 most Upper Silesian German activists joined one of two organizations which supported the maintenance of unified “Germandom,” even if their members sometimes leaned toward political autonomy as a means of courting voters. The group most clearly nationalist and anti-Polish in sentiment was the Free Union for the Defense of Upper Silesia, formed in November 1918 by Upper Silesian merchants and industrialists who calculated that Berlin was too powerless to provide any direction for Upper Silians. School teachers seem to have formed much of the rank and file of the organization, which aimed at influencing public opinion through rallies, lectures, and printed materials. The Free Union changed its name in 1919 to the League of Patriotic Upper Silesians (Verband heimattreuer Oberschlesier) and eventually split into two groups: the League itself inside the zone designated for the plebiscite and a larger group headquartered in Central Silesia which was to publicize the plebiscite throughout Germany and help register and


transport native Upper Silesians back home to vote when the time came.\textsuperscript{16}

Less nationalistic and less anti-Polish in its propaganda was the Breslau People’s Council, originally the provisional revolutionary council for the province. Even in November 1918, however, the Breslau Council had reflected the moderation of “revolutionary” thinking in Upper Silesia, where Council members ranged from socialists to nationalists and called for an orderly and non-Bolshevik transition to the republic.\textsuperscript{17} At the end of the summer of 1919, the People’s Council and the Free Union for the Defense of Upper Silesia set up an umbrella organization, the Silesian Committee, designed to coordinate the plebiscite campaign with Berlin and to serve as a conduit for official propaganda funds.\textsuperscript{18} After the Interallied occupation began, the Germans created yet another organization, the Plebiscite Commissariat, to represent the wishes of the German Upper Silesians with the Interallied Commission. Yet the Commissariat had its own propaganda section, and its mission clearly overlapped with those of the earlier groups.\textsuperscript{19}

From the early months of 1919 onward, both sides considered some kind of German–Polish clash in Upper Silesia inevitable. The Germans predicted an armed Polish action along Posen lines, to be centered on the industrial region of eastern Upper Silesia. Both Berlin officials and Upper Silesian German activists argued that increasing discontent among the Polish workers (aggravated by continuing food shortages), the continued repressive measures of the command economy, and the shutdown of operations by many mines were making it easier for Poles across the border to foment an “uprising.”\textsuperscript{20} In fact, in mid-August 1919 the predicted uprising \textit{did} come about, combining Polish strike activity with armed insurgency supported by some individuals

\textsuperscript{16} Manfred Laubert, \textit{Die ober schlesische Volksbewegung}, 3–16; Ernst Birke, “Schlesien,” 152–53. The branch with responsibilities outside Upper Silesia was called the \textit{Vereinigte Verbände heimattreuer Oberschlesier}.

\textsuperscript{17} Schumann, \textit{Oberschlesien}, 70–89; Hesterberg, \textit{Alle Macht}, 11–16.

\textsuperscript{18} Zentralrat für die Provinz Schlesien to Prussian Minister-President (Hirsch), 5 Dec. 1919, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter cited as BA), R43 I/349.


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holding high position in the Polish government, if not by that government itself.

Fighting between German troops—regular and volunteer—and armed Polish insurgents lasted from 17 to 24 August. The clashes were vicious. Both sides publicized the atrocities committed by the opposing forces. Defeated, the Poles retreating into Poland took with them some two hundred Germans, some of whom remained hostage until October, forming both a focal point for recrimination and a negotiating card in triangular talks on amnesty for uprising participants carried on by Poland, Germany, and an Allied investigatory commission. Far from solving anybody’s problems, the August 1919 episode only heightened ethnic tension.21

In the ongoing official debate in Berlin over how much and how directly Germany should attempt to intervene militarily along the unstable eastern border, the Polish uprising assisted those arguing for bolstering the region militarily. Those opposed to strengthening German forces in the east—chiefly individuals in the Reich Finance Ministry—had valued the financial savings of troop withdrawal and the political leverage with the Allies which such a move might create by demonstrating peaceful German intentions. Only the rapid action of the German military and paramilitary auxiliaries had saved the region, however; and as State Commissar Höring told the Reich Cabinet at the end of August, “the peace in Upper Silesia is a peace after the storm and before a new storm.” Hence, the Reich kept its military contingents in Upper Silesia at full strength until the army of occupation arrived in February 1920. For their part, the Poles remained quiescent, waiting for the arrival of the Allies to neutralize the predominance of the Germans.22

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No matter how one evaluates the activities of the Interallied Commission, the opportunities for Germans to terrorize and intimidate bilin-


22. Reichskanzlei (hereafter, RK), Reichsministerialsache, 15 June 1919; Höring to RK and Staatsregierung, BA, R43 1/344; Reichswehrministerium to VI. AK, 10 Sept. 1919, BA, R43 1/349; Akten der Reichskanzlei: Kabinet Bauer, 219–27, 244, 254.
gual Upper Silesians declined after the Interallied Commission arrived. For one thing, all regular and Grenzschutz contingents had to leave. Interallied troops were soon policing all border crossings, and bringing in weapons thus became at least more difficult. Finally, even if it could not be everywhere at once, the whole apparatus of the Interallied Commission was committed to a fair vote, though the Commissioners were not necessarily in agreement as to what “fair” meant in that context.

The Allies had agreed in advance that the British would provide the commission presidents for the plebiscites in Schleswig and East Prussian Allenstein, the Italians for the Marienwerder plebiscite in West Prussia, and the French for the Upper Silesian referendum. By the same agreement, officers of the presiding nationality were to head the military forces of occupation. The Quai d’Orsay entrusted the Upper Silesian presidency to General Henri Louis Edouard Le Rond. Head of the Commission for Polish Affairs at the Paris Peace Conference and negotiator of the subsequent plebiscite ground rules, Le Rond was identified as much as any Frenchman with the policy of strengthening Poland as an ally against Germany. In the German view, he was a formidable negotiating partner, likely to be even more intractable in Upper Silesia, where, as the newly appointed German plebiscite plenipotentiary, former Silesian Oberpräsident Prince Hermann von Hatzfeldt, pointed out, “he is fully conscious of his power and wields it accordingly.” More explicitly, the Foreign Office’s representative in Paris, Otto Göppert, speculated that Le Rond would act fairly and with goodwill if he found that the Germans accepted the Treaty as a “given fact”: “But if he encounters the spirit of rebellion, he will—especially in the early stages—be ruthless in making use of the formidable means given him by the Treaty.”

Le Rond’s colleagues expressed misgivings over both the general’s power within the Commission and his sympathy for the Poles. The British Commissioner, Colonel Henry Percival, reported in May that Le Rond and the French “undoubtedly sympathize with the Poles.”

The Italian Commissioner, General Alberto de Marinis, also thought
Le Rond was wielding his authority heavy-handedly against the Ger-
mans. After three months in Upper Silesia, de Marinis told Percival
that the Frenchman seemed to be interpreting the prearranged ad-
ministrative guidelines "according to his own view rather than accord-
ing to the views of the Committee as a whole." Still, the Italian and
British representatives tended to let Le Rond's decisions stand in order
to avoid an open break; and Hatzfeldt was therefore probably close to
the truth when he reported on 1 March 1920 that the influence of the
two on Le Rond was "obviously very trifling." 24

Yet Le Rond's predominance among the Commissioners did not
tell the whole story of French control in Upper Silesia. The failure of
the United States to join the Commission and the refusal of Britain
and Italy to allot additional funds or men to close the resulting gap
made it necessary for the French to fill the majority of Commission
jobs. Frenchmen comprised over half of Commission personnel and
were numerically predominant at the upper levels of the Commission.
Five of the Commission's eight administrative departments, for exam-
ple, were headed by Frenchmen. The military occupation itself dem-
onstrated the French preponderance still more decisively. Of the
20,000 Allied troops who entered Upper Silesia in February 1920,
about 15,000 were French, the rest Italian. The French commander of
the 46th Division, General Gratier, became Commander of Allied
Forces in Upper Silesia. 25

The entry of the Interallied Commission and its military forces
came off without major incidents; and in spite of grave misgivings,
some German officials even found it relatively easy to work with the
lower-level French officers. Yet the Germans recognized that they
could not expect impartiality of the French. Many troops obviously
considered themselves liberators, and Gratier's open hostility toward
the Germans—hostility which is quite clear in his extant reports to Le
Rond—undoubtedly encouraged similar attitudes among the troops.
The French, moreover, would have been less than human if they had
not compared their stay to the four-year German occupation of north-
ern France, which the Germans had carried out generally with harsh-

(1947–81), II: 14; Žródła, 2: 58.
25. Žródła, 2: 56; Wambaugh, Plebiscites, 1: 217–23; F. Paoli, "L'armée française au service de
ness and often with brutality. Nonetheless, by mid-May 1920 a satisfied Gratier was reporting to Le Rond that the attitude of the German population was satisfactory, being one of "respectful fear." Le Rond in turn informed the Conference of Ambassadors on 22 July that "absolute calm and order" prevailed in Upper Silesia.  

But the reports of the French military, as well as contemporary observations by both Poles and Germans, indicate that in late June 1920 the level of violence in Upper Silesia began to rise well above garden-variety jeering and baiting of Interallied troops or shouting matches at rallies. The Germans blamed the multiplying confrontations between Germans and Poles on the gradual Interallied dismantling of the predominantly German plebiscite gendarmerie, the Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei, or Sipo), on the organized activities of the secret Polish paramilitary force, the POW, and on the fraternization between Poles and French from the bottom of the chain of command to its top. The Poles blamed the disturbances on provocations by the Sipo and on the existence of German paramilitary groups. These accusations were not, of course, mutually exclusive.

By the summer of 1920 the Germans were convinced that the underlying balance of potential force was tipping rapidly in favor of the Poles. The Interallied Commission had, said the Germans, disarmed the ethnic Germans and in some measure the mostly German Sipo. On the other hand, the POW had cached a good many arms rather than surrender them. Moreover, the Germans charged, sympathetic French troops had scrupled at disarming the Polish population with the same rigor they had applied to the Germans, and in any case, the unsecured Polish frontier constituted a standing source of replacements for the weapons actually confiscated.

In June, moreover, the Commission began preparing to liquidate the Sipo by excluding non-Upper Silesians from the 4,000-man force, incorporating the remaining 1,800 members, mostly (though not all)

26. For the views of Germans working with the Commission, see Hatzfeldt’s report in Źródła, 2: 56; and Werner Pollack, “Erinnerungsberichte,” BA, Kleine Erwerbung 706/1: 17–18. The opinions of the French generals are found in Gratier’s communications to Le Rond of 6 Feb., 18 Mar., 15 Apr., and 12 May 1920, BA, Microfilmed Files of the Commandant Supérieur des Forces Alliées en Haute-Silésie (filmed by the Bundesarchiv from originals in the Wojewódzkie Archiwum Państwowe at Opole, Poland), N926: 4, N927: 14016; N928: 6 (hereafter cited as CSFAHS); and in Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st ser., 11: 10, 12, 32.

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German, into a new Plebiscite Police, and recruiting 1,200 new Polish policemen. The Poles had already set up recruiting stations. Unsuccessful in opposing this Allied move, by early summer the Germans had acquiesced in the reorganization, indeed, had encouraged the Upper Silesian Germans from the old force to join the new organization so as to make it as “German” as possible. The new force would thus be only three-fourths the size of the old Sipo, and almost half of it would be Polish, this at a time when many knowledgeable Germans were predicting a new Polish revolt.

As early as the end of January 1920, German observers in Upper Silesia had contended that the Poles were preparing a full-scale uprising before the Interallied troops could replace the departing German contingents. This had not materialized, but the Germans offered evidence of the existence of “secret Polish organizations” to Le Rond on 3 May, with no result. The accounts of Polish participants in the POW and a great deal of Polish historical research has now shown that the German accusations were more than wild charges. The POW had floundered temporarily after the August 1919 uprising, but after the arrival of the Interallied Commission POW leaders reorganized and reinvigorated the group. By May 1920 its membership had risen to over 8,000 men, organized into six (after June nine) military districts. The Germans procured hard evidence of an imminent Polish paramilitary strike during the night of 30/31 July, when German customs officials exchanged gunfire with a band of smugglers crossing the Britiza River close to Beuthen and afterward found a dropped suitcase filled with military plans and instructions for the POW.

Polish charges of German violence, planned and executed, are more difficult to substantiate, especially those regarding the Sipo, whose activities stood near the top of the Polish grievance list and indeed provided theoretical justification for the existence of the POW. Finding concrete proof that the Sipo harassed the Poles poses formidable methodological problems. In the first place, Le Rond decided in mid-

28. On the Sipo, see Hatzfeldt’s reports, printed in Zródsta, 2: 62–63, 226; and also the row of July 1920 directives from the Prussian Interior Minister, BA, CSFAHS/N937: 50–57.
29. AA (Meyer), File Note, 10 May 1920, PA, IV Polen O/S/80.
April not to use occupation troops in disorders of a political nature, since "this service is one which must be performed by the Sicherheitswehr [sic] and the local police." Thus, the Sipo was to be present at any disorder. To determine long after the fact how it behaved in action is difficult in the extreme. Certainly its potential for aggression one way or the other had been reduced dramatically in March, when the Commission confiscated 4,000 of its rifles, 180 machine guns, and three (presumably small) artillery pieces, along with 600,000 rounds of ammunition. Only side-arms, and for the officers, sabers, remained.

Subjective observations by diplomatic witnesses do not help much more. British diplomat E. H. Carr wrote after a short tour of the region that the Sipo was "extremely efficient and well-disciplined." "It is," he continued, "undoubtedly anti-Polish in sentiment and may have been so, on certain rare occasions, in action." The French generally agreed with the Poles that, as a member of the military command put it in August 1920, the Sipo was guilty of "complicity with the German population," though not all French officials on the ground shared this view.

There is, on the other hand, some evidence for the Polish contention that the Germans were forming strong-arm groups, though not to the extent the Poles claimed. The Poles—and the French as well—feared a whole range of violent German intervention: from street-fighting to a full-scale regular army invasion. In particular, the Poles feared that the Germans were arranging for strong-arm leadership of German mobs in the cities and terror by small groups in the countryside.

The reality, though not entirely clear, was certainly more modest. As events would prove, the weakness of the Reichswehr and the fragility of Germany's international position precluded official military operations: of necessity, diplomacy was the government's chief weapon. On the other hand, the departure of the Reichswehr and the Grenzschutz in February and the gradual dismantling of the Sipo made German Upper Silesians insecure, particularly after the clashes of May and the steady climb of violence beginning in late June 1920. Still,
Berlin rejected the creation of secret formations parallel to those of the Poles. When, at the end of May, the executive director of the Kattowitz Coal and Metal Workers’ Union warned Foreign Office official Richard Meyer, who was entrusted with keeping an eye on plebiscite activities, that irregular armed resistance to a putsch by the Poles would result in catastrophe for the Germans, Meyer replied that “the government has taken steps to prevent irresponsible military officers from taking rash measures (independent intervention by local formations during a Polenputsch, etc.).”

The official who was eventually to be connected most closely with such subterranean measures was Karl Spiecker, an agent of the Prussian State Commissariat for the Supervision of Public Order. The Commissariat had been founded in 1919 to counter attempted subversion of the republic, in particular by its radical enemies. The head of the Public Order Commissariat after March 1920, Robert Weismann, might have been expected to be drawn to the troubled waters of Upper Silesia. A state attorney in Berlin when appointed to head the Commissariat, Weismann was a keen observer of politics and men, who prided himself on possessing the most recent, and most accurate, political information available. Enemies often condemned him for his somewhat irregular private life and for his underworld contacts and his legendary string of informers, which stretched across the political spectrum. His politics were ambiguous, but he used this ambiguity and great personal charm to maintain political contacts with every party in Germany.

The Commissariat had been trying for some time to get a share of the massive public funds now flowing to propaganda activities in Upper Silesia. No doubt it was in part to justify such claims that Weismann put a man on the ground in the first half of 1920. This was Karl Spiecker. A kindred spirit to Weismann, Spiecker preferred clandestine modes of operation and soon established a network of “agents” who provided material for his reports to Berlin and carried out a so-called “quiet propaganda” by talking up the German cause at work.

34. AA (Meyer), File Note (strictly secret), 29 May 1920 (the Berg- und Hüttenmännischer Verein report is attached), PA, IV Po 5 Nr. Geheim, Bd. 1.
35. See the portrait drawn by Hagen Schulze in Otto Braun oder Preussens demokratische Sendung (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, 1977), 377–81; and also Arnold Brecht, Aus nächster Nähe (Stuttgart, 1966), 327–28. Schulze calls Weismann “one of the most colorful and most problematic figures in the public life of the Weimar Republic.”
on trains, and wherever people gathered. School teachers proved especially willing to do this kind of work. Constantly travelling throughout the region under cover names, Spiecker made himself known to the local plebiscite leaders but maintained an aura of mystery which continued to impress them years afterward; as one of them wrote: "Dr. Spiecker by name, whispered as if a taboo." 37

By midsummer Spiecker had also founded three plebiscite periodicals, two in the Polish language; and at some point during the violent summer of 1920 he apparently began to toy with the idea of a secret German self-defense force for use in case of a Polish invasion. On 23 June, Korfanty ran a newspaper article "exposing" Spiecker and accusing him of having contacts with known Freikorps veterans of the most extreme type. 38 Yet during the summer of 1920, both Weismann and Spiecker—who were to be intimately involved in the creation of Upper Silesian Freikorps in 1921—warned against paramilitary activity, since it would only give the French an excuse to declare open season on the Germans. In light of Spiecker’s later connections with individuals named in the Korfanty exposé, it is probable that Spiecker was in contact with these freebooters already. Still, in communications with Berlin he insisted that only regular troops be used to counter any attempted Polish fait accompli. 39 The precise nature of Spiecker’s connections with the secret formations remains obscure, but it is likely that his dealings with those capable of forming “shock troop” units at this point partook more of an experimental flirtation, in much the same way that his mentor maintained contact with all political camps. 40

Independent formations existed nonetheless, but they were on a

39. Spiecker to Moltke, 12 July 1920, PA, Po 5 Nr. 1, Abst. 5; Staatskommissar für die Überwachung öffentlicher Ordnung to RK (Albert), 16 June 1920, BA, R 43 I/351.
40. Working on a doctoral dissertation on the press and the Upper Silesian plebiscite, Rudolf Vogel met Spiecker and looked over his private archive sometime around 1930. In an interview on 26 May 1983, Ambassador Vogel—now retired after a distinguished career as journalist, CDU Bundestag member, and cabinet-level civil servant and diplomat in the 1960s—told me that Spiecker was mainly interested during 1920 in keeping an eye on the activities of those likely to form shock troops. He also told me, however, that after 1945, when he and Spiecker were both CDU politicians, the two became close friends. Considering the multiplicity of filters through which this information has passed, one must conclude that its value as evidence is quite low, though it does tend to confirm the tentative assessment given here. Interview with Rudolf Vogel, 26 May 1983.
small scale and, it seems, purely local in origin. The first such groups belonged apparently to the “Speaker Guard” (Rednerschutz), a small defense force belonging to the largest and most nationalistic of the German plebiscite organizations, the League of Patriotic Upper Sile- sians. Armed with clubs or blackjacks called “patriot sticks,” these groups were supposed to guard German rallies from Polish hecklers. Rudolf Vogel, who as a doctoral student in the late 1920s interviewed all the German plebiscite leaders and examined League records now no longer existing, asserted in his 1931 study that the Speaker Guard was a cover organization for numerous secret units of uprooted, hardened adventurers who recognized only “the law of the fist”—in short, the typical postwar paramilitary “volunteer.”

On the other hand, the historian of the League of Patriotic Upper Sileans, Dr. Manfred Laubert, a historian at the University of Bres- lau, likewise had access to League documents and asserted in his 1938 work that “only seldom could the Germans protect themselves by self-help, as for example in the Ratibor area, where Polish agitators were often downright thrashed out of town [hinausgeprügelt]. . . .” Laubert makes no mention of the Rednerschutz. One should hesitate to dismiss this testimony out of hand, since, unlike Vogel, Laubert was a nationalist who saw nothing wrong with “thrashing” Polish agitators, and since his book appeared during a period of triumphant confessions which tended to extol—as will be seen below, even exaggerate—the brutality and mayhem committed in Upper Silesia rather than pass over it.

Since the presence of Freikorps units in Upper Silesia at a later date is well documented, the significant question to pose is whether “shock troops” existed in advance of the open paramilitary hostilities which were to break out in May 1921. A partial answer comes from the minutes of a conference between Prussian Interior Minister Karl Severing, Foreign Office plebiscite manager Richard Meyer, and the

41. Interview with Rudolf Vogel, 26 May 1983. The quotations are from Vogel, Deutsche Presse und Propaganda, 96–99.
42. Laubert, Die oberschlesische Volksbewegung, 170.
local plebiscite leaders in Breslau on 25 August 1920, a week after the second Polish uprising had begun. Severing’s remarks indicated that he was not aware of the existence of armed German groups. Hans Lukaschek, head of the plebiscite steering group (the Silesian Committee) confirmed to Severing that “German shock units have been formed.” But, he said, their inability to hinder their Polish counterparts in any way proved that they “were not properly armed and led.”

Lukaschek’s reference was undoubtedly to the the Speaker Guard, whose informal, even “wildcat,” units possessed still less discipline than was normal for such postwar groups. For one thing, the human material available at this point was of a fairly low quality. The German plebiscite plenipotentiary, Prince Hatzfeldt, reported before the August 1920 uprising that a good many disturbances of a “purely economic character”—demonstrations over rising food prices in the larger cities—had been touched off “less by the inhabitants actually affected by the price rise than by outside elements who have come to the cities with the intention of plundering, the majority of whom, here as elsewhere, are youths.” It is understandable that the French military would see in the ill-organized Speaker Guard units, which were drawing on such a pool of recruits, “special troop bands, officered and strongly armed,” but what evidence exists points to a very weak force, the mere shadow of the Freikorps army which was to develop in May 1921.

This, then, was the state of opposing forces when hostilities broke out on 17 August 1920. The immediate cause of the second Polish uprising was the mounting climax of the Soviet-Polish War, a conflict which had been going on since February 1919. At the end of July 1920, as the Red Army converged on Warsaw, the German government declared itself strictly neutral and forbade the transport of matériel and troops across German territory. Protesting Allied troop movements which apparently bolstered the Poles, the German unions—almost universally anti-Polish—called a strike in Upper Silesia for 17 August. German protest demonstrations spread to several

44. “Sitzung 25. August 1920 in Breslau vormittags 11 Uhr,” PA, Po Nr. 5, Abst. 6, IV Polen O/S /83.
45. Hatzfeldt’s report is in Źródła, 2: 257; the French opinion is that of General de Brautes, report on activities through 31 Aug. 1920, n.d., BA, CSFAHS/N889.
Upper Silesian cities, and some turned violent. In Kattowitz, in eastern Upper Silesia, a pro-German crowd of over 10,000 clashed with German Security Police and French troops, who defended themselves with rifle and grenade. The rioters then turned against available Poles, lynching a well-known Polish sympathizer and destroying Polish campaign offices. The German riots burned themselves out during the night, but the larger disorder was only beginning.47

Declaring that the German outrages demonstrated the inability of the occupation troops to protect Polish citizens and property, Wojciech Korfanty on 19 August issued a call for all Poles to arm themselves in defense against marauding German bands. Polish miners immediately went on strike and, taking up arms, joined the POW, now also bolstered by Poles living across the border, apparently both civilian and military. On 20 August paramilitary forces numbering as many as 50,000 seized control of the industrial triangle, in eastern Upper Silesia, and the heavily Polish areas to the south. They met little opposition from the French troops, who identified strongly with the Polish movement and engaged in at least limited fraternization with its armed wing during the uprising. According to German sources, the Italians put up stiffer opposition, but they were relatively few. The Sipo units, having been reissued light arms, offered resistance, but the Poles outnumbered them and—in at least one case, with French help—successfully disarmed and imprisoned them in Upper Silesia or across the border.

Generally speaking, the insurgents concentrated on removing the leading representatives of German authority, such as local officials, customs officers, and above all school teachers, who were apparently overrepresented in the groups imprisoned, taken as hostages to Poland, or killed. The League of Patriotic Upper Silesians—the most visible and most blatantly anti-Polish plebiscite group—claimed that 150 of its members were murdered. Though the German White Book on the uprising listed only 35 confirmed murders, beatings and other mistreatment were common, the result of the rising level of violence on both sides and of the pent-up frustrations of the Poles. Soon German

refugees began streaming from the insurgent areas, some expelled by the Poles, some on their own.48

By 23 August, observers reported that eastern Upper Silesia was, for all practical purposes, in Polish hands. The Reich, Erich Koch-Weser recorded in his diary, "stands helpless before the invasion of the Poles." Prussian Interior Minister Karl Severing and the Foreign Office's Richard Meyer travelled to Breslau on the twenty-fifth to talk things over with plebiscite organization heads, union leaders, and Silesian officials. There they encountered nervous appeals for Berlin either to arm the workers or to call a general strike. Opinions among the locals varied, but all agreed that the Interallied Commission had lost control and that the Germans must act decisively. Severing tried to restore confidence and patience. Any direct intervention would, he pointed out, put Berlin in violation of the Treaty, a position it was straining to avoid. Germany's shortage of ammunition, moreover, rendered the arming of workers impossible. A general strike would confuse the situation rather than help it. Thus, he exhorted the local leaders to await events and discourage precipitate action in the meantime.49

Unable to do anything else, the Upper Silesians followed Severing's advice. Having established control over a sizeable area, the Polish insurgents became less active, though they still refused to hand over their weapons as the Commission demanded. In this tense atmosphere Korfanty met in Beuthen on the twenty-seventh with representatives of the German Plebiscite Commissariat. Holding a strong hand, Korfanty offered to renounce violence and hand over weapons if the Germans would agree to certain concessions, among them the immediate disbanding of the Sipo. In fact, on 24 August the Commission had decided to disband the Sipo and establish a Plebiscite Police consisting equally of Germans and the Poles. The Commission published the necessary decrees on 28 August and presided over the signing of the agreement between Korfanty and the Germans in Beuthen on 2 September.


Political Violence in Upper Silesia

For all practical purposes, the uprising was over by the first week of September, and the Poles had released most of their hostages by this time. Yet the violence which been on the rise even before the August days continued to smolder. The appearance of peace and order, wrote Hatzfeldt, was deceptive. During September the local German political parties repeatedly demanded of the Commission greater protection for Germans in the eastern region and more energetic disarmament of the Poles; but delegations went away from Le Rond with little hope of having influenced him. When Hatzfeldt handed the general a recently intercepted sheaf of Polish plans for renewed hostilities, Le Rond, in Hatzfeldt's words, "showed little inclination to look through the documents." But the general finally expressed his distaste at least for the position in which he found himself, saying "that this time he would open up with machine guns if an uprising occurred. I [Hatzfeldt] replied: quite proper; but against everyone? To which he countered: against the one who starts it."\(^{50}\)

* * *

The second Polish uprising altered the outlook of all plebiscite participants. It formalized the polarity within the Interallied Commission: fed up with what they considered to be open French partiality toward the Polish insurgents, Percival and de Marinis henceforth opposed Le Rond outspokenly.\(^{51}\) At the same time, the establishment of the Plebiscite Police and other efforts by Le Rond to prevent harassment of and discrimination against Poles finally loosened the German hold on the administrative machinery. Plebiscite historian Sarah Wambaugh concluded that the power relationship between the opposing groups was thereby reversed.\(^{52}\)

As for the Germans, at least eastern Upper Silesia had gotten a taste of the reprisals which Germans had predicted in areas which went to Poland, and it seemed unlikely that many of the refugees, estimated at between five and ten thousand, would return to vote in any case. The disaster of August had not only called up visions of the Posen pattern; it had also brought home to Berlin the possibility that Ger-

\(^{50}\) Wambaugh, Plebiscites, 1: 237; Zródła, 2: 433–44; Hatzfeldt to AA, 14 Sept. 1920, PA, Po 5 Nr. Abst.

\(^{51}\) Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st ser., 11: 45–51, and especially Percival's report of 14 Sept. 1920, 58–65.

\(^{52}\) Wambaugh, Plebiscites, 1: 237–38.
many might actually lose this economically vital region "legally." This was the more compelling because Upper Silesia was fast becoming a crucial component in reparations negotiations with the Allies, the linkage being (at least in the German view) that the loss of Upper Silesia would cripple German efforts to pay reparations and hence necessitate reduced payments. The effects on German plebiscite policy were direct. After August 1920 the entire German referendum campaign took on a new urgency, a controlled panic, which loosened purse strings and inhibitions in the name of leaving nothing undone which might save the threatened border.

Hence, it was in this period that Berlin raised substantially the level of supplies and subventions flowing to Upper Silesia. Berlin now allowed the local plebiscite umbrella organization, the Silesian Committee, full control over federal propaganda moneys, where federal and state offices had previously participated directly even in local spending decisions. In the same period the Foreign Office created a Central Office for the Technical Execution of the Plebiscite and placed at its head a retired lieutenant-colonel, Philipp von Kahlden. The so-called "von Kahlden Office" soon showed great initiative in making its own plebiscite policy on the ground, particularly when it came to extra-legal measures and the creation of a subterranean "defense force." Moreover, the Reich government, in the name of "leaving nothing undone," browbeat the Prussian government into agreeing to the creation of an independent federal state of Upper Silesia should the area vote for Germany.

On the ground, the campaign reached new heights of bitterness and took on tones of ethnic animosity previously absent. Related in many respects to the growing element of hatred in German propaganda was the formation of paramilitary groups to "protect" the Germans from the Polish terror. Indeed, as with other categories of plebiscite measures, paramilitary planning became systematic in the wake of the August uprising, active and abundantly financed in the three months before the vote.

The opposing sides agreed formally to renounce violence in August.

Political Violence in Upper Silesia

1920, and the Interallied Commission cracked down as much as possible in the months thereafter. But the Germans pointed out that violence had become a regular condition of life in Upper Silesia. Le Rond asserted that the total number killed from 19 August, the second day of the uprising, to 17 September was ninety, of whom forty-nine were Germans, forty-one Poles. The German Foreign Office documented forty-five murders alleged to have been committed by Poles or pro-Polish individuals "from political motives" in the months September through December 1920; this in addition to many more cases of assault, arson, and kidnapping. As a boom region and a borderland, Upper Silesia had long registered an exceptionally high crime rate. Now hoodlums of all descriptions took advantage of the poorly guarded borders to flood the land, in some cases proving their fairmindedness by falling on Pole and German alike.

Most of the increase in violence, however, seems to have carried political overtones. The POW was now in a particularly strong position from which to engage in outright terrorism. As late as January 1921, the best information available to Percival and the British Foreign Office was that the Germans were, on the whole, disarmed, while the Poles had kept most of the weapons used in August. The most spectacular act of terrorism was the murder of Theophil Kupka, a Polish "renegade" journalist who had professed himself sick of corruption on the Polish side and resigned from Korfanty's Polish Plebiscite Commissariat to start an Upper Silesian Commissariat, nominally neutral but in fact pro-German. With aid from German sources, Kupka founded a bilingual newspaper, Wola Ludu—Der Wille des Volkes (The People's Will), which railed in sensational language against the corruption of Korfanty and the Warsaw "carpetbaggers." Korfanty's equally strident denunciations of the renegade led people to believe that it was on Korfanty's order that a Polish assassin rang Kupka's doorbell on 20 November and pumped four shots into the journalist as his wife and children watched.

56. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st ser., 11: 75; AA, "Zusammenstellung der in letzter Zeit in O/S Abstimmungsgebiet vorgekommenen Verbrechen ...," 17 Dec. 1920, PA, IV Po O/S, Po S Nr. 1 Abst. 9a; Vogel, Deutsche Presse und Propaganda, 103.
57. From Hatzfeldt's report of 15 Nov. 1920, Zródtła, 2: 464.
58. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st ser., 11: 155-56.
59. Vogel, Deutsche Presse und Propaganda, 113-14; Urbanek, "Plebiszitkommissar in Oberschlesien," 41-42. The murderer was apprehended, but the Commission postponed the trial,
The Polish side immediately issued the story that Kupka had been an agent provocateur in the pay of Spiecker from the beginning. Whether or not it had any basis in fact, the charge itself is characteristic of the embittered atmosphere, for the Hexenkessel of Upper Silesia was in truth filled with a witch’s brew of spies, counterspies, bribery, death threats, and underworld characters doing the bidding of one side or the other. Many such charges must have been concocted for propaganda purposes, but evidence on all sides indicates that many clandestine activities were real enough.

It was in this atmosphere and amid these events that the Germans began building a “self-defense” system. In the last weeks of 1920, the German volunteers finally achieved real organization in the form of secret “special police” units financed by the Reich through Spiecker and through the Foreign Office’s recently organized “von Kahlden Organization.” The first leader of these special police units was a veteran sergeant of the Freikorps Löwenfeldt, Heinz Oskar Hauenstein. Logistics were somewhat difficult since the units were strictly illegal; almost half of the volunteers remained outside the plebiscite area, in Central or Lower Silesia, mostly under the command of another retired officer, Colonel Schwarzkoppen. From there, special police squads made brief sorties into the voting zone. Observation units lay low in the occupied area to spot useful points for action, such as the protection of German rallies and retaliation against Polish strong-arm groups. The account of one “special policeman,” however, suggests that the units spent less time in violent pursuits than in such activities as spying, trying to find and photograph Polish arms caches, bribing Polish functionaries, buying information from prostitutes, and the like. Judging from the numbers involved—according to Freikorps historian Wilhelm von Oertzen never more than about two hundred all told—and the nature of the missions described by participants one

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surmises that most of these actions involved small groups of a few “special policemen” on assignment for an evening.\(^6^2\)

Long after the plebiscite, Upper Silesia took on the aura of legend in *Freikorps* lore as perhaps the paramount experience of the freebooters’ post-Kapp existence. The “heroic” character of the Upper Silesian days was reinforced by the 1928 *Feme* murder trials, during which Hauenstein, called as a witness, estimated that his special police had executed about two hundred “traitors” to the Upper Silesian *Freikorps*, a shocking comment on the desperateness of the struggle. In the early thirties a number of participants set down their experiences, mostly in published memoirs which embellished the memory of those halcyon days. In fact, even before the Feme trials, in 1926, former Reich Finance Minister Joseph Wirth told the Reichstag that while the government had previously denied supporting the *Freikorps* groups, he could now admit that the government had sent arms and equipment to them throughout the period. Five years later, Wirth said publicly that he had done so on his own authority.\(^6^3\)

Now, the question under scrutiny is whether the “special police” units were active and effective in the months before the plebiscite; that is, whether the German “defense” organizations succeeded either in counteracting Polish terror (as Hauenstein & Co. claimed) or in terrorizing Poles into voting German (as partisans of Poland have asserted). It is precisely in this connection that one must compare the *Freikorps* legend with other available evidence.

In its most developed form that legend asserted that Berlin had refused to finance a volunteer defense group until it was forced to do so by the August 1920 Polish uprising. Thereafter, official money flowed through Spiecker and von Kahlden to the defense units, which operated heroically and effectively, the only impediments to their greater success arising from the insufficiency of funds, the difficulty of getting arms across the Allied-controlled border, and the strength of their Polish counterparts.\(^6^4\)

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Contemporary documents tell the story differently. It is true that Spiecker and other German leaders—with the notable exception of Hatzfeldt, the plebiscite plenipotentiary, who argued against illegal military or paramilitary measures—sent to Berlin increasingly urgent calls for aid in counteracting Polish paramilitary attacks from December 1920 to March 1921. Even more alarming than terror within the referendum area, however, were the mounting rumors after the turn of the year that the Poles were planning a full-scale repetition of the Posen pattern if the plebiscite went for Germany; and not just in Upper Silesia, but in rump German Posen and Central Silesia as well. Military intelligence soon detected Polish troop movements to the border. Thus, from mid-January 1921 onward the German government considered very seriously its options for bolstering both the plebiscite region and the surrounding unoccupied areas.

At a meeting of 28 January 1921, Seeckt, the head of the army, discussed border conditions with cabinet officials. The general confirmed the gravity of the situation but exuded confidence in reporting on “defensive measures, especially the recruitment of volunteers.” Assuming that Seeckt was talking about Freikorps units, Reich Interior Minister Koch-Weser urged the general at least to forbid nationalist and monarchical demonstrations among the volunteers. Seeckt replied “that he was not going to form Freikorps, but regular regiments,” as Koch-Weser recorded.

Spiecker, Lukaschek, and other local plebiscite leaders continued to report on Polish terror in Upper Silesia and the gathering of Polish troops to the east, but in early March 1921 Hatzfeldt and the governors of neighboring districts warned that such reports were probably exaggerated, and that raising an open counterforce might well trigger the Polish attack it was supposed to prevent. Hatzfeldt also pointed out that some Germans were—“unfortunately”—smuggling arms into the plebiscite region, that many of these were being discovered, and that such activities only worked against the German cause in Paris, where it counted.

As the non-resident natives, the “outvoters,” began to enter the

65. Spiecker to Reich and Prussian ministers, 22 Dec. 1920, BA, R43 I/353.
66. See the numerous reports about the probability of a general Polish revolt in BA, R43 I/355; Hatzfeldt had predicted such a revolt as early as July 1920 (Hatzfeldt to AA, 9 July 1920, MGFM-T120/5180: . . . 328–32).
68. Hatzfeldt to AA, 4 Mar. 1921, PA, Po 16 Abst. 3; Akten der Reichskanzlei: Kabinett Fehrenbach, 582–83; Zródła, 2: 169.
plebiscite area after 10 March, their arrival resulted in some mistreatment of pro-German Upper Silesians in the heavily Polish areas, and Lukaschek even called for German troops to be sent to Rybnik and Pless, deep in the occupied zone. But the extent of official German preparation against both terror in Upper Silesia and the possibility of a general Polish attack was an order by Defense Minister Gessler that the military in the east was to remain on alert and be ready to provide "military experts" for leading the eastern populace in case popular resistance became necessary. All this was to take place outside the referendum area: the German government still refused to jeopardize its legal position by violating the occupation directly. Berlin meanwhile directed Hatzfeldt to leave nothing undone in urging Le Rond to guarantee a peaceable and free vote by clamping down on Polish terrorists.

Finally, on 16 March Reich President Friedrich Ebert instructed Gessler that the final decision for any military activity, defensive or otherwise, was to be Ebert's alone. Thus, although Seeckt had made defensive arrangements, including the enlistment of short-term volunteers, the Reich government carefully stopped short of military mobilization.

Official ties with the "self-defense" forces of Spiecker and Kahlden developed within this framework of events and policy. Officials at the ministerial level—particularly Reich Finance Minister Wirth—were well aware that Spiecker and Kahlden were financing defense units. At the same time, by the testimony of Freikorps participants, the membership of such groups before the plebiscite did not exceed a few hundred men. In his thoroughly sympathetic history of the Freikorps, participant F. W. von Oertzen described the volunteers available in Upper Silesia, even in early 1921, as being of extremely low quality. Bernhard von Hülsen, a leader in the paramilitary war which broke out a month after the plebiscite, had little respect for the "accomplish-

69. AA, "Meldung aus Breslau von 13. März 1921," PA, Po 5 Nr. 1 Abst. O/S 12; Prussian Interior Ministry to Regierungspräsidenten, 17 Mar. 1921 (a copy of Gessler's report is attached), PA, Po 5, Nr. 1 Geh. Abst. It is an indication of how carefully the Foreign Office was treading that the preceding document and supporting reports were filed without entry into the AA journal and with a senior councilor's instruction that these papers were to be assigned to a safe. They were later bound into a folder but apparently remained sealed in an envelope until I viewed them in 1983.

70. AA to Hatzfeldt (tel.), 18 Mar. 1921, MGFM-T120/5478: ... 848.

71. Ebert to Gessler (personal, strictly confidential), 16 Mar. 1921, BA, R43 1/118.
ments” of Hauenstein’s special policemen, whose activities he dismissed as “fairly random scuffling.” Glombowski, the only real special policeman among the memoirists, could at most call up a few exchanges of gunfire in the period before the vote. The implication in Hauenstein’s 1928 testimony was that if two hundred traitors were killed, how many more out-and-out Poles must have bitten the dust! Yet neither Hauenstein, nor Glombowski, nor any other participant bore this out. Finally, the weakness of the pre-plebiscite units is evident from events immediately after the vote, when French policemen arrested almost every Freikorps leader in Upper Silesia (one was killed) between 6 and 25 April.72

What then should one make of the over one hundred million marks funnelled through the Spiecker and Kahlden offices for the “special police” before April 1921? And of Wirth’s subsequent declaration that the government had financed the skulduggery all along? Some money, of course, paid the wages of the self-defense troops during several months of service, but no more than a fraction. Arms stockpiling undoubtedly accounted for much more. On the other hand, it is likely that much of the money earmarked for “special police” and “self-defense” went to line the pockets of the many individuals through whose hands it passed between Berlin and its destinations.

Such a pattern was not without precedent in the plebiscite campaign. Even before the referendum took place, some critics from within the campaign organizations had accused certain Upper Silesian plebiscite groups of mishandling funds. The von Kahlden organization in particular came under fire. Evidence of exhorbitant salaries, blanket bonuses, personal use of automobiles and other equipment supposedly bought for the campaign resulted in an audit which confirmed the uninhibited nature of spending in Upper Silesia but which exculpated the leaders of this semi-private creation of the Foreign Office. The same treatment was accorded the government-subsidized United Leagues of Patriotic Upper Silesians, the organization designed to keep the Upper Silesian plebiscite in the public eye throughout Germany and to organize the voting registration of Upper Silesians living outside the plebiscite area.73 Spiecker, like Kahlden a prime mover in

72. Oertzen, Die deutschen Freikorps, 138–41; Hülsen, Der Kampf um Oberschlesien, 15, 21; Glombowski, Frontiers of Terror, 49–94.

73. Kahlden to AA (Meyer), 9 Dec. 1920; Kahlden, “Weihnachtsgratifikationen,” 10 Dec. 1920; Schutzbund to AA (Voss), 3 Feb. 1921, PA, Handakten Meyer 1; copy of a letter from an
subterranean measures, also drew charges of financial corruption, most seriously after the plebiscite when political enemies pointed out that the impecunious Center journalist who had joined the Commis-
sariat for the Supervision of Public Order in 1919 emerged from the
plebiscite two years later a wealthy man. 74

In light of the peculation actually uncovered, one would hardly find
similar behavior in the interstices between Spiecker or von Kahlden
and the rough-and-ready Freikorps characters surprising. While it was
difficult enough to audit the books of the orthodox plebiscite organi-
zations, it was impossible to review the “self-defense” expenditures:
in December 1921 Wirth, now Reich Chancellor, blocked all such
audits, simply by filing a statement that he himself had approved the
funds for secret purposes and had received assurances that the money
had been used as intended. 75

What then of Hauenstein’s two hundred murdered traitors and the
organization which would have been required to carry this out? What
of the “special police” units and their place in the history of the plebi-
scite? Perhaps Hauenstein was personally ferocious, and he probably
oversaw the execution of “traitors” at some point during 1920 and
1921. But contemporary evidence indicates that the operations of the
German “defense forces” for the entire period before the referendum
were haphazard and ineffective, whatever their real goal. Indeed, as
some observers pointed out, the sporadic and pointless escapades of
the defense volunteers crippled German diplomatic efforts to portray
the German side as the side of correctness and legality.

It is possible that Hauenstein was trying to gild his dismal record in
Upper Silesia by exaggerating the brutality of his thugs, perhaps hop-
ing thus to insure his own place as a Freikorps hero. One can, however,

unnamed AA referent working with the Silesian Committee to AA, 23 Feb. 1921, PA, Po 5 Nr.
1, Abst. O/S 12; Überschar to AA, 8 Mar. 1921, MGFM-T120/5478: . . . 796–99.

74. Rudolf Pechel, editor of the Deutsche Rundschau, made these charges in a 1921 article.
Spiecker sued him for libel and won, but the unsavory publicity dealt his post-plebiscite career
as head of the United Press Section of the Reich Government a setback, from which, however,
it had recovered by the end of the twenties, when Spiecker held several important posts in the
Reich and Prussian governments and the Center Party; after the Second World War, Spiecker
held ministerial posts in both the federal government and the government of Nordrhein-
Westfalen. See the clippings and Pechel’s notes in BA, Nachlass Rudolf Pechel, 119. One must
exercise caution, however, since at least some of the nationalist animus against Spiecker arose
from his association with the Wirth wing of the Center. A particularly virulent diatribe against
Spiecker appears in Hans Steinacher’s memoir, cited above in n. 61.

suggest broader motives both for his grisly admissions and for the appearance of the various Upper Silesian "confessions" of the late twenties and early thirties. In fact, specific political motivations arising in the Weimar period and continuing on related tracks into the Third Reich contributed to the desire of terrorists to advertise, even inflate, the ferocity of their earlier activities rather than to cover them over.

By the late twenties, participation in the Upper Silesian episode had become a kind of litmus test for patriotism, a proof of devotion to an increasingly exclusive vision of Germandom. Both Joseph Wirth and Karl Spiecker, for example, issued confessions of sorts during this period, confessions which seemed to put these two still active public servants in the forefront of the patriotic saviors of Upper Silesia who had circumvented the law in the service of a higher cause back in 1921. Without going further than the evidence warrants, one might point out that precisely Wirth and Spiecker—in the moderate wing of the Center Party—had cause to strengthen their own patriotic credentials against the pressure of increasing nationalism from the conservative wing of their party. And it did not hurt that the "enemy" being refought was the Polish nation, a direct threat to Germandom and an object of hatred across the political spectrum.

If this was the case with political moderates, how much more with the radical nationalists? It is clear that the Nazis worked very hard to associate themselves post facto with the so-called defense of Upper Silesia, particularly in its more brutal aspects. There was, of course, plenty of basis in fact. Freikorps veterans had tended to join NSDAP organizations, particularly the SA, during the twenties. Hauenstein himself, for example, had been an early member of the party (1922) and was by the late twenties deeply involved in its factional strife. Similarly, Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, one of the top SA commanders in western Germany, contributed to a 1934 collection of essays addressed to the Nazi intelligentsia; his contribution: "The Freikorps Saves Upper Silesia." Manfred von Killinger, another SA-man and the

76. The literature on Center trends in the late twenties and early thirties is now large; a concise and useful discussion may be found in the essay by Rudolf Morsey, "The Center Party between the Fronts," in The Path to Dictatorship 1918–1933 (Garden City, N.Y., 1966), 68–80.
78. Glombowski, Frontiers of Terror, 261; Waite, Vanguard of Nazism, 288–89.
Nazi Minister-President of Saxony, also published his Upper Silesian experiences in 1934, with an especially cloying preface dedicating the labors of the “old fighter” to the edification of a new brand of youth. As one might imagine, the exploits of the freebooters lost nothing in the retelling as time went on.  

Indeed, the Upper Silesian story a decade after the fact contributed to a brutalization of rhetoric which had long existed but which became a kind of lingua franca among the Nazis and other extreme nationalists. Ernst von Salomon’s famous 1930 Freikorps memoir, Die Geächteten, though literally a cut above much of the Freikorps confessional literature, clearly aimed to shock the reader with its brutality. Hauenstein’s airy casualness in court in 1928 was likewise shocking:

[Judge:] Are you aware that Vehm-murders [sic] took place in Upper Silesia? 
[Hauenstein:] Certainly. 
[Judge:] Figures have been stated here. Can you give us the number of traitors who were removed by the Special Police which you commanded? 
[Hauenstein:] I can’t say the exact figure, but I am of the opinion that it is around 200.  

This maximizing of shock value in rhetoric and action, seemingly instinctive in characters like Salomon and Hauenstein, was on its way to becoming institutionalized in the National Socialist political culture. Thus, contemporary “political” acts such as the August 1932 murder in the Upper Silesian village Potempa—the brutal murder of a Polish Communist sympathizer by drunken SA-men—seemed to fit coherently into a mythological Nazi past of “old fighters,” raging battles against leftists, betrayal by the republic, and the like.  

For the present study, the pertinent point in all this is that the post facto accounts of some participants do not square with available evidence. The analysis of these accounts suggests that the “eyewitnesses” in question are quite suspect, apart even from the normal caution

80. Ernst von Salomon, Die Geächteten (Berlin, 1930).  
81. Glombowski, Frontiers of Terror, 271.  
which the historian uses in extracting evidence from witnesses speaking long after the fact. They by no means establish that German terror influenced the decisions of Upper Silesian voters.

* * *

Yet if pre-plebiscite Upper Silesia was not exactly the storm of steel which some Freikorps veterans subsequently described, it still presented a tempestuous and highly unstable scene. Over this the Allies presided with as firm a hand as possible. The Commission had taken advantage of the August 1920 uprising to balance the Plebiscite Police ethnically, to increase Interallied control over the regular police forces, to tighten regulations relating to a fair campaign, and to extend the jurisdiction and power of Interallied courts over almost all criminal cases. The regulations for the vote itself appeared on 3 January and evoked protests from both sides, but none which threatened public order. On 8 March the Commission issued the first in a series of decrees designed to reduce further the opportunities for violence by outlawing demonstrations, public display of posters and flags, distribution of printed matter, and the sale of wine and liquor. An additional four battalions of British troops arrived to help police the vote. The week before plebiscite day, 20 March, nevertheless saw several violent incidents: a Polish woman and a little girl were killed in an altercation in Gleiwitz; some barracks which were to accommodate German outvoters were blown up, some German outvoters beaten. A German representative in the region reported twenty-three distinct incidents, all in eastern Upper Silesia, resulting in two dead and ten wounded Germans. But the French were able to report to Paris four days before the referendum that “all external political activity is suspended as Upper Silesia awaits its plebiscite.”

Still, when Sunday, 20 March 1921, came and went without the outbreak of wholesale violence, the peaceful balloting elicited general astonishment. Colonel Henry Percival marveled that “the 20th of March must be recorded as one of the quietest days experienced in Upper Silesia since August, 1920.” Most Interallied personnel managed to be out and around to observe the proceedings informally, and Interallied troops patrolled throughout the day, especially in the urban

84. Moltke to AA (tel.), 13 Mar. 1921, MGFM-T120/5478: . . . 810; Le Rond to Affaires Étrangères, 16 Mar. 1921, BA, CSFAHS/N950.
areas. Moreover, in spite of threats on both sides, 97.5 percent of the voting population turned out to cast ballots, the result, no doubt, of the tremendous prize at stake, the prolonged politicization of the population, and the high degree of organization of both sides which resulted in “the lame, halt, and blind” being carried to the polling stations by carriage and stretcher, as Wambaugh recorded.85

Of 1,186,342 valid votes cast,86 59.6 percent were for Germany, 40.4 percent for Poland. The seventy-nine percent of eligible outvoters who made the trip contributed thirteen percent of the total. Assuming, as most observers have, that eighty to ninety percent of the outvoters voted for Germany, the results without the outvote still gave the Germans a majority of 53.75 percent. Over fifty-eight percent of the voting precincts, rural and urban, came up with German majorities.

The geographical distribution of the vote ran roughly as both sides had expected. The greatest German majorities occurred in the west, where the language statistics of 1910 had shown the lowest percentage of Poles. Generally speaking, the areas which contained the most Polish speakers gave the most votes to Poland and vice versa (see table). But in only two of twenty-one Kreise did the Poles achieve a voting level conforming to the 1910 census, even though the Poles had constantly tarred that census as being skewed in favor of the Germans. Thus, where language figures had indicated that sixty percent of Upper Silesians spoke Polish as a first language, only forty percent voted for Poland in the referendum.

The Poles and their supporters were immediately suspicious of results which showed some 200,000 ethnic Poles to have chosen Germany in the referendum: hence, the charges of vote manipulation and terrorism which persist to the present. Still, if German terrorism caused the discrepancy, one might expect this to be reflected in the voting results themselves. How might terror have affected the vote? Since the ballot was secret and well patrolled by Interallied officials, one might expect that German terror would have caused visible or known Polish supporters simply to stay away from the polls; or that

85. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st ser., 11: 196; Wambaugh, Plebiscites, 1: 249.
86. The full results of the vote by commune appeared in the Journal officiel de Haute Silésie, 7 May 1921. More accessibly, Wambaugh describes the vote in outline in Plebiscites, 1: 249–50, and reprints the results for all Kreise and some communes in 2: 240–60. In Otto Ulitz, Oberschlesien: Aus seiner Geschichte, 3d ed. (Bonn, 1971), 54–57, a former German plebiscite leader gives statistics by Kreis along with a brief analysis, which, while it makes no pretense at nonpartisanship, is perceptive and useful.
TABLE

Population and Voting Statistics in Upper Silesia, 1910–1921

The Communal Elections of 9 November 1919 and the Plebiscite of 20 March 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kreis</th>
<th>Population 1919</th>
<th>% of population ethnically Polish*</th>
<th>% votes for Polish Party Nov. 1919</th>
<th>% votes for Poland Mar. 1921</th>
<th>% increase 1919–1921 Polish vote</th>
<th>% increase 1919–1921 German vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beuthen</td>
<td>71,187</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>45.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beuthen-Land</td>
<td>213,818</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>55.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cosel</td>
<td>131,060</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>19.4</td>
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<td>82.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gleiwitz</td>
<td>69,028</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tost-Gleiwitz</td>
<td>86,461</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>43.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross-Strehlitz</td>
<td>76,502</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>50.6</td>
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<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindenburg</td>
<td>167,632</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>59.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kattowitz</td>
<td>45,422</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
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<td>227,657</td>
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<td>64.2</td>
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<td>35.0</td>
<td>54.6</td>
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<td>Königshütte</td>
<td>74,811</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>38.4</td>
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<td>18.2</td>
<td>55.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kreuzburg</td>
<td>58,217</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>79.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leobschütz</td>
<td>78,247</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lublinitz</td>
<td>55,380</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>65.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oppeln</td>
<td>35,483</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>50.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oppeln-Land</td>
<td>123,165</td>
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<td>40.7</td>
<td>30.5</td>
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<td>67.4</td>
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<td>Pless</td>
<td>141,828</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>40.6</td>
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<td>Ratibor</td>
<td>36,994</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ratibor-Land</td>
<td>75,661</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosenberg</td>
<td>54,962</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>81.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rybnik</td>
<td>160,836</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarnowitz</td>
<td>86,563</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,070,914</strong></td>
<td><strong>58.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>40.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.85</strong></td>
<td><strong>60.85</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, 1: 250, 2: 246–47; Vogel, *Deutsche Presse und Propaganda*, 69; Ulitz, *Oberschlesien*, 54. Wambaugh’s figures for the Communal Elections, which she indicates are “unofficial calculations,” are not used here since they contain a number of discrepancies with the official figures.

*The Poles consistently disputed the language statistics form the 1910 census, holding that the real percentages were much higher.

Polish terror would have caused Germans to stay away. This did not happen with either side. Indeed, the high level of voter participation is the most striking pattern of the plebiscite: outvoters included, 97.5 percent of those eligible exercised their voting rights. If one leaves out the non-resident voters, participation appears to have been over ninety-nine percent, a result hardly compatible with the presence of effective terror by either side.
Still, one can probe more deeply. Before the war, the Upper Silesian vote for Polish Party candidates in national elections had remained consistently in the range of thirty to forty percent, although, it will be remembered, the 1910 census indicated that fifty-nine percent of Upper Silesians were of Polish extraction. Since the Polish Party boycotted the National Assembly election of January 1919, the next usable voting results come from November 1919, when the Germans—ill-advisedly, it turned out—called for local elections to take place. The hallmark of these Upper Silesian communal council elections was low voter participation: only fifty-seven percent. Indeed, the Polish candidates garnered more votes (fifty-three to forty-seven percent), but the elections represented something of a low point of morale for both sides. Local political squabbles had thrown the German camp into disarray; and the German martial law which followed the August 1919 Polish uprising had been especially damaging to the Polish movement. Yet this election provides a useful comparison with the plebiscite results, since the comparison enables one to ask which voters participated in the plebiscite who had failed to vote sixteen months earlier.

These comparative figures are especially significant when examined against the conditions prevailing and the changes in conditions taking place in the twenty-one voting districts of Upper Silesia. These districts might be grouped loosely into three categories based on economic and cultural complexion. The northern and western sections of the province were predominantly rural Kreise. Urban centers, associated with the highest concentration of Germans, were usually the administrative seats of the districts and sometimes the commercial centers as well. The Poles living in areas of this category tended to live in the countryside as laborers or small farmers.

The industrial section of Upper Silesia was packed into a triangle described by the major cities of eastern Upper Silesia, adjacent to the Polish border. Here the Germans also predominated in the cities, but the “rural” Kreise which surrounded each urban county consisted chiefly of coal mines and mining villages. Large but sparsely populated

88. For the background to these elections and their results, see my “Fighting without Arms,” 426–39.
89. More extensive information on the complexion of the regions can be gained from Blanke, “Upper Silesia, 1921,” 245–47; Vogel, Deutsche Presse und Propaganda, 4–21; and from Wambaugh, Plebiscites, 1: 211.
Upper Silesia 1921

Only the plebiscite district is shown. Three western Upper Silesian Kreise—Grottkau, Falkenberg, and Neisse—were not put to the vote, and only the eastern half of Oberglogau fell in the plebiscite region.
estates accounted for well under ten percent of the rural population. Hence, these “rural” areas were in reality peopled mainly by an industrial proletariat.

The third category consisted of those mixed Kreise whose character was partly industrial (usually coal mining) but strongly agricultural as well. The southeastern district of Pless, with a population eighty-five percent ethnically Polish, was such a region.

The combination of a district’s character, its proximity to Poland, the behavior of the Interallied occupiers, and the results of the August 1920 uprising helped determine who was seen to be “in control” of the district, even though the Allies officially held sway everywhere. After August 1920, for example, both Germans and Poles regarded certain areas to be under Polish control, Pless and Rybnik being the most obvious examples. There the occupying French troops had seemed inclined neither to counter the Polish insurgents during the uprising nor to disarm them thereafter. Some flight of Germans from these districts had occurred after August, though the size and the permanency of the emigration is impossible to gauge. One would certainly expect—and participants testified—that the German “terror” had little chance here.90 On the other hand, western Kreise like Oppeln (rural and urban divisions) and Leobschütz, sitting across a porous border from central Silesia and peopled chiefly by Germans, were considered to be dominated by the German administration and potentially by German force.

All this considered, the local voting shifts from one election to the other are interesting. It is hardly surprising that both Germans and Poles gained voters in every single Kreis from November 1919 to March 1921. On the other hand, the Germans gained more, showing an overall increase of sixty-one percent to a Polish increase of thirty-five percent. The Poles increased their vote more than the Germans did in only two of the region’s twenty-one Kreise: in Pless, which bordered on Poland and contained the greatest relative number of ethnic Poles in Upper Silesia (eighty-six percent); and in Ratibor, which lay in the south of the province and had no Polish border. In

90. Hatzfeldt was so sure of the overwhelming Polish sentiment in Pless and Rybnik as of mid-1920 that he suggested giving the two Kreise to Poland outright in exchange for calling off the plebiscite. The Foreign Office rejected the suggestion as unacceptable, both to the German public and to the Allies; Hatzfeldt to AA, 9 July 1920; AA (Meyer), File Note, 20 July 1920, MGFM-T120/5180: . . . 328–33.
fact, the southern third of pre-1918 Ratibor, the Hultschiner Ländchen, had gone to Czechoslovakia outright by the terms of the Versailles Treaty. Thus, the Poles outgained the Germans in the two counties where Germandom seemed on the run, since Ratibor was already a rump Kreis and heavily Polish Pless was almost certain to go to Poland in any case.

The greatest increase in the Polish vote occurred in Cosel (seventy percent), an agricultural county straddling the Oder in southwest Upper Silesia, and Lublinitz (fifty-six percent), a farming area on the Polish border adjacent to the industrial triangle. The populations of both areas were three-quarters Polish according to the 1910 census, and over half of the Poles in both Kreise had rather consistently voted German in the past. One must question whether these data square with the charges of the Poles, who held that German terror was especially vicious in the defenseless rural areas. In Lublinitz, support from across the border might have cancelled out the German terror. But Cosel was in the German-dominated west, far from the aid of Poland or the Polish strongholds in Pless and Rybnik.91

The lowest Polish increases occurred in the heavily Polish coal-mining districts of Königshütte and Hindenburg.92 The two areas were strongholds of the POW and had earlier been the scenes of gargantuan strikes by Polish miners. Both had come under Polish paramilitary control during the August 1920 uprising; and both possessed French Kreis Controllers. Thus, if any Upper Silesian areas were likely to resist intimidation by the Germans, one would expect to find Hindenburg and Königshütte among them.

All of this goes to say that if German terrorism, or indeed terrorism on both sides, produced these voting patterns, then political violence yielded effects completely the reverse of what both sides asserted

91. The Kreise ranking third and fourth in terms of Polish electoral increase—Oppeln-Land and Ratibor—were likewise western Upper Silesian counties with heavily Polish rural populations. Pless, the most Polish of all counties, came in fifth in terms of participation increase (forty-four %); but Rybnik—almost as Polish—managed only a twenty-two % increase over November 1919. On the other hand, the northern Kreis really comparable with Cosel and Lublinitz in terms of population size and composition was the northern county Rosenberg, with a Polish border and a population almost eighty % Polish. Rosenberg Poles, however, increased their vote by only thirty-four %.

92. As mentioned above, however, participation in the November 1919 elections was relatively high in Königshütte and Hindenburg. The next lowest increase was in the northwestern Kreis of Kreuzburg, an agricultural area of the first category. Kreuzburg was atypical in many respects because its population, German and Polish, was almost entirely Protestant.
terrorism ought to do. What, then, produced the voting result of 20 March 1921? Richard Blanke has explored this question in a 1975 essay. Economically successful Poles, he points out, probably associated material and social progress with Germanness itself, the more so since in Upper Silesia no Polish nobility existed as in West Prussia and Poznań, and since Poland’s internal conditions were chaotic. Moreover, thirteen months of Interallied control could not have put much of a dent in the real predominance of the Germans in administration, education, and the newspapers. Still, Blanke calculates that the advantages possessed by the two sides roughly canceled each other out, and that the plebiscite was, after all, a fairly accurate reflection of the desires of the populace, not of its ethnic composition. Blanke concludes that the idea of “objective” nationality inherent in the doctrine of 1919 self-determination was a flawed conception, assuming as it did that an individual would necessarily choose to live in a country whose language was his own. Actually, Blanke’s critique of the voting results conforms to what many knowledgeable observers of Upper Silesia were saying at the time of the plebiscite: that one could not gauge the political allegiance of Upper Silesians simply by finding out what language they spoke at home; that in addition to solid German and Polish camps, Upper Silesia contained a substantial minority of vacillating elements, mostly of Polish extraction, who placed their allegiance on the basis of social, economic, cultural, and historical considerations.

* * *

After a month of deliberation, on 30 April, the Interallied Commissioners, divided in opinion on the drawing of a border, sent two different plans to Paris, both favoring partition. Yet before the Ambassadors’ Conference had time to deliberate—indeed, before the recommendations were made public—Korfanty ran an article entitled “The Diplomats Have Spoken” in the 1 May Grenzzeitung, asserting that only Pless, Rybnik, and part of Kattowitz were destined to go to Poland. The article served as the signal for a massive Polish uprising. The day before, the militant leaders of the POW, a force now numbering over 40,000 men, had persuaded a hesitant Korfanty to sign orders
for the paramilitary conquest of eastern Upper Silesia, over the protests of the Polish government.94

Thus, on 2 May an armed insurrection broke out along the eastern border, where insurgents seized all roads and railways crossing the border and enabled reinforcements to pour in from Poland. The Polish members of the Plebiscite Police deserted, imprisoning most German members and shooting some of them. The British troops had departed a few days before. The weak Italian force resisted at a cost of twenty dead, but the Poles were too strong. The French troops simply fell back before the Polish thrust. Polish forces now occupied a good half of the province.95

Meanwhile, the Allies had met at London on 5 May and issued a reparations ultimatum: Germany could either agree to a final bill of 132 billion gold marks and immediate payment of one billion, or the Allies would occupy the Ruhr valley. The Fehrenbach Cabinet resigned as a result. Hours before the London ultimatum arrived, the Reich ministers had agreed with Hatzfeldt and Seeckt that direct military intervention against the Poles in Upper Silesia was not advisable. In the last meeting of the Cabinet on 9 May, Seeckt reported that Freikorps units were gathering at Breslau in preparation for a counter-attack. The general urged the government to spread the word that it sanctioned the volunteer outfits, but that “neither regular nor irregular formations can be allowed into Upper Silesia.”96 Yet the decision now belonged to the new Cabinet under Joseph Wirth, who had been the minister closest to self-defense activities before the vote. Speicker and von Kahlden had already used their extensive budgets to supply the rapidly gathering freebooters. On 18 May Wirth and Defense Minister Gessler met with General Karl Höfer and commissioned him to lead the Freikorps against the Polish forces; this despite the government’s continued public prohibition of the measure. Hence, Wirth carried out the opposite of Seeckt’s suggestion.97

In fact, by the time Wirth spoke with Höfer, units of the Organisation

96. Trachtenberg, Reparation in World Politics, 208–11; see also the Cabinet protocols of 5, 6, 7, and 9 May in Akten der Reichskanzlei: Kabinett Fehrenbach, 664–71.
Political Violence in Upper Silesia

Escherisch, the Bavarian Freikorps Oberland, the Rossbach volunteer group, and various student battalions had taken the field in Upper Silesia. Fighting broke out in northern Upper Silesia on the day of Höfer’s commission, the eighteenth. Within two days open paramilitary war had spread across the whole north-south axis of the province, despite the efforts of Allied troops (British contingents had now returned) to interpose themselves between the combatants. On 21 May the Germans attacked and seized the Polish strong point on the Annaberg in the south, and the Poles began to retreat. By 7 July the Allies had managed to end the hostilities and regain a degree of control over the area, though the Poles still held the eastern third of the province.98

As for the now even more complicated problem of drawing a border, the Allies ultimately handed the decision over to the League of Nations. In October 1921 a League Commission, then the Conference of Ambassadors, adopted a partition which gave Poland a third of the territory (essentially the areas which the Poles had retained by force) and forty-three percent of the population, including two-thirds of the industrial triangle in the east. Allied forces finally withdrew in May 1922.99

What reconstruction of events does the evidence warrant? Did the German plebiscite victory of March 1921 result from German political violence? On the specific level, the fragmentary nature of the evidence makes it difficult to envision straightforward and conclusive proof that German terror did or did not influence the voting choices of Upper Silesians. Still, the following picture emerges from a close analysis.

The German government was committed to the military defense of Upper Silesia until Allied troops arrived in February 1920 to take over that job. A few months later, local nationalist groups attempted to form strong-arm units to protect German rallies and other campaign activities from the POW, which had been reorganized on a large scale just after the Allies arrived. These early groups did not carry firearms and apparently engaged only in non-lethal scuffles.

As altercations of this sort multiplied during the summer of 1920, however, the agent of the Prussian Public Order Commissariat, seeking for ways by which his agency could tap into the massive public moneys now flowing to Upper Silesian propaganda organizations, approached some genuine Freikorps veterans on an informal basis. Neither these contacts, nor the scuffling Speaker Guard, nor the predominantly German Security Police were sufficient to deter the organized Polish insurgency of August 1920.

This uprising simultaneously weakened the German hold on the region and strengthened the hand of those who called for a less moderate, more direct anti-Polish policy in Berlin and on the ground. One manifestation of the success of these forces was the creation of the von Kahlden Office, which was directly responsible to the Foreign Office, and whose leadership was nationalist and non–Upper Silesian. Toward the end of 1920 the Spiecker and von Kahlden organizations organized “special police” units, one of whose leaders was the later notorious Hauenstein. On the other hand, these units seem to have had no effect in eastern Upper Silesia, where the POW maintained the upper hand. It appears that Upper Silesians voted as they wished on the secret ballot. Finally, after the vote, the military police of the occupying French forces simply arrested all of the special police leaders still in the plebiscite region in a matter of weeks.

The paramilitary war which grew out of the third Polish uprising in May 1921 indeed brought volunteers in great numbers to Upper Silesia, but thousands of non-Silesians marching to the sound of the guns could have had nothing to do with the results of the vote six weeks earlier. Yet events tend to run together in the reminiscing. The early accounts of Freikorps activity in Upper Silesia differentiate between the ineffective strong-arm groups existing before the vote and the full-fledged army created in May. But by the end of the twenties, natural confusion combined with a particular brand of brutal anti-republican nationalism to create the myth of Freikorps influence in the vote of March 1921, a myth which agreed in its essentials with the apologia put forward by nationalist Poles immediately after they were outvoted in the plebiscite.

Did the German terror determine the outcome of the border plebiscite held in Upper Silesia on 20 March 1921?\(^{100}\) Neither official Ger-

\(^{100}\) It has been seen that this question is more easily asked than answered. In his essay, “Approaches to the Study of Political Violence,” in *Political Violence and Terror: Motives and*
man records, nor eyewitnesses, nor the resulting voting patterns prompt the historian to answer in the affirmative. Both sides organized "defense" groups whose purpose was supposed to extend to influencing voters. Yet it seems that neither side succeeded in terrorizing a substantial number of voters into "crossing over," certainly not into staying away from the polls. Richard Blanke had suggested that neither infringements of fairness nor the deterministic constraints imposed by ethnic background were strong enough to override a range of factors which contributed to the decisions of Upper Silesians. This study confirms Blanke's analysis on the specific issue of terror. Whatever else influenced the decisions of individuals, it does not seem that a substantial number of them based their decision on the terror being carried out by either side.

Motivations, esp. 37. Peter Merkl has pointed out that the effects of political violence have so far been the subject of only limited empirical research; it may be added, certainly too limited to support the proposition that one may assume the effectiveness of goal-oriented terror from its mere presence.