

FORAN 50-ÅRSJUBILEET OVER FRIGJØRINGEN:

"OPPGJØRETS TIME"
ANALYSE - DISKUSJON

The Norwegian Purge Process in Comparative Perspective

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*My reasons for joining the Wehrmacht in 1941,
the consequences and how I see it today.*

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My reasons for joining the Wehrmacht in 1941,
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A contribution to the symposium

THE NORWEGIAN PURGE PROCESS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

University of Bergen 25. - 26. November 1994

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen !

First of all I must accentuate that I am no historian and have no scientific sources at my disposal. I don't even have personal notes from that time to back up my memory.

But the decision I made at the beginning of the year 1941 was a such important one and the following consequences in at least some ways heavy and bitter and I don't think I will ever forget the details of those times, from 1940 up to 1949, when I was able to make a living for myself.

I must begin with the outbreak of the war in 1939. I was 17 years old and a student at the Katedralskolen in Bergen. Norway had a what we today would call a social-demokratic government. Some say it was a socialist-marxistic regime. Beside the established left- and right-parties there were two nationalistic groups which were especially opposed to the government, the Fedrelandslaget and Nasjonal Samling(NS). As far as I remember only the NS was a real political party. In Katedralskolen 2 of my professors were members of that party. And a lot a citizens with a name in town were also members.

My father who was an architekt had studied and worked for 10 years in Germany before the first world-war was very enthusiastic about everything German and he was very impressed by the outward show of the Nationalsocialism. My mother who came from Hamburg must have seen more behind the screens, because she never liked the NS and in no way was the reason for my membership in the party.

My Father sympathized with Fedrelandslaget and I myself since 39 partizipated in a voluntary military education, organized and directed by activ or former officers of the Norwegian Army. It was called FNF. We exercised in the gym of Katedralskolen, learned shooting with handguns and had a lot of theoretic stuff.

On the April 8. in 1940 we were alarmed in the evening and met in a room under the roof in the Stock-Exchange. Each got a sleeveband with the Red Cross token and a special stamp, which proclaimed that we were members of the International Red Cross Liga. We also got a big first aid kit each (which we really had learned to use !).

Then we were sent home again.

The next morning the Germans came. From where I lived in Fjellveien, I could see the German ships unloading troops at the different piers and at the same time observe the whole crew of the officers school in full uniform with black plumes on their

We from the FNF met again in the morning and were told to go around in Town with our Red Cross outfit and report what we saw of the Germans. We all agreed wery much in the oppinion, that the Germans by all means had to leave Norway again. Some days went in that fashion. The Germans did not care about us when we went in and out of their camps or paraded the piers. Some stayed in the office overnight, but I was sent home every evening, perhaps because of my age 17.

One morning, perhaps a week later, when I was just preparing for leaving the house, I was warned by telephon not to come to the regular meeting because the Germans had discovered some conspiracy and arrested the group. Between them was also my teacher in physics, lektor Stinessen. The group was released a few days later after some rough interrogation. Lektor Stinessen returned to school and accused me of having betrayed the group to the Germans, which was not true ! Just before the beginning of the summer-vacation he must have learned better and apollogized for having wrongly accused me. As a compensation he offered me the place in a camp, building a new youth hostell in the mountains at Mjölfjell. There I stayed the whole summer 1940.

In the autumn 1940 I started my last year in school. About the political situation, there was not much diskussion between us pupils. There was only one member of the NS who openly discussed with us others and, as far as I can remember openly praised the program of the party.

Later in the autumn my father said to my mother and me, that although he didn't really like it, he had to cooperate with the Germans to try to minimize the damage they did to houses and landscape when fortifying the town and the surroundings. He was also constantly under pressure from certain Norwegeans to join the NS. Allthrough he had held his position as head of the town planning department, since 1916 he thought it possible, that he could be replaced. He then joined the NS, but as far as I know, never during the whole war went to any party assembly.

I myself was at that time very unsure. In one way I thought it possible that a membership could benefit the Norwegian stand against the Germans and I wanted of course to back up my father. As I saw it, my father was a very respected person in town and had no difficulties in any ways when dealing with other Norwegeans not in the party or even, as we learned after the war, with people from the resistance. Difficulties came from a lot of party members who started campaigns in party controlled papers against him, obviously for opportunistic reasons.

Well, I joined the NS in the autumn of 1940 without beeing very enthusiastic about it. I was enrolled in "hirden" and carried an uniform at the obligate meetings, but not in school or elsewhere. One incident I should like to relate to show that the german influence in the party was greater than one should think from the program alone:

One Thursday evening, I think it was just befor Christmas, the hird was summoned to Konsertpaleet.

It was the evening of the weekly Philharmonic concert. We were about 30 uniformed hird-members. Each got handed out a concertticket, perhaps they were faked, but we forced our way into the hall just before the concert should start. The manager came on the stage and said he had to inform the public, that the soloist of the evening, a cellist mr. Glaser, was not able to perform.

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The leader of our group then very loud asked, if it was because
mr Glaser happened to be a jew ! There arose a commotion in
the hall and we withdrew. 3)

I must say, I didn't feel well at that time and later on was very ashamed that I had participated in such an action.

As I had to work hard for the last examination in school, I had no time to spare for hirden or the party any more. In March I think came the first appeal to join the Waffen-SS. Please remember that at that time nobody knew of any plans to start a war against the Sowiet-Union. This country did allmost not exist for us.

I at that time, in my youthful optimism, saw 3 possibilities in joining : a: My enthousiastic interest in everything military could be pleased, b: I could get away from home in spite of the war and see interesting places and c: If we were summoned before the final examinations, we would get the certificate according to our grades during the last year.

After the war I have many times reflected, that perhaps the last argument was the most important!

After this very long introduction I can make the tale of my year in the Waffen-SS shorter.

It started in Sennheim in Alcace , where the Germans very carefully started to form free Norwegians into soldiers after prussian patterns. As the weather was warm and the wine cheap, we had a good time the first two months. Then in June the war with the SU started. We were transferred to Graz in Austria, where we for the first time got weapons. We were also mixed up with volunteers from other nations and with people from eastern countries of german origin. I had the impression that many of the volunteers were really forced to join for different reasons. Some were petty criminals, others were homosexual, (even in the norwegian group there were some and I was told, the "Party" had ordered them "to the front")

In Graz the real hard drill begann. The older petty officers from the army, who were not fit for the front, were reasonable human, but especially the young SS-corporals made life unbearable and tried to eliminate every human dignity. (I know drill in the USA follows the same pattern). Once and only once we were granted a visit from a norwegian officer with rank (captain or major). Some of our group knew him personally and complained, but to no use.

We then travelled a lot. On open trains from Graz to Vienna and on to Prag without knowing anything of our destination. In Stralsund we then were garrisoned for 2 months. As it was said, to repair the disastrous impression a Finnish battallion had made on the inhabitants of that town.

From there we went back again to Graz, every transport going over weeks through the country with no possibility to leave the train anywhere. From Graz we went to Klagenfurt were it was Winter with snow. After a few maneuvers into Jugoslavien, we really embarked by train for the East-Front. In 4 weeks we reached Winiza in Ukraine and there learned, that we were to go to the "Division Viking" near the Kaukasus mountains.

Just at that time, 2 days before Christmas, the German offensive in the north was stopped 50 km before Moscow. We were marched to the airfield and stuffed into 17 JU-52, about 20 soldiers in

each and left in a snowstorm to the north.

12 planes did it to Orel, the whereabouts of the rest we didn't learn of.

We stayed over Christmas in Orel at 30° below zero and were then marched to the front. We or I at least didn't see much of the enemy, because I got an splinter from a rocket (Stalin-organ) in my jaw and was brought back to Orel to the hospital. After a stay there of perhaps 14 days, nobody knew what to do with an Norwegian voluntary. The whereabouts of the unit with which I had arrived were unknown and so they handed me out a railway-ticket across the whole of Russia down to the Black Sea to Division Viking.

This was in February 1942. The rest is not much to talk about. During the trainvoyage I was several times hauled out of the train by lokal military posts and detailed to watch duty. The last commander then sent me back to Klagenfurt. There I did some training jobs and was released from the Waffen-SS in Mai 1942.

Back in Bergen I applied for admission to the Norwegian Handelshochschule which was granted. But just as the new term started, the school was closed for political reasons. I then applied for a seat at a German university and after acceptance went to Göttingen, where I stayed untill autumn 1944, studying Busines Administration. As I needed 1/2 a year of merkantil pratice, I found a job with the Danziger Werft in Bergen as a bookkeeper.

There I experienced the end of the war!

In the newspapers for the 10. of May there was an appeal to all "frontkjempers" to appear at the next policestation, otherwise the consquences would be heavy! Well, I went to the headoffice in Bergen and was shown into an office where a policeman, not much older then myself, whom I knew by sight as living in my neighbourhood, asked some questions and then said I should better go on with the work for the DW, because I would then be out of the way of any "bloodthirsty revenge-takers". In due time I would be summoned.

Well, I continued going every morning through the town and with the ferry to Laksevåg to my work until the 16. May. Nobody took any notice of me, probably because nobody kwew me for a Frontkjemper.

On that day there was big headline in the morning papers which I first saw on the job: **DEATH AWAITS THE FRONTKJEMPERS!**

Just as I was contemplating going to Sweden through the mountains a whole truckload of people from Heimefronten arrived at the gates, asking for me. The guard tried to keep them of for a while, but I thought it better to follow them and so I was delivered to Espeland. (A former German KZ outside of Bergen.)

Perhaps I should mention here, that our treatment even in the first days after the war was reasonable well. Especially for the young people, who as soldiers had been used to living in barracks and eating detailed food it was not bad. For older and established businessmen and other citizens, who up to the last day of the war had lived well, it was of course a schock having to share the rooms (and the toilets!) with many.

During the summer 45 we were examined by police and special law officers and also had the opportunity to speak with our legal defence.

Some time before the trial in the late summer those whose cases were being prepared, were transferred to the prison in Bergen. and placed two in a cell.

From the trial itself I don't remember much. Only that we were 6 accused being tried at the same time. The others got about 3 years forced labour and I as the only one got 6 years because I came from a "good" or renowned family, had a good education and should have known better. Of course I appealed, but the sentence was later on confirmed by Høyesterett.

It would go to far to tell about the stations of my imprisonment. From Knappen to the military jail in Sverresborg (21 days because of insubordination against a prison-warden) then to Skulestadmoen where we built our own camp and at last in the winter 47/48 to Nesbyen in Hallingdalen where we lived high up in the woods and worked hard as lumber-jacks, but also had a lot of freedom.

There I got the message, that my sentence had been reduced to 3 years and because of good behavior I was to be released at once. That was in May 48. As far as I remember I came home in good health with a big beard just in time for my birthday in June.

When I today look back at those 3 years of confinement, I must say that I learned a lot. Not only some skills, like that of an electrician (in Knappen, where by the way the plot of "Solbris" started), or that of a blacksmith or a plumber, (Skulestadmoen) but also a good deal of common social behavior. I must say, I can't remember any sort of reeducation, for instant that we learned something about the different systems of democracie or the difference to the totalitarian rules. Even the papers were censored in the first year. We did first learn about all the atrocities of the Nazi regime in Germany after being released.

Just two days after being back in Bergen I took my Artium certifikate and went to the secretary of the University and asked for an enrollment. I told them, I was a frontkjemper, but nobody seemed to be interested in that and a few days later I was a student of law. As the lectures wouldn't start before September, I needed a job. That was not so easy to obtain. An office job was out of the question, because I had no qualifications to show. But friends told me that there was a company refining fish-oil which constantly looked for unskilled labour, payed well and did not ask any questions concerning ones past. So I started there cleaning fishoil-filters the whole day. My clothes smelled awfully, but besides a good pay, I got a wonderful soft skin!

After 2 months I met a class-mate who worked as a bookkeeper for a small agency. She asked me to deputice for her during her 4 weeks voyage abroad, which I of course happily did. Then my friends from the blacksmith shop in Skulestadmoen set up a small shipyard in Florvåg near Bergen and I worked there until the summer 1949.

During the winter I heard the lectures for the preliminary tests in philosophy (the lecturer was the son of my former rektor at school and knew me, but never mentioned anything about my past.) Then I started learning for the Dispatcheur-examen with a tutor and made the tests in the spring of 1949. The lectures for the philosophy were in the evening twice a week and the classes for the dispatcheur were only one morning

In the week so I could go on working for the shipyard. which was necessary because my father was withheld his pension until 1950, when he filled 65 years. 6)

With the certificate of a dispatcheur in my pocket it was not so difficult to get a job, that is to say if I didn't mention my past. After some refusals I stopped mention it and found a position in a small ship-broker company as a bookkeeper and accountant. The boss who was a good salesman, but had not much knowledge about technical matters had just acquired an agency for a famous German engine manufacturer and needed someone to take care of the technical part. Here my skills from the prison camps and advice from my friends from the shipyard, were invaluable helps.

After one year my boss asked me if it was true, that I was a Frontkjemper. As I couldn't deny that, he said that if he had known that, he would not have engaged me. But he kept me on the job.

In 1954 I found that I still wanted a better education and this time engineering was the word. After Trondheim declined my application for enrollment not because of the past, but my certificate was not good enough, I went to Germany with many others to study engineering in Hannover and got my diploma in 1960.

From Germany I applied for a job bei Norske Veritas, a company for which my diplom in ships-engineering combined with the dispatcheur examina should have been just the right qualification. Unfortunately I mentioned that I had been a frontkjemper and got the letter back with a big "NO" beside that sentence. (As a curiosity I can mention that the general manager of NV of that time was one of the founders of NS in Bergen)

When I stayed in Germany after that and made a certain career the reason was only that I found more interesting and qualified work there, than I ever would have found in Norway.

To end my tale I should like to remind you of what Arthur Koestler, the jew and formerly an ardent and later renegade communist has written in his autobiography :
Once you decide to join a political party or a movement like Zionisme, Kommunisme or Nazism, you are inside a closed circle, from where it is very hard to get out. If you voice the slightest criticism, others will tell you that you haven't understood the fundamentals of the real theory and in time will learn better to understand what the "Leader" or "Führer" or someone else means.

I think that is what happened to many of us at that time and what happens daily all over the world if we don't do all we can to educate young people and explain those mechanisms to them.

