

Shadowy Figure of a Sad Traitor

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Vidkun Quisling, whose attempted usurpation of authority in Norway during the German occupation of 1940-45 gave us a new word for traitor, became the best known of fifth column leaders in a period marked by many strange deviations in political allegiance. The man himself is, however, so shadowy a figure to the outside world that the lapse of time makes it easy for revelations of his private rectitude to confound the issue of his political turpitude.

The facts of his personal character are widely known in Norway and many of them were stated in evidence at his trial in 1945. He was an awkward and rather shy man, given to long monologues and equally long silences, mainly because he was a person of few and rather vague general ideas, taking little or no interest in other people, unless they came to sit at his feet.

He had excellent manners, frugal habits and a marked disinclination for any personal extravagance. His scholastic record was outstanding; in fact, he graduated from the Military Academy with the highest honours ever awarded. There was no trace of any love of violence or dishonest tendencies in any part of his life—outside his activities in politics.

NO DOUBT OF GUILT

Because the contrast between Quisling's private and public life is at first sight surprising, attempts have been made to explain away the latter. Could it be that he was a victim of circumstances, an honest man chained to the Nazi juggernaut; or a visionary who looked beyond a fratricidal war to the supranational community of the future but who, by an accident of history, had happened to choose the wrong side for partner?

There is, however, no need for such attempts to add a sort of mental fourth dimension to one who was well bred and intellectually well endowed, but in his sum total of qualities and shortcomings a rather ordinary sort of person. For one of the terrifying things about Nazism was its ability to attract just such a type.

Nor is there any doubt whatever as to his guilt and the nature of the crimes for which he was shot in October, 1945, on judgment given in the High and Supreme Courts.

He founded a National Union party of strong fascist leanings in 1933, the year Hitler came to power, and he was true to type in doing so: a military man with no ability for practical politics and therefore disgusted by it, a strong belief in authority and discipline, and a more than naive confidence that the majority of workers were misled political prisoners under socialist bosses, needing the liberating hand of organized

Scandinavian expedition the latter point seems particularly incriminating.

According to the minutes of the meeting, Quisling further declared that his National Party intended to prevent such developments "by placing suitable bases at the disposal of the German Wehrmacht". Quisling and Hagelin had come in order to clarify the future attitude of the Third Reich towards Quisling's party.

INFORMATION GIVEN

They felt that "a complete political reshuffle" must be possible in Norway. In this case, Quisling's party was "unlikely to remain passive". The speakers were anxious for "discussions with a view to concerted action", and there was a reference to troops being moved to Oslo. At the conclusion of the interview Raeder promised to inform Hitler and to keep Quisling informed.

This document was introduced in evidence during Quisling's trial in 1945. The court, however, did not have full knowledge of Quisling's activities immediately before the German landings. He went to Copenhagen to meet Colonel Hans Pickenbrock, of the German *Abwehr* (military intelligence), who had come from Berlin for this specific purpose.

The results of the Quisling-Pickenbrock conversation were embodied in the form of a résumé drawn up the following day (April 4, 1940), and incorporated in the War Diary of the Seekriegsleitung (naval command). Though it yielded no fresh information of use to the Germany Navy, it contained valuable information for the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe on the strength of Norwegian forces, the location of airfields, and the state of preparedness of the Norwegian Air Force, coastal fortifications, and so on. Quisling considered that six German divisions would be sufficient for a total occupation.

This entanglement with Nazi aggression lifted Quisling out of political insignificance into a new dimension where he was entirely out of his depth. The sequel was his six-day ministry at the beginning of the German invasion, then two years of management behind the scenes, and finally the three years of office as Minister-President.

He never made up his mind about the nature of his relationship with the Third Reich. He never gave up asking for a peace treaty and repeatedly maintained that hostilities between Germany and Norway had ceased with the end of the campaign in 1940. On the other hand, he did not object when his "Ministers" and the controlled press repeatedly tried to explain drastic German measures by pointing to the state of war with Germany. In the autumn of 1943, however, he suddenly declared that Norway was Germany's ally and at war with Germany's enemies.

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The party presented candidates in two elections (1933 and 1936), was unable to gain a seat in the Storting and finally split. Quisling's inertia in party crises was unbelievable. On the eve of the war, the National Union party had practically ceased to exist.

GRAND ADMIRAL RAEDER

Quisling, however, originally an admirer of Mussolini, had turned to Germany for support, and his self-styled *Stellvertreter* for Germany, Mr. Hagelin, was instrumental in paving his way to the highest places—including the Führer himself, with whom Quisling and Hagelin discussed possible German support, political and military, for a Quisling *coup d'état* in Norway.

The time was December, 1939, and the gist of the Berlin conversations was immediately put on paper by several initiated persons, among whom Grand Admiral Raeder was the most reliable, having least imagination.

According to Raeder, Quisling stated that Norwegian political life was dominated by "the Jew Hambro" (then president of the Storting), her press bought by the British, and her Government prepared to assist a British invading force whose targets had already been agreed upon. To anyone familiar with the stubborn Norwegian refusal to

become in any way implicated in the

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GAME NEARLY UP

This declaration had not been discussed in the Quisling Cabinet and led to strong protests from several leading party members. These protests became all the more emphatic because a number of Norwegian Army officers were arrested by the Germans on the same day and were sent to prison camps.

The German attitude towards Quisling was more consistent. Hitler used him when he could be useful, but otherwise ignored him, without bothering much about the courtesy nominally due to a fellow leader. As for his relations with the German civil and military authorities in Norway, the story is too intricate for brief examination here. But it may be summed up in the candid remarks of a Quisling supporter, Finn Stören, made in March, 1945, when the game was nearly up:—

"I have a feeling that the German authorities are deliberately making fools of you, Mr. Minister-President, and of the National Union. . . . As you yourself have pointed out, Norway is *de jure* at war with Germany. . . . in spite of all the support that Norway under your government has given to Germany. The *de jure* state of war has served and will . . . continue to serve as a justification for a taxing of our resources which, in many cases, is tantamount to robbery. . . . Under a pretence of friendship and cooperation they manage to make our administration share their guilt as plunderers and oppressors."

Having shared the guilt, Quisling shared the punishment.