

The teachers' resistance against nazification of Norwegian youth and education during World War II. By Joron Pihl.

Introduction

Why discuss the teachers' resistance against nazification of Norwegian youth and education here today?

History shows that it is possible to win a *specific struggle* against an overwhelming military power.

People can win by *political* means.

The teachers' resistance against nazification of Norwegian youth and education is one example of that.

Therefore it is interesting to study the policy and organization of the teachers' resistance.

There is a lot to learn from that, which can be useful even today.

Background

The Nazi occupation of Norway started on April 9th 1940.

The occupation was implemented by military and ideological means.

From the very beginning, the Nazi regime took measures to win the hearts and minds of the people in support of the Nazi regime and ideology. This was done in terms of policy guidelines, new laws, new organizations led by Nazis, new Nazi leadership in civil organizations and replacement of professionals who resisted the Nazi policies.

The Nazi policy was backed up by force: sanctions, persecution and arrests of people resisting the occupation.

Nazification was targeted at professions which played important roles in the Norwegian society: the teachers, the religious leaders and the police.

Here I will talk about the teachers' resistance against nazification of youth, of Norwegian schools and the teacher union.

I will briefly relate it to the teachers' to the struggles and resistance fought by other groups such as the priests and the parents.

However, the police professions did not resist nazification. On the contrary, the police served the Nazi regime and more than 50% of the policemen became members of the Nazi party.

Thus I will not go into the role of the Norwegian police during the occupation, but only point

to the fact that in sharp contrast to the teaching profession, the police profession was open to nazification, and served the Nazi regime.

The teachers' resistance

Again: Why talk about the teachers?

Because the teachers successfully resisted the strongest military power in the world.

They succeeded because their struggle was politically and morally just, and superior to the oppressors'.

The Nazi regime failed in its attempts at nazification of Norwegian youth and schools.

The teaching profession also resisted nazification of the teachers' unions.

What made this possible?

A few words about the context:

On 9 April 1940, a Norwegian fascist and collaborator seized power in a Nazi-backed coup d'état. The coup was led by Vidkun Quisling – a Norwegian Nazi traitor.

The Norwegian legitimate Government went into exile to England.

The Parliament was dissolved.

Nazi judges were installed in the Supreme Court.

From 1942 to 1945 Quisling served as so-called Minister-President in collaboration with the German Nazi occupying forces. Quisling's government came to be known as the Quisling Regime.

Illegal resistance was being developed and organized from September 1940: military and civil resistance.

Within the resistance, high priority and strong effort were put in to development of **political guidelines** for the resistance.

This was done in terms of development of political "paroles," based on thorough discussions.

Political mobilization and organization was based on the paroles.

The idea was: better no parole, than a poor parole.

As early as October 4th 1940, Reichskommissar Terboven issued a law saying:

"Public servants who do not with all their powers contribute to the new political order, can be expelled from service."

This law was used to threaten the professions to pledge loyalty to the Nazi party.

Five teacher unions got together and wrote a response which refused loyalty to the Nazi party.

8000 copies of the teacher unions' response were distributed among teachers around the country. In other words, the teachers were mobilized behind the protest against loyalty to the Nazi party.

In February 1942, the Quisling regime issued two laws:

- One law was about the Nazi Youth League, Nasjonal Samlings Ungdomsfylking (NSUF). The law obliged all children from 10 to 18 years of age to participate in the Nazi Youth League to support the Nazi regime.
- One law was about Norges Lærersamband, a Nazi union for teachers. The law made membership in Norges Lærersamband mandatory for all Norwegian teachers.

The teacher unions and the representatives of the church, immediately sent protests to the regime against these two laws. They argued that participation in the Nazi youth league and Norges Lærersamband was against the conviction of parents and teachers.

A committee was established to organize the teachers' protests against membership in "Norges Lærersamband" – the Nazi teacher union.

One person was decisive to the teachers' political struggle against nazification: Einar Høigård.

Høigård was a teacher and an historian. He had studied in Hamburg in Germany in 1935 and was very well informed about the Nazi development in Germany. In Norway he had worked as a teacher in secondary school. He then got a phd scholarship in education, thus connected to the university as well.

Høigård developed the four key political paroles that became the political foundation and organizing principles for the teachers' resistance:

- *Demand for membership or loyalty declaration to the Nasjonal Samling (Nazi Party) is refused.*
- *Every attempt to bring Nazi propaganda into the schools is refused*
- *Resist every order from non-competent actors.*
- *Resist any participation in the Nazi Youth League, NSUF.*

The teachers' action committee decided that teachers should protest individually against membership in Norges Lærersamband (the Nazi teacher union). The letter should be sent by the teachers to the Quisling regime on a particular date, February 20th.

The content of the letter was the following:

"I cannot participate in the upbringing of Norwegian youth according to the guidelines of the Nazi Youth League (NSUF), because it is against my conscience.

Since membership in Norges Lærersamband makes me obliged to contribute to such (mazi) upbringing, and because membership also puts other obligations on me which are against the conditions on which I was employed, I hereby declare that I do not consider myself a member of Norges Lærersamband.”

Ca. 12 000 out of 14000 teachers in Norway sent this protest letter to the Quisling regime, refusing to participate in nazification of Norwegian schools and membership in the Nazi teacher union.

The Nazi regime reacted by severe sanctions: expelling teachers from their jobs, withholding salaries and enlisting teachers to work for the Nazi regime. Teachers were enlisted to do hard labor under poor conditions at German military installations in Norway.

Reichskommissar Terboven, Hitler's representative in Norway, decided that 1100 teachers should be arrested and sent to the North of Norway, to do forced labor.

Lists with names of the teachers to be arrested were made by Norges Lærersamband – the Nazi teacher union. The teachers were arrested in different parts of Norway and put into camps at Grini and in Trondheim.

The arrests were of course the Nazis' attempts to break the teachers' resistance.

498 teachers were sent by the ship to Kirkenes on the 15th of April 1943

On the 11th of May a new group of arrested teachers arrived in Kirkenes, and were put to do forced labor for the Germans.

The conditions were poor.

In the fall 1942, imprisoned teachers who had become seriously ill, and teachers above 55 years of age, were offered release from arrest, if they signed membership in Norges Lærersamband. After discussions, the teachers agreed that 160 teachers should sign membership in Norges Lærersamband and then get released from prison.

The teachers' resistance was at its most intense from 1940 until 1942-1943.

Collaboration with priests and parents

On March 1, 1942, open conflict between The Norwegian Church and the regime broke out. The Norwegian State Church refused to be controlled by the state under the rule of the Quisling regime. The church issued an open letter to the regime, in which it resisted and refused any control of the church by the Nazi regime. The church refused specifically that Nazi priests hold sermons in the church. The letter was read in churches around the country on March 1, and reached out to very many people. It had a very important mobilizing effect on the civil resistance among teachers and parents.

800 out of 850 priests supported that the Norwegian Church resisted the Quisling regime's control over the Norwegian Church. Some of the priests were arrested. Nazi priests were appointed by the new regime.

A few days after the open letter of resistance from The Norwegian Church, another group came out in support of the teachers and priests resisting the occupation.

That was the parents.

Two women, Aasta and Helga Stene, organized the parents' resistance. They were teachers in secondary school. One of them had a phd.

Aasta and Helga Stene were members of a women's organizations, with branches all over the country: The women's league for peace and liberty, a Quaker organization. This organization had contact with the other women organizations in Norway, which constituted "The women's front". They mobilized The women's front in support of "The parents' front" against nazification

The Stene sisters made the following letter:

"I do not want that my child shall participate in the Nazi Youth League, because the guidelines are against my conscience".

It was decided that the letter was to be mailed by parents On March 6th 1942.

Parents were urged to mail the letter to the Quisling regime.

Ca. 200 000 parents sent the protest letter against nazification of children and youth to the regime.

People were arrested, but the Nazi youth league became a failure.

This was due to an alliance between the teachers, parents and the church.

Conclusion

The effect of the teachers' resistance was that Quisling's regime failed in nazification of Norwegian education and youth

Why?

- The teachers resistance was organized around political paroles and principles which were imperative and categorical: No collaboration with the Nazi regime was accepted
- The resistance was organized around the four key paroles which summed up the refusal to collaborate with the Nazi regime – written by Einar Høigård
- The resistance appealed to the teachers' conscience, and the values with they based their work as teachers on
- The democratic and Christian values, which were the foundation for the work of Norwegian teachers, became the foundation for the teachers' resistance. These values were supported by the vast majority of teachers, regardless of their political or

religious affiliation. The teachers were convinced that the Nazi ideology was in total conflict with the democratic and Christian values they adhered to.

- The resistance was very well organized – the teachers' political actions were coordinated and implemented with great discipline and timing
- The teacher resistance united teachers at elementary level, secondary level and university level.
- The teachers collaborated with the labor front, the parents' front, the womens' front and the church.
- The teachers were willing to pay the price when the Nazi regime started persecuting opponents.
- The teachers' resistance had a strong and wise leadership. Einar Høigård played a crucial leading role in the struggle. He was a highly respected teacher with strong moral integrity. And he had contacts among teachers as well as professors.

Einar Høigård was arrested while trying to escape to Sweden in 1943. He was tortured. He committed suicide - jumping out of the window under arrest at Victoria Terrasse in Oslo. He knew too much, and would not betray his colleagues. He became 36 years old.

But the teachers' front, united by Høigård's political principles and paroles, resisted nazification of Norwegian children and youth and the teaching profession under WW II, while threatened by the strongest military force in the world.

This is an historical fact. What can be learnt from this?