

ARREST OF TEACHERS PROMPTS NATIONWIDE PROTESTS



NORWAY TIMELINE

April 8, 1940:

Germany invades Norway, hoping to secure naval bases.

June 10, 1940:

Norway surrenders to Germany and King Haakon VII, along with the Norwegian government, escapes to London.

Vidkun Quisling, a fascist, proclaims himself prime minister.

May 8, 1945:

German forces in Norway surrender to the Allies.

October 24, 1945:

Quisling is executed after being found guilty of treason.

Norwegian teachers imprisoned in the Falstad Concentration Camp, near Trondheim, for their refusal to participate in the Nazi Teachers Association in the spring of 1942. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*



90 percent of Norway's 14,000 teachers resigned from the national teachers union under German occupation.

TIMELINE OF NORWAY'S TEACHER PROTESTS

February 1942

Prime Minister Vidkun Quisling demanded compulsory membership in Norway's national teachers union under German occupation. In response, the Norwegian Department of Education was flooded with letters of protest, including letters from parents. Within two months, 90 percent of Norway's 14,000 teachers resigned from the union, making it ineffectual.

March 20, 1942

One in every ten teachers was arrested and pressured to retract their protest. Those who were arrested were sent to concentration camps and assigned hard labor.

March–April 1942

Ten thousand teachers had their salaries withheld. The Norwegian government-in-exile in London sent money to help the families of incarcerated teachers. The civilian resistance collected donations from private citizens to offer aid. Smuggled reports regarding the appalling conditions and unspeakable treatment to which the teachers were subjected were making their way to Oslo. Despite the Nazi-imposed ban on demonstrations, an incensed citizenry staged protests throughout the country, which strengthened the morale and renewed the spirits of Norwegians.

The teachers' resistance seemed to inspire others to join the civilian resistance movement.

It was remarkable that teachers could inflict such an unconditional ideological defeat upon Nazism in Norway. There can be no doubt that the Nazi attempts at mobilizing Norwegian children for purposes of Nazification, more than anything else, solidified the Home Front.*

After two-and-one-half months of humiliation, forced resignations, loss of pay, torture, and other forms of maltreatment, it was obvious to the authorities that nothing was going to break the solidarity of the teachers.

April 25, 1942

The decree ordering the dismissal of teachers refusing to join the union was repealed. In May, the schools reopened and teachers were gradually released

* Richard S. Fuegner, *Beneath the Tyrant's Yoke: Norwegian Resistance to the German Occupation of Norway 1940–1945* (Edina, Minnesota: Beaver's Pond Press, 2003), 81–82

Norwegian Prime Minister Vidkun Quisling (first row, left) sits next to Heinrich Himmler during his visit to Oslo. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

Members of various teachers unions in Norway distributed leaflets urging teachers to remain loyal to their country and true to their profession by refusing to sign any pledge promoting Nazism.

from prison. Although they were no longer required to belong to the union, they were still expected to teach Nazi ideology and, therefore, many teachers refused to return to work.

Seven hundred arrested teachers from eastern Norway were transported to a military training ground near Lillehammer after a grueling 14-hour train ride in open coal cars without food. The teachers were ordered out in the middle of the night, ten miles from their destination, and made to march the rest of the way. Those who collapsed were whipped or kicked-up and ordered to proceed. After reaching the training ground, they were given a slice of bread for breakfast and then put through a series of exhausting physical exercises, drills, and marches. Those who lagged behind or hesitated were made to crawl on their stomachs through ice, water, snow, and slush with hands tied behind their backs. Some were given the task of carrying snow on a table fork or on a broom handle or moving wood piles back and forth. All of this to break the spirit of the group.*

Even after being subjected to such harsh conditions, the majority of teachers remained firm. Those who gave in typically had family responsibilities— young children or a spouse who was ill—and they simply had to get home.

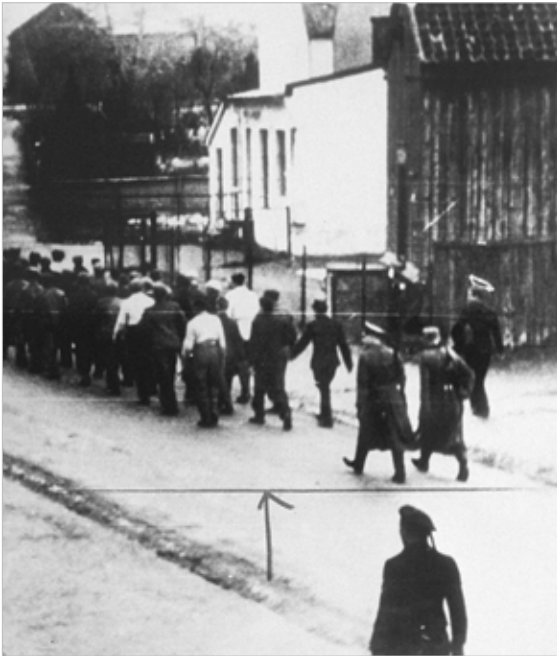
The prisoners were all paraded outside the barracks occupied by the Nazis in charge of the camp. The first man to be called in to sign the statement of apology was a sickly, rather elderly teacher who had sole responsibility for a flock of children. The others had let him know that there would be no reproaches if he signed. He dragged himself up the steps in an obvious state of collapse, which was painful to watch. Two or three minutes passed, and then he came out on to the platform at the top of the steps a completely new man. Standing in front of all 600 men, he clenched his fists and shouted: “I bloody well didn’t sign!” Then he went back to his place, and after that it was not easy for anyone else to give way.*

STUDENTS IN NORWAY

Students were defiant toward the Nazis and their Norwegian collaborators. They created symbols, insignias, and gestures to demonstrate loyalty to the King of Norway. They also jeered at soldiers or turned their backs to them as they marched down the street. Children who sympathized with the Nazis or Norwegian collaborators were often ostracized or even beaten.

When Nazi school inspectors entered a classroom, the students frequently showed their disdain by singing patriotic songs. Students were expected to join the Nazi Youth Movement in Norway, but high school students in Oslo

* Richard S. Fuegner, *Beneath the Tyrant’s Yoke: Norwegian Resistance to the German Occupation of Norway 1940–1945* (Edina, Minnesota: Beaver’s Pond Press, 2003), 81–82



refused. In retaliation, schools were broken into and teachers and students were beaten. Despite threats, arrests and bribes, the Nazis met with little success in attracting students into the Nazi movement and concluded that it was not worth enforcing.

The Nazis' determination to promote their ideology extended to university students as well. The vast majority of university students pledged with their university student associations to "oppose Nazification whatever the cost." When the Nazi candidate for student association president received only 11 votes, the acting minister for the department of education, a Nazi, announced that this would no longer be an elected office, but one that was appointed.

In 1942, although many university students were concerned chiefly about completing their academic studies, many were also engaged in illegal resistance and gathering intelligence, using the university as their base.

In 1943, when the Department of Education announced that "no association, club or assemblage except the [fascist party] would be tolerated and that no one outside that body would receive financial aid or scholarships," students voiced bitter opposition.

On November 28, 1943, a fire was set in the auditorium at the University of Oslo. Although it was believed that the Nazis set the fire intentionally as provocation, the students were blamed. Two days later, the Gestapo with 300 SS detachments closed in on the male students. More than 1,100 students were arrested on the streets, in their homes, and on campus. Eventually, about half were released, but 700 were sent to a "retraining camp" in Germany.

The President of Oslo University, Dr. Didrik Seip, after his release from a Nazi concentration camp at the end of the occupation, said this:

A dictator can close universities, but he cannot put out the light of reason, he cannot obscure the clarity of thought, and he cannot halt the drive to desire that which is right. Today our hearts are filled with happiness and thanksgiving that our university has carried on through want and slavery to a free status in a free land and that it can continue unhindered to work out the tasks which await it.

Norwegian political prisoners marched through the streets of Trondheim under German guard on their way to a labor camp in October 1943. *University of Minnesota Libraries*