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Contel

INTERROGATION
OF THE FORMER PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GERMAN REICH
IN DENMARK, DR. WERNER BEST, IN KASTELL.
KOPENHAGEN, 2 AUGUST 1945.

It is known to the subject that Fritz Clausen had many connections in German circles, including the embassy, previous to the subject's arrival in Denmark. Whether von Renthe-Fink had an interest in these connections personally is perhaps doubtful, but in any case an interest was felt by circles in Berlin, and the local German representatives were given to understand that they should maintain liaison with Fritz Clausen and his Party. The subject, before he arrived here, received no actual information concerning occurrences in this respect, but through talks with - among others Messrs. Meissner and Kanstein - he learned that the promise was made to Fritz Clausen repeatedly in the course of events that he would be able to create a government, and it is clear that these promises were given either upon the direct insistence of Fritz Clausen or at any rate as a result of his wishes. It is not clear to the subject how the coup d'etat was to take place, and it is probable that one never approached the thing so closely that detailed plans concerning it were in existence. Who actually gave to Fritz Clausen these promises concerning the formation of a government is also unknown to the subject; perhaps it is one of the local representatives, possibly also Abteilungsleiter Luther of the foreign office, who was in my case enthusiastically in favor of the thing, although, in the same fashion as many of the others, in a most dilettante manner. The exact reason why the coup d'etat was not taken up seriously is not known to the subject, but it was always clear to him that it could take place only by putting the king and the Reichstag out of commission, and certainly this is the reason why one shied away from it. It is not known to the subject who else, other than Fritz Clausen himself, took part in the negotiations directed at a Fritz Clausen government.

When the subject came here he was instructed to support Fritz Clausen politically; as already indicated, however, he was supposed to try to form a legal government which was to include National Socialists, and herein must lie the reason why von Ribbentrop did not at that time desire a coup d'etat; on the contrary it was desired that Fritz Clausen should enter the government himself, and this wish was undoubtedly expressed at the prompting of Luther. The subject immediately notified Fritz Clausen that he would not support a movement in the direction of a coup d'etat by him, which disappointed Fritz Clausen, for he had doubtless expected that greater support would now be forthcoming from the new plenipotentiary. Fritz Clausen complained at the same time that the promises made up to them on the matter of a coup d'etat had not been kept. The subject also declares that he had no further personal interest in seeing to it that National Socialists should enter the government and, as is known, after he had interviewed various persons who were considered eligible for the post of Minister of State, he recognized, without consultation with Berlin, the government of Scavenius, into which no National Socialists had been incorporated.

At the time the subject arrived here, Fritz Clausen was drawing continuous support from the embassy, with very high contributions, and without being able to certify the amount from recollection. The subject believes that it totalled two million Kronen a year; however, it should be possible to determine this from the books of the embassy, and probably Chancellor, Werner, will be able to remember the extent of the contribution. It was a fund which Fritz Clausen could dispose of as he saw fit, as its purpose was political party propaganda exclusively; perhaps Meissner was supposed to exercise a control through the manner in which the money was handed out. This support continued its very high contributions up to the election of the Folketing in 1943, after which the contributions fell off markedly. With regard to this election the subject declares that, from the outset, he favored its being held. Berlin circles, however, influenced further to be very much opposed to it, holding that it should not be permitted to take place. The subject does not remember having discussed the election with other Danish Nazis besides Fritz Clausen, who was sometimes for and sometimes against it, depending on whether, at the particular moment, he imagined that advantages or setbacks were to be had from it. It was therefore at the wish of the subject that the permission [...to hold the election...] was granted. After the election it was of course evident to Fritz Clausen that it had been a great setback, and it was clear to him that he would have to give up the big party-machine. He transferred the offices to North Schleswig and thereafter his support, as has been said, became noticeably less. The subject had, as stated, no personal interest in Fritz Clausen, and the political role, as such, of Fritz Clausen was played out with the election, but Berlin circles nevertheless expressed a desire to have him treated, in any case, as a long-standing friend of Germany. It was upon the instigation of the subject that Fritz Clausen later went to the front, in which connection the subject remarks that, from the beginning, he considered Fritz Clausen a degenerate psychopath in the process of decay.

Up to 29 August, 1943, the subject did not occupy himself with a change in the government; he was quite satisfied that he had brought about cooperation on a legal basis. Nor, does he remember that others suggested a change in the government.

After August 29th the subject was interested only in a new government which could be formed with the consent of the king and of the Reichstag; but he was not of the opinion that, in view of what the developments had been, he could take the initiative toward the formation of such a new government, to which end he would have been willing to listen to suggestions from responsible quarters. Upon being prompted he stated that now and then he received visits from persons who belonged to the Nazi Party or at any rate had interests in that direction, and that then the formation of a government was repeatedly brought into the conversation by the following: Hartel, Sehested, Schimmelmann, on a single occasion Helge Bangsted and Ejnar Jorgensen. The subject brought it at once to everyone's attention that he was interested solely in a government having the consent of the Reichstag, and more of the gentlemen went so far as to make concrete proposals. The subject did not get the impression that any of the above-mentioned gentlemen were revolutionary-

minded enough to desire a government brought about by force. Bent Holstein was encountered by the subject only once at a social gathering, and he never looked up the subject at his office. The subject met Lehnegrafen Schimmelmann and therefore discussed everything possible with him, but Schimmelmann was neither politically nor revolutionarily minded.

C. O. Jorgensen, who was leader of the Party after the fall of Fritz Clausen, held the view, unmistakable to him, that though a new government should come into existence the National Socialists wouldn't be able to get even a deciding vote in it; yet C. O. Jorgensen was interested, for the sake of the country, in the possibility of creating a government.

Relative to "Faedrelandet" ~~in~~ the subject declares that the newspaper was financially supported by "Mundus" in Berlin. "Mundus" was set up for the purpose of issuing newspapers in foreign countries, but the subject had nothing to do with the monetary affairs of the newspaper. The money was paid out by Clearing.

On the other hand, because German money was invested in the newspaper, the subject and others had a publishing control of the paper, exercised for the most part by the press attache's Meissner and later Schroeder. When articles appeared in the paper which in the opinion of the subject should not have been allowed the context they had, he saw to it that they were reprimanded; at intervals he discussed phases of the newspaper with the editor, Bangsted; but as long as an actual censorship of Danish newspapers did not exist he did not introduce any censorship into "Faedrelandet". Asked if he would not have had the power to do so, since he held control of the newspaper, he admits that he most assuredly would have had that power. After 29 August 1943 "Faedrelandet" was subjected to the same censorship as the other newspapers, but the subject was convinced that censorship, as far as "Faedrelandet" was concerned, was not always abided by.

The subject never read "National-Socialisten", however articles were occasionally laid before him which his press co-workers found too crude, and on that basis he had them reprimanded.

With regard to the German minority in North Schleswig, the subject had received no instructions when he came to Denmark, and knew nothing concrete about the relationships there, so that he had first to acquaint himself with them gradually. Up to the election in 1943 he had absolutely nothing to do with matters concerning the minority - except that he was called upon for assistance on behalf of the veterinary Muller when the latter failed to receive the position of Chief Veterinary (Overtierarzt) for which he had applied. When the question of representation for the minority arose, in connection with the elections, the subject held with the suitability of forming a special bureau under the Ministry of State, as he was of the opinion that thereby every form of opposition relative to the government could be avoided, and the whole administration could be identified more closely with the government.

The subject approved the formation of the "Selbstschutz" (Self-protection) with the express observation that the institution should have no executive authority and should assemble only in purely emergency self-defense in the same manner as private individuals. Concerning the "Zeitfreiwilligen" the subject states that these, in his opinion, were set up exclusively with a view to hostilities coming from outside the country, while the organization was to abstain from assembling in opposition to the Danes, and therefore it was very much against the subject's desire that the nationalized (Volksdeutsche) Zeitfreiwilligen as well as the German-born, were committed in the exceptional conditions of August-September 1943, concerning which the subject protested to general von Hanneken.

Conditions were such that no basis for intervention existed for the subject; to him the difficulties were clear which were connected with turning the common people from their earlier catch-phrase "Home to the Reich" ("Heim ins Reich") after Germany had decided to respect the integrity of Denmark, and to cause them to become the "Bridge to the North" ("Brücke nach Norden").