

D 26,02
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Tail

INTERROGATION
OF THE FORMER PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE GERMAN REICH
IN DENMARK, DR. WERNER BEST, IN THE KASTELL
COPENHAGEN, 6 AUGUST 1945.

The subject declares that he is able to elaborate on the points set forth on 31 July 1945 regarding demands from the German side which were counteracted by him. These notes are attached as pages 29 to 33.

To No. 1. The subject has nothing to add--except that he wants to emphasize that he approved the Cabinet of Scavenius which did not comprise Nationalsocialists, without getting in touch with Berlin. He'd like to remark that moreover he had advised at several occasions against a change of the form of government in Denmark as being imprudent and unfortunate because on the basis of his knowledge of the country, which he had gained gradually, he believed that just the democratic form of government was the right one for the country and was in conformity with her development and also her size. For example, he had found that unlike larger countries where corruption could spread more easily, there was no corruption of any kind in Denmark.

To No. 2. The subject had commented exhaustively.

To No. 3. He has nothing to add.

To No. 4. He has also nothing to add.

To No. 5. Re: Confiscation of Jewish Property in Denmark after 1 October 1943, the subject refers to his former statement.

To No. 6. Arrest and execution of hostages.

The subject declares that from time to time requests were made by the Army as well as by the Police to take hostages as is known in the affair Odense, in August 1943. The subject never took these requests particularly serious but rejected them under all circumstances each time very rigorously. However in the beginning of 1944 plans were submitted for comments via Berlin from the SS as well as also from the Supreme Command, in which the SS as well as also the Supreme Command demanded the arrest of hostages in order to curb the increasing sabotage activities. The subject held direct as well as telephonic conferences with von Hanneken and Pancke; about the plans, both approved the plans while the subject renounced them vigorously before these two gentlemen as well as before the Foreign Office in Berlin. He emphasized that the arrest of hostages would easily necessitate their execution, in which case chaos would undoubtedly develop in the country, because the idea that innocent people should be executed for the acts committed by others could absolutely not be imposed on the Northern Countries. Generally speaking, the subject was able by his strong protest to prevent the introduction of the hostage-system. However, he admits to have known that the police

in agreement with the military authorities placed prisoners on trains so that they would be exposed to the immediate danger in case of railway sabotage. But the subject has not participated in discussions regarding this measure, he knows about it only as a matter of fact. Incidentally, the subject thought that these measures were impracticable for the prevention of sabotage on trains as carried out in this country. The subject is reminded of the fact that prisoners, sentenced to death, were also kept as hostages in so far as their pardon or their execution was held up and made dependant on possible new acts of sabotage or attacks on Germans. The subject declares that in his opinion this procedure differs from the hostage-system. He admits, however, that the pardon depended on the course of events, and that the prisoners could count on it if the acts of sabotage ceased. The subject had the right to pronounce a pardon at the "Special Field Court of the German Police", that is in cases where this court had sentenced Danes but not in cases of Germans or Danes who belonged to the SS or the Police.

To No. 7. Execution of Danish prisoners as a reprisal-measure for attacks on Germans.

In the beginning of 1945 seven or eight German soldiers were shot during the changing of the guard in a factory. This caused the German military authorities to propose to the Supreme Command to shoot an equal number of Danish prisoners as a reprisal-measure. This proposal was submitted to the subject through the Foreign Office. He opposed the proposal vigorously and declared that such an action was out of the question in Denmark. The proposal was then not carried out.

To No. 8. Compulsory guarding of railroad tracks by the population, etc.

Frequently, the possibility of generally drafting the population for guard-duty on railroads was discussed. The Supreme Command had set off this question directly. The subject opposed it, arguing that it served no reasonable purpose since one did not contemplate to arm the whole Danish population, and since un-armed guards would not be effective against armed saboteurs. They accepted this argument. At the question whether these guards had also been expected to be responsible with their lives in case of sabotage, the subject answers that no such proposals were made with regard to Denmark though it is known to him that demands of that kind were made in other places.

To No. 9. Compulsory drafting of labor from the population for fortifications.

For the same principal reasons as in the question of compulsory drafting of Danish labor for the Reich, (see # 10) the subject opposed such a measure which was strongly advocated by the Army in the fall of 1943, to speed up the work on the fortifications in Jütland. Also for reasons of pure expediency. He had pointed out, would it be preferable to rely on current regulations and to employ voluntary labor through various firms.

To No. 10. Compulsory drafting of Danish labor for work in the Reich.

According to the subject the Reich Plenipotentiary for the mobilization of labor, Sauckel, has repeatedly in the course of time proposed compulsory drafting of Danish labor for Germany. He could not understand why Denmark should not receive the same treatment as all other occupied countries. Each time the subject had objected strongly against such actions. For one thing, he maintained the basic principle that Denmark should not be made a belligerent in the allied camp -- that would have been accomplished by compulsory drafting of Danish labor-- and for another, he foresaw the unfortunate consequences, without a doubt that would result, such as unrest in the country and a lowering of production so that such a procedure would impair the net result of the mobilization of Danish labor.

To No. 11. Confiscation and transfer of all Danish ships, docks and floating cranes.

Whenever a Danish ship escaped, the Navy raised the question whether such an escape could not be prevented simply by confiscating and transferring all Danish ships to Germany. Also against this, the subject had protested for reasons of principle as well as expediency and he succeeded in preventing a general confiscation of Danish ships. However, he was unsuccessful to prevent individual confiscations which took place without prior consultation with the subject in such way that he was informed of the confiscations only by orders issued to him. In the beginning of 1945 the Navy requested the transfer of all Danish docks and floating cranes to Germany. The subject was able to prevent this measure too.

To No. 12. Confiscation and transfer of all motor vehicles and bicycles, usable and in use at the time.

Time and again, over a long period practically every month, the Supreme Command requested the confiscation and transfer of all usable Danish trucks. The subject succeeded to prevent this. In fall, when the confiscation of bicycles took place, the Supreme Command had requested the confiscation of all bicycles in the country. Only by a strong protest the subject succeeded to have the request changed so that only the bicycles in factories or in shops were confiscated. In this way the confiscation of bicycles of private individuals was not effected.

To No. 13. Conversion of the advance payments of the National Bank to the armed forces into final payments to the war-effort by the Danish Government.

In 1944 -- the subject does not remember the exact time -- the Reich Ministry for Finance in Berlin suggested to impose on Denmark a definite contribution to the cost of the war--instead of constantly drawing from the National Bank, according to the agreement of April 1940. Berlin was concerned that the increased circulation of money would result in inflation.

This was after the experiences in Greece, for instance, not desired in other European countries. Furthermore, the opinion prevailed that it was more advantageous for Germany to impose actual war contributions on Denmark which were not to be paid back. One intended to ask Denmark to raise these war contributions through higher taxes, whereby it was believed to prevent an increased circulation of money. In a conference with the Secretary of the State, Reinhard, at the Reich Ministry for Finance in Berlin, the subject emphasized the previously mentioned arguments that such measures would make Denmark a belligerent and that also in view of the country's morale such demands should be discarded. The subject's protest was acknowledged.

To No. 14. Lowering of food rations in Denmark.

Time and again Berlin suggested to lower the Danish food rations. It could not be understood what entitled Denmark to have much bigger rations than the other occupied countries or even Germany herself. Particularly during last winter the Reich Ministry for Food put this request forward very strongly. The subject succeeded, by his protest, to prevent such a lowering of rations.

To No. 15. Positive regimentation of thought applied to the Danish press (e.g. pro-German editorials).

At various occasions the Ministry for Propaganda had proposed to compel the Danish newspaper to print pro-German editorials--as was done in the other occupied countries. The subject was continuously called in to conferences on the subject. Each time, he protested against such compulsory measures to write positively pro-German. He personally wanted to play with open cards in this respect and mark the articles published in the papers by German report accordingly. He argued that if one insisted on pro-German editorials, one would not get the Danes to read or believe the articles printed in the papers at all, since it would become known immediately that compulsion was applied.

To No. 16. Transfer of the official Danish broadcasting system to complete German management.

The Ministry for Propaganda repeatedly demanded a stronger propaganda in the Danish radio. The subject also opposed this. In the beginning of 1945, the Ministry for Propaganda and the Supreme Command requested the seizure of the Danish broadcasting system and its use for programs in the German language--to make up for the loss of other senders, in Germany caused by the gradual advance of the Allied Armies. The subject would like to add here that during his whole term of office he had been constantly under pressure from all sides on account of the radio as well as of particularly the press for not having reprimanded the press for writing between the lines and for their headlines, which were conspicuously biased. The interference was in so far against his wishes as he had wanted to leave it to the press to write almost as they pleased.

To No. 17. Confiscation of radio receiving sets of the population.

In regard to the confiscation of radio receiving sets, the subject states that the Army and particularly the police demanded it more and more claiming that the population was subjected to foreign propaganda and to illegal broadcasting, and that also the sets were used to instruct saboteurs among other things, by code-messages from England, and that radio sets could be used to issue orders in any case of an uprising. The subject succeeded to prevent such confiscation mainly by arguing that the population had a pressing need for sets in order to receive official announcements which would otherwise not be brought to the attention of the population sufficiently quick.

To No. 18. Compulsory billeting of German refugees in private Danish homes.

The subject states that the Reich Ministry of the Interior had decided that German refugees were to be evacuated to Denmark. The reasons for that were also based on technical considerations of the Navy according to which the refugees could not be brought to Kiel or a similar place (even at a time when such places were not in the combat zone) but had to be shipped to Copenhagen if they were to be evacuated at all. The subject protested vigorously against the evacuation of the refugees, because as a matter of principle there was no agreement with Denmark on the subject, but also because of practical considerations which would make the billeting of the refugees very difficult as in his opinion only barracks and public buildings could be made available. Berlin demanded however, that the refugees were to be billeted with private people as was done in Germany. The subject very strongly advised against this procedure as being impossible and against the desires of the population.

The subject would like to add to all these points that he had always and in the first place insisted on the maintenance of Denmark's special position. This was necessary because of the legal rights derived from the existing agreement, and also because it constituted the most intelligent policy.

Finally, the subject would like to add that the resumption of relations with the Royal House was mainly due to the subject's energetic initiative. He had made it clear to the Foreign Office that cooperation with the Danish Government would be much easier if one would not continue to make a show of one's offended feelings.