

# Norwegian teachers prevent Nazi takeover of education, 1942

- [an example of paradox of repression](#) [1]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [2]

## Timing

### Time period notes:

The Norwegian teachers' defense of education was part of a larger resistance movement, which incorporated both nonviolent and violent methods against Nazi rule in Norway.

February 5,  
1942

to:

November 4,  
1942

## Location and Goals

### Country:

Norway

[View Location on Map](#)

### Goals:

Primary: Prevent fascist government takeover of schools

Secondary: Preserve Norwegian culture during Nazi occupation

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 179. Alternative social institutions

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors

- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 037. Singing
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 128. Boycott of government-supported institutions

Segment Length:

Approximately 1.5 months

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Norwegian teachers
- Oslo underground cell

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Magnus Jensen, principal who represented Norwegian teachers in the Home Front Leadership. Secret resistance group comprised of several teachers from Oslo, which sent out simple communications to teachers.

Partners:

Parents of Norwegian schoolchildren, 200,000 of who wrote letters of support for the teachers, including in the letter their full name and address.

External allies:

Norwegian clergy, Norwegian king (escaped to the United Kingdom during Nazi Invasion), general Norwegian population.

Involvement of social elites:

Bishops of the state church resigned when occupation government created Fascist Youth Front for all 10 to 18 year olds.

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- 150 University Professors
- Parents
- Teachers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- farmers
- students along rail lines

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- A few sympathetic German soldiers

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

Approximately 1.5 months

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

Occupation Minister-President Vidkun Quisling and the Nazi occupiers

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

School closures

Campaigner violence:

Some resistance to the Nazi occupation was violent or included sabotage, although there was no known violence

as part of the teachers' defense of education

Repressive Violence:

On March 20, 1942, 1000 teachers were jailed and sent to the concentration camps where they endured starvation and extremely harsh conditions. Out of these, 499 were shipped to a concentration camp called Kirkenes in the arctic, where a teacher died and three were seriously injured while performing forced labor.

## Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Movement prevented occupation government from turning schools into part of fascist state, preserved and strengthened Norwegian solidarity, and ultimately helped slow the entire occupation government.

Although a painful number of teachers died in the concentration camp they were sent to, the campaign continued and most people involved lived to see its success.

The growth was so explosive at the beginning of the movement that there were very few teachers who didn't join immediately, but 200,000 school children's parents joined the campaign, and the teachers sent to Kirkenes were sent off with the support of farmers and other Norwegians along their route to the arctic.

Norway was invaded by the Nazis on April 9, 1940. Within two months, the Nazis had crushed Norwegian military resistance and installed a puppet government. Norwegians responded to the occupation of their country both nonviolently and violently. Because of the unprovoked aggression that the Nazis unleashed upon them, many Norwegians felt that all forms of resistance were fully legitimate. However, most saw nonviolent resistance as the only practical option, given the massive military advantage of the occupying military forces.

This resistance was centered on the question of how Norway could maintain its cultural and national identity during an occupation of indefinite length. Therefore, it largely began with people wearing lapel pins and other symbols of Norwegian solidarity. A particularly popular symbol was the paper clip, which meant "stay together." On the king's birthday, Norwegians wore flowers to show support for their exiled king. As their wearers grew more and more self-confident in their protests, the people would add to their lapel pins so that the symbols "grew." While this was largely a nonviolent protest, some people responded to having their pins ripped off by soldiers by placing sharp blades behind the pin to harm anyone who tried to rip it off. The protests were fueled by the presence of the Nazis and many actions of the occupation government, led by the fascist "Minister-President" Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian collaborator, only increased the size of the resistance. For example, the creation of a compulsory fascist Youth Front led the Bishops of the State Church to resign.

The Teachers' Defense of Education should be understood as a part of this continual resistance against fascism, which continued up through the liberation of Norway. While it is arguably the highpoint of Norwegian

nonviolent resistance during World War II, it did not occur in a vacuum. Quisling and his Nazi backers wished to create a Corporative State, meaning a state where the entire society is geared towards fascist goals. When Quisling attempted to transform the education system for this purpose, the teachers responded with a very successful defense.

Quisling created a new Norwegian Teacher's Union, which was to be led by the Norwegian storm troopers (occupation forces), and required all teachers to join on February 5, 1942. Almost immediately, an underground group in Oslo sent out a short statement for teachers to copy and mail to the authorities stating their refusal to participate, with their name and address affixed. This tactic worked best in urban areas, where teachers were able to learn of the plan in time to participate and between 8,000 and 10,000 of Norway's 12,000 teachers participated.

The teachers' action created panic in the Quisling government, and he ordered schools to be closed for a month. This decision sent the school children back home to some very irritated parents, 200,000 of who wrote letters of protest to the government. In addition, teachers continued to hold their classes in private, defying government orders.

Again, Quisling was outmaneuvered by the Norwegian resistance, and so the occupation government ordered roughly 1,000 male teachers to be arrested and jailed. Underground organizations continued to pay the salaries of the incarcerated teachers, removing financial pressure on the prisoners and striking teachers. However, the Gestapo used inhumane tactics in an almost entirely unsuccessful attempt to break the teachers. Rumors about the fate of the prisoners also increased pressure upon the campaign, but the teachers endured.

In April the government sent 499 teachers to a concentration camp near Kirkenes, in the arctic. When news of this action was leaked crowds of students and farmers gathered along the tracks to sing and offer food as the train passed. The teachers also formed their own choirs and gave lectures in order to maintain their sanity and pass the time. Around a month after their arrival in Kirkenes, word came in mid-May that the occupation government's Church and Education Department had given up on creating a fascist teachers' organization, and the teachers asked to return to their schools but they did not receive a response. During their time at Kirkenes, a teacher died and several were injured from the forced labor, but a German soldier secretly showed the teachers how to create beds out of hay to ease their conditions.

Eventually it became clear to Quisling that while the approaching winter might force the teachers to capitulate, he would lose whatever legitimacy he had left in the eyes of the population. By November 4, 1942, the teachers had all returned from the concentration camp. Thanks perhaps in equal measure to Norwegian pride and fascist oppression, the people of Norway had solidified into a resistance movement that successfully defended the schools from incorporation into the fascist state. The people would continue to give Quisling so much difficulty that he was ultimately forced to give up on his idea of the Corporative State altogether. Norwegian culture was successfully defended during the occupation.

## **Research Notes**

Influences:

Not known

Sources:

Sharp, Gene. *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*. Extending Horizons Books, Boston, 2005. Pages 135 – 141.

Skodvin, Magne. “Norwegian Non-violent Resistance During the German Occupation.” Pages 136 – 153 in *The Strategy of Civilian Defense: Nonviolent Resistance to Aggression*. Edited by Adam Roberts. Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1967.

Additional Notes:

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