

C O P Y

Copenhagen, 31 July 1945.

NOTES

During my term of office as Reich Plenipotentiary in Denmark I was guided in my political actions by two principles which are the pillars of my philosophy of life.

The first is the National principle which considers every nation as the materialization of an idea created by God and therefore confers on every nation equal dignity and equal right to live.

The second is the principle of the faithful adherence to treaties which coincides with my conviction that what is morally right is always in the long run also right politically.

According to these principles I decided to preserve and protect primarily the sovereignty and integrity of the Danish State as guaranteed by the German Reich on 9 April 40, when I took charge of my office in Copenhagen on 5 November 1942. I made this intention very clear by cooperating with the Government of the Minister of State, von Scavanius. Even today I am convinced that this cooperation could have been continued until the end of the war, had it not been blasted open during the first half of the year 1943 by the Danish resistance-movement. Rightly speculating on the mentality of certain groups in the German armed forces and of German political leadership, the resistance movement provoked these groups through its guerilla-warfare so long until the explosion of 29 August 43 came to pass. The resistance-movement aimed at aggravating the situation in Denmark in order to assure the country by its struggle a place among the allies. After the Allied victory one has to admit, of course, that the resistance-movement had been right and achieved its goal.

But in 1943 the guerilla-war in Denmark which provoked a tense situation were neither in the interest of the Danish population nor of the German Reich. Therefore, I struggled with all my strength against the nervousness and sensitivity with which the commander of the armed forces in Denmark and the Fuehrer Headquarters reacted to the acts of sabotage (which as individual acts, were really not especially damaging). But I could not win against "military necessities" ("Denmark is the strategic bridge to the North which ought to be absolutely secure") and against the prestige angle. This is why it came to the 29 August 1943.

After the State of martial law had been declared and the removal of the government Scavanius, it was for me much more difficult than before to continue by policy of the preservation of the Danish sovereignty and integrity. Certain groups on the Danish as well as on the German side were now inclined to regard the two countries as being to each other, even as being hostile at war with each other. In Germany, those circles demanded that Denmark should be treated politically and economically in the same way as the countries which were occupied on a war basis. The Danish circles mentioned wished the same thing and did everything in their power to provoke such a treatment. I stood in between these two factions, battling desperately

on two fronts for the combination of the policy envisaged by me. It was impossible for me under these circumstances to prevent all German measures to which I was opposed and which were in contradiction to the German-Danish agreement of April. Those measures were ordered against my opposition. A refusal to obey wouldn't have helped. I shall comment on the question of my resignation further down. Nevertheless, I was successful in preventing through my opposition and arguments a number of grave measures, which were demanded for Denmark by the German authorities, according to the examples set in the other occupied countries. I may today conclusively state that Denmark was in many, very important instances treated differently from all other occupied countries. This was the result of my struggle through 2½ years, for the policy envisaged by me--which could unfortunately not be realized in all its aspects. Personally, I got into hot water on all sides on account of my policy. In Denmark, nobody recognized what I did for the country because nobody knew what I had averted from the country; on the contrary, I was made responsible also for all measures which were carried out against my opposition. In the Reich however, I was regarded as a one-sided fighter for Danish interests against the German interests and I provoked particularly the mounting wrath of the highest authority. In the beginning of July 1944 Hitler made a terrific scene at the Obersalzberg and blamed me for not representing the interests of the Reich in Denmark energetically enough. When in spring 1945 telegrams were presented to him in which I opposed in no uncertain terms certain measures regarding Denmark, he called me "beast" in the presence of other people.

As far as I can remember--this may perhaps warrant some supplements yet--I prevented mainly the execution of the following measures, planned or demanded for Denmark by the German authorities:

1. Inclusion of the Danish National Socialists into the government and may I draw to your attention the list of cabinet members which the Minister for Foreign Affairs von Ribbentrop had handed to the Danish Foreign Minister Scavenius at the end of October or the beginning of November 1942 in Berlin and from which I deviated, when I gave my approval to the formation of the government of Scavenius, without consulting with Berlin.
2. Prohibition of the elections for the Folksting in March 1943 (in order to camouflage the weakness of the Danish National Socialist which I had just meant to demonstrate by the election).
3. Establishment of a permanent Military Government under the general von Hanneken after the 29 August 1943.
4. Transfer to the Reich of the Danish soldiers interned on 29 August 1943. (Instead I succeeded in obtaining their releases.)
5. Confiscation of Jewish property in Denmark after the 1 October 1943.
6. Arrest and execution of hostages.
7. Execution of Danish prisoners as a reprisal--measure for attacks on Germans.

8. Compulsory guarding of railroad-tracks by the population, etc.
9. Forced labor for fortifications.
10. Forces recruiting of Danish labor for work in the Reich.
11. Confiscation and transfer of all Danish ships, docks and floating cranes.
12. Confiscation and transfer of all motor vehicles and bicycles, usable and in use.
13. Conversion of all advance payments by the Danish National Bank to the armed forces into final contributions to the costs of war on the part of the Danish State.
14. Lowering of food-rations in Denmark.
15. Positive regimentation of thought of the Danish Press (for example, pro-German editorials from German owned sources)
16. Change-over of the official Danish broadcasting system to completely German management.
17. Confiscation of the population's radio receiving sets.
18. Compulsory billeting of German refugees in Danish private homes.

All these measures (with the exception of the last one) were carried out in most of the occupied countries. That Denmark was protected from them gave the country a privileged position all through the war relative to the other countries occupied on a war basis. Herein a partial success of my policy for the preservation of Danish sovereignty and integrity may at least be seen. Also, whenever a measure, which I was unable to prevent, interfered with internal Danish conditions, I explained to the Danish Government or the Central Administration that the measure was taken as a war emergency measure without prejudice to the sovereignty of the Danish State.

In as much as the Reich Cabinet ordered, against my opposition, measures to be taken to which I did not agree, I was faced by the alternative whether to resign my office as Reich Plenipotentiary or not. I have often discussed this question with the Minister of the State, von Scavenius, and with director Svenningsen. The result always was that it would be better for German-Danish relations and for Denmark if I'd remain in office instead of being replaced by somebody else. I could not resign incidentally, by my own free will -- as is proven by the rejection of my request for resignation of September 1944. When, without my knowledge and against my will, the Danish police had been dissolved and some of its members had been interned, I requested the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs to be relieved from my job. In spite of the strong reprimand which I had received, Hitler's decision was that I had to stay on the job. Quitting my job on my own, would have resulted in the most serious punishment.

(Signed) Dr. Werner Best

(The above notes conform in contents with the notes sent to Director Svenningsen on 21 June 1945.)