

Children of Conviction

AASE GRUDA SKARD

"THE CHILDREN are the future. Whoever has won the children, has won the future." The Nazis have realized the truth of this trite saying more clearly than any political group in history. A cardinal part of their system is the education and moulding of the next generation. Our greatest problem for the future world actually is these nazified children of Germany.

But what about the children of the Nazi-occupied countries? Are they being nazified too? Or is there any hope that the next generation will take up our fight for a better world and carry on our ideals of democracy? What about the children of Norway, that country of genuine democratic development which was in the midst of so much promising work when the Nazis broke in?

Soon after the German occupation in June, 1940, it became clear to the Norwegians that a major part of the struggle against the Nazis would concern the children and would be a fight

for the coming generation. As soon as the Nazis got settled in the country, they tried to get control of schools and youth organizations and to turn Norwegian children into Nazis. No Norwegian could at that time know how the children themselves would respond.

The first Nazi attack on the schools came during the winter of 1940-1941 as a clumsy attempt to have all pupils indoctrinated by the teachers with the Nazi ideology. This attack was vigorously repelled by the teachers and put both parents and children on the alert.

The Nazis then tried to win the children and youth over to their side by propaganda. In February, 1941, a great exhibit from the Hitler Youth Organization was opened in Oslo; evidently the Nazis hoped to show to Norwegian youth how attractive Hitlerism could be. But no Norwegian came to the exhibit. The schools then were ordered to send their students to the Nazi show, and special days were reserved for these group visits. The children answered by not coming to school at all on those days, not because they disliked school but because they *would not* go to something Nazi. It is told that one class was forced to go—boys and girls of 13 to 14 years of age. These children walked through the whole exhibit with their eyes glued to the floor.

The Nazis were infuriated at the rejection of their exhibit, and the Stormtroopers swore revenge. One day 150

Aase Gruda Skard, who in the October issue of Educational Leadership told of the intrepid teachers of Norway, discusses this month the amazing courage and ingenuity of Norwegian children in opposing the Nazi invaders. Herself a victim of Nazi terrorism, Mrs. Skard, who with her family escaped to the United States in 1940, writes with the fervor and intensity of one who understands from personal experience why we are fighting this war.

of them stormed into an Oslo school and began beating the pupils with clubs. A great battle took place, which ended with the imprisonment of many of the pupils, the headmaster, and several teachers. The following day all the school children in Oslo struck and not a single school was opened.

To demonstrate their attitude hundreds of school children assembled a few days later in the main street of Oslo. In prewar times on Constitution Day, it was the same street on which the children used to parade joyously with their flags waving, passing exultantly the Parliament Building, the University, and the Royal Palace where they greeted the King as the symbol of their independent country.

The children's parade of February 13, 1941, also passed the building of the Parliament where now the Nazi swastika was flying, the University where the brave President (now for years a Nazi prisoner) was leading the spiritual battle for truth and independence, and continued to the Royal Palace where dark windows gave them no greeting. It was not a gay parade; it was an expression of determination and conviction. These children had no flags flying; their flags were sewed to their backs so that nobody could easily tear them away. They were shouting greetings to the King and singing national anthems and songs.

The police came and tried to break up the parade. Many children were arrested. One little fellow, whom the police had not noticed, thought he was just as "guilty" as anybody else. He ran after the police and shouted: "Long live our King! Arrest me too!"

When the strike was over and the children back in school, the police came

to arrest the so-called leaders, the older children of 15 and 16. But the officers had a hard time getting them away from the schools because the small children of 7 or 8 years threw themselves on the ground in front of the wheels of the patrol cars and prevented them from starting. As soon as the policemen had carried these children away others were in their places shouting: "I am not afraid to die for my country." Perhaps they did not fully understand what they were saying; perhaps they just echoed what they so often heard around them. But their actions spoke for them.

The Children of the Nation Take a Stand

These strikes in Oslo were followed by general unrest and strikes in many other cities and towns. Children refused to have anything to do with fellow students who were members of the Nazi organization or whose parents were Nazis. Party members wrote miserable letters to the "Minister" of Education, complaining bitterly about the isolation their children were suffering. Whole classes and schools refused to greet the Nazi-appointed teachers.

As a consequence the assaults by Stormtroopers multiplied in all parts of the country. Patriot children were spanked and maltreated by these heroes of the "New Order." They were threatened with removal to Nazi reformatory institutions, and many actually were sent to schools for delinquent children. They were expelled from the schools and refused the right to take their examinations. One boy, for example, was deprived "forever" of the right to go to school because he had written on the blackboard quotations from Norway's

greatest nineteenth century poet which, evidently, were too appropriate for the present situation.

The struggle developed a new spirit of solidarity in the children. They learned to support each other and not betray either comrades or teachers. One high school teacher (now outside Norway) tells how one day he was asked to substitute for one of his colleagues in a class he did not know. Before the lesson started one of the boys got up and declared: "Teacher, you can feel safe here; you can count on every one of us. But take care that nobody is listening at the door!"

When the teacher asked the students what kind of work they would like to do that day, a girl said she would like to read something to the class; she then recited with burning fervor a famous speech of patriotism given by one of the signers of the free Constitution of 1814. The class cheered. But evidently someone had been listening at the door. The Nazi headmaster appeared and reproached the teacher brusquely for the material presented. The students immediately protested: the teacher had not suggested anything; it was their own proposal. The headmaster turned to the students and asked which girl had performed the recital. Spontaneously all the girls rose and said: "I did it."

Even Unto the Youngest

These were high school students. But even the youngest school children would refuse to give information about specific incidents, saying, "I cannot tell. We promised each other."

One could trace the same attitude of resistance and refusal even in pre-school children. Small tots 3 or 4 years old

would stubbornly refuse to accept candy from Germans—in a country where everyone is continually hungry.

The children can be trusted. They can be useful, too. Quick-footed youngsters, who know all the alleys and back yards, tear down the Nazi posters before the glue has dried and paint on wall and fences the slogans of Norwegian resistance, the encouragement of a sorely tried population. As recently as September 1, 1943, the "Ortskommandatur" (German authorities of administration) of a small city announced that children "again have deliberately destroyed doors and windows in numerous German bunkers" and threatened punishment.

Much pre-adolescent revolt and aggressiveness now find an outlet against the Nazi masters; children and youth join in singing mocking songs when the Germans walk by, the goose-stepping troops are imitated by laughing youngsters who are quick to disappear around the nearest corner if attacked. And much behavior that was punished in normal times, even including acts of violence and destruction, is now highly praised by the grown-ups, provided the victims are German.

The children know that they have both their parents and the patriotic teachers with them in their opposition against the Nazis. The great conflict between the teachers and the Nazi regime in February, 1942, began with an order to the teachers to teach Nazism and to the children of 10 to 18 years of age to join the Nazi Youth Organizations, which would involve compulsory, Nazi-supervised physical training and labor service during their free time.

When teachers from cities, towns, and villages were taken away to con-

centration camps, the children formed lines along the streets and roads where they had to pass, cheering them and singing the national anthem. They filled the platforms of the stations where teachers were put on the train. Police tried to drive the children away but they stood firm.

"You, Too, Must Fight"

The children's attitude was such that in the middle of the conflict of 1942, after all ordinary teaching had been forbidden, the teachers issued a letter of gratitude to all Norwegian school children. After acknowledging the courage of the pupils the letter goes on:

"You, too, can and must fight for our country's future together with us. And we know that you will, as soon as you realize what you can do. You must not be idle. If you are, you will not be able to build a better Norway when your time comes—and not many years will pass before Norway will need your help in that task. Each day you must devote some hours to school work. That is now your soldier's duty to your country. The teachers who have not been put in concentration camps will help you as well as they are able, and you will also get help from your parents; but first and foremost you must depend on yourselves. In that way you can help our country, and those who work hardest help it most. We expect and believe that not a single boy or girl calling himself or herself a good Norwegian will be a deserter from duty. Remember: *laziness is desertion.*"

The teachers could appeal in this way to their pupils because there had been no "desertion" even earlier. All teachers report how easy teaching was during those trying times because the children worked so hard. They put more energy into their school work than ever before.

High school students often would take part in the illegal (underground) work which kept them up every night till 1 or 2 A.M.; nevertheless they would show no sign of fatigue during the lessons and would do their home-work perfectly.

The children play their part with courage and perseverance because they feel that they are accepted as fellows in the common struggle, that they are part of a great unity. One might say that in Norway there are no children and grown-ups any more; there are just Norwegians.

With wonder and awe we Norwegians have seen the youngsters meet the challenge that has come to them. Nazi domination means a life of insecurity, where any father may be taken away from his home at any moment, where the mother may disappear without warning, where the scarcity of food and the lack of clothing means an eternal suffering. But all this is counterbalanced for the children by the feeling of security born of their acceptance into the common unity; whatever may come they share with parents and teachers, and it makes them strong. The children of Norway have demonstrated that they are able to carry burdens; and it makes them happier than if they were "spared."

The children's attitude is a great reassurance to every true Norwegian, and, indeed, should be a source of hope for every true anti-Nazi. Our enemies have conspicuously failed in their attempt to conquer the next generation. In Norway, the conflict is already decided. We know that we have already won. Democratic Norway of the future, based on security of life, justice, and truth is assured in the souls of those who are to build it.

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