

SEPTEMBER 3, 1945

p. 47

With Soul So Dead



Vidkun Quisling (on forced tour of patriots' graves) says that he loves Norway

The father of all this war's traitors, in name and example, entered a Norwegian court last week to stage a farcical and futile fight for his life. In a former movie house in Oslo, Vidkun Quisling, 58, went on trial for treason. With his thinning yellow hair slicked back and his blue eyes shifting nervously, the thickset, sour-faced defendant settled in the prisoner's dock to squirm during a week of crushing testimony, the most detailed yet to be presented at a war criminal's trial.

The Nine Crimes: Aided by Allied war-criminal investigators, who obtained depositions from high-ranking imprisoned Nazis, the prosecution charged Quisling with nine crimes: military treason, attempting to place Norway under foreign rule, civil treason, attempting to change the constitution, responsibility for the murder of sixteen Norwegian patriots, misappropriation of state and private property, embezzlement of state and party funds amounting to about 50,000,000 crowns (more than \$10,000,000), receiving stolen property, and unlawful seizure of privately owned real property.

In the first days of trial no witness denied Quisling's guilt, no Norwegian doubted that the man who sold Norway to the Nazis would pay with his life for his treason. His only defense was the unsubstantiated claim he made over and over: "I am the savior of Norway and the North." As the traitor wriggled hopelessly while the legal net closed about him, NEWSWEEK's Oslo correspondent cabled this account of Quisling, in power and on trial:

"All the world knew that Quisling was a traitor; few thought he was a coward, a brazen liar who stammered like a schoolboy caught stealing apples when the prosecutor and judge caught him. Everybody knew he had sold his country for money and power, but few imagined that he was a vain fool to boot, falling for every Nazi trick and false promise. Now it is clear that Quisling, even in what should have been his heyday as Norway's make-believe Führer, was pitifully alone, surrounded by drunken misfits and failures whom he called his Cabinet ministers, and on every turn tricked by his Nazi masters. This is the picture of his road to perdition reconstructed in court:

Vidkun Quisling

The Fruits of Genius: "Quisling himself conceived the plan of delivering his country to the Germans if war materialized. A military genius, even if a poor statesman and politician, he drew up a brilliant plan for capturing Norway, submitted it to top Nazis like Alfred Rosenberg and Grand Admiral Erich Raeder. He finally succeeded in getting to Adolf Hitler—and convincing the Führer.

"When the time came for attack, Norway's prewar politicians eased the way for treachery. For on the witness stand last week Col. Rasmus Hatledahl, chief of staff in 1940, admitted he had unsuccessfully implored Premier Johan Nygaardsvold's Cabinet to decree general mobilization on April 5, 1940—only four days before the invasion. Not until April 9 did the Cabinet move. It ordered a useless 'silent' mobilization — summoning Norway's reserves by postcard instead of radio.

"The Norway operation would have been more effective had the Nazis followed Quisling's masterful plan, for it warned against attempting to capture Oslo by naval action, and instead recommended surrounding the capital with paratroopers and thus catching King Haakon and the government before they could flee.

"But if the Nazis were slow to accept all his offers, Quisling wasted no time waiting for his reward. He appointed himself head of the state—and got his first disillusionment. The Wehrmacht would have nothing to do with a traitor like Quisling, and Hitler dispatched Josef Terboven as governor. Six days after the invasion Quisling and his so-called government resigned on orders from Berlin.

"Quisling was taken back eventually but only as office boy, for the elaborate ceremony installing him as 'Minister President' in February 1942 meant nothing. (As the trial judge put it, he could not even sign a document pensioning a dog-catcher without asking Terboven—and Terboven loathed him.)

Riddle of a Fool: "To show up Quisling as a fool in Berlin, Terboven encouraged his every mistake: He applauded Quisling for persecuting schoolteachers, academicians, university students, and Jews, and the vain Minister President swelled with pride. Hitler, dangling the prospect of Terboven's dismissal, persuaded the traitor to sign death warrants, order deportation of whole categories of citizens, and commit other infamies. In the final analysis, Quisling was content as long as he could live well on the money the Germans allowed him to steal from dissolved Masonic societies and Jewish fortunes, happy when he could eat on silver from the royal palace and gaze on priceless Dutch masters stolen from wealthy but absent fellow citizens.

"As the Norwegian traitor neared the end of his road to a firing squad, his trial gave only one answer to the riddle of how Quisling became a quisling. Only lust for power could explain why a top honor graduate of the Norwegian Military Academy and the late Fridtjof Nansen's friend and collaborator became the most despicable of traitors; why a man made a Commander of the British Empire for signal services to Britain turned into a violent Anglophobe; and why the erstwhile friend and admirer of Lenin became an anti-Communist crusader."