

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM

Interview With

KONRAD NORDAHL

Oslo, Norway
May 22, 1964

by Philip C. Brooks, Director
Harry S. Truman Library

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EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM M INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

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[1]

DR. PHILIP C. BROOKS: Can you tell me how long your affiliation with the labor movement had been?

MR. KONRAD NORDAHL: I've had my affiliation for fifty and a half years.

BROOKS: And you are now head of this labor organization, are you not?

NORDAHL: Yes, I have been head of the Trade Union movement in Norway since 1939.

BROOKS: That includes all the period that I'm talking about, the thirties to the origin of the

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Marshall Plan. Now, the reason that we're talking about the Marshall Plan, Mr. Nordahl, is that in our country, it is a high point of foreign relations of the Truman administration. We generally feel that some of his greatest accomplishments were in the field of international relations. So that the Marshall Plan, itself, is of very great importance to us, and I'm wondering, would you say it's generally regarded equally over here?

NORDAHL: My personal impression was that the Marshall Plan was a very good idea. It was very helpful for Western Europe, and very, very helpful for Norway.

BROOKS: The Marshall Plan was initiated in June 1947, when General Marshall made a speech at Harvard University. Were you prepared for this kind of vigorous action on the part of the United States?

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Did you expect that?

NORDAHL: No, no, we didn't expect that.

BROOKS: Do you remember what your immediate reaction was, or the reaction of the labor group?

NORDAHL: My reaction was that it would recover from the war, and to build up our economic system, and get a higher standard of living.

BROOKS: What did you think were the greatest needs of Norway at that time?

NORDAHL: Well, there was import of machinery for building up the industry.

BROOKS: So, that what was needed was credit to take care of the imports, because you had an unfavorable trade balance?

NORDAHL: Yes, we had an unfavorable trade balance.

BROOKS: Would you say that was more important than building up the Merchant Marine?

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NORDAHL: That was equal.

BROOKS: What were Norway's greatest assets? The Marshall Plan called for participation by all the governments of Europe, cooperating and contributing as much as they could to their own

recovery. What was the greatest contribution that Norway had to make? Was it manpower? Was it shipping? What was it?

NORDAHL: It was the Merchant Marine that was important and the export of paper and pulp, and then sulphur, and iron ore.

BROOKS: And, these were exported mostly Westward, is that right, or more into the Continent?

NORDAHL: They were exported to other countries mostly in Western Europe.

BROOKS: Was England the biggest one?

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NORDAHL: Yes, well England, and the European continent.

BROOKS: There was an effort made, Mr. Nordahl, to get the Russians to participate in this.

NORDAHL: Yes, I remember that.

BROOKS: Did you think it was a good idea to ask them?

NORDAHL: Yes, I think it was a very good idea of President Truman to ask all the nations to cooperate. I know many of the satellite countries wished to cooperate, Czechoslovakia and Poland, because they had a big need, but the Russians said no. Stalin said no.

BROOKS: Did you expect that the Russians would join the program or not?

NORDAHL: It's not easy to remember, but I think my

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impression was that the Russians would not join it. I think it would have been all right if they'd been in it.

BROOKS: Some people have told me that the plan never would have worked if the Russians had been in it.

NORDAHL: They had to work together with us at that time because they needed money. They couldn't dictate to the United States.

BROOKS: What do you remember was the attitude toward Germany, Mr. Nordahl? There was a good deal of bitterness, I know, but Germany was a pretty important export market, wasn't it?

NORDAHL: Well, yes, after the Currency Reform in 1948.

BROOKS: There were debates in Paris as to the level

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of industry to which Germany would be allowed to rebuild. What was your attitude on that?

NORDAHL: Well, you see, the feeling against Germany was a very strong one at that time.

BROOKS: Most people that I talk to in Europe have told me that despite that feeling that a strong Germany was important economically to the rest of Europe.

NORDAHL: Oh, yes, and then Germany has always been one of Norway's biggest trade partners, before the war, and now again.

BROOKS: Mr. Nordahl, were there differences of opinion within Norway, as to the Marshall Plan and the United States aid as among labor, industry, agriculture, and so forth?

NORDAHL: No, I don't think there was any. You know,

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the Communists were against it and the Russians said no, so the Communists have said we should say no, but I think generally people were for it.

BROOKS: So, as the head of a labor movement, you didn't feel that you had a strong position that was different from the industrial leaders, or the shipping interests, or anything...

NORDAHL: No.

BROOKS: The winter of 1947 and 1948, Mr. Nordahl, was a bad winter, and the economic reform hadn't taken place yet. Even after General Marshall made his speech, it was several months before the American Congress approved this project, so no aid was forthcoming. Did that make problems here, were the Norwegians concerned about it?

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NORDAHL: Not very much.

BROOKS: I wondered if, for example, the debates in the American Congress -- I wondered if the Norwegians followed those?

NORDAHL: A few people I think followed it.

BROOKS: Well, now as the program worked out, after the setting up of the organization, Mr. Nordahl, did you think the Norwegian interests were well represented in Paris? Did you think that the conduct of the Marshall Program was good.

NORDAHL: Generally, I think it was good, generally. I don't know the details. My impression, generally, was very good.

BROOKS: And that Norway was fairly considered. Was there any debate in Norway as to whether the funds for industry, for example, should go

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through a government organization or should give more encouragement to private industry?

NORDAHL: Well, there was discussion about that. I, myself, and the labor union was interested, most through the government.

BROOKS: I wondered if there was that kind of controversy, if the Marshall Plan, itself, complicated that problem?

NORDAHL: Well, there was some controversy, but, it was ironed out.

BROOKS: The recovery that was proposed through the Marshall Plan was accomplished in less time and with less money throughout Europe than the Committee of Paris expected in 1947. Was that true of Norway, would you say?

NORDAHL: Yes, the results were felt in three years time.

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BROOKS: Would you say that was because of the effectiveness of the organization in Paris?

NORDAHL: Well, I can't talk about the effectiveness of the organization in Paris. But we had your representative here -- Mr. Gross was here. You know him?

BROOKS: No, I don't.

NORDAHL: He was a very fine man. He helped us to get the new aluminum plant.

BROOKS: Did you at the time think, or maybe hope, that the Marshall Plan would lead to economic union, a common market, or a political union?

NORDAHL: Well, it was a great help to integrate the economics of Europe but now, you know, we have two economic blocks. That's not good.

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BROOKS: There were some people, who felt, when the Marshall Plan was initiated that this ought to be the aim. Would the people of Norway have approved of that?

NORDAHL: It was a great experiment, a planned economy.

BROOKS: Now, would the Norwegians have favored that trend?

NORDAHL: Yes.

BROOKS: What did most people there think about the motives of the United States? Do you think they thought the United States was really doing this out of idealism or that it was largely building up export markets for the United States?

NORDAHL: We will not discuss the motive, but the result of it. The result was good.

BROOKS: What did the Norwegians think of Mr. Truman?

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Do you have any particular reaction...

NORDAHL: Yes, I met Mr. Truman once.

BROOKS: Did you?

NORDAHL: Yes.

BROOKS: When was that, Mr. Nordahl?

NORDAHL: In San Francisco, in '48.

BROOKS: During the Presidential campaign?

NORDAHL: Yes, it was in July. I attended an ILO conference in San Francisco, and he gave a breakfast for all the delegates, early in the morning and we shook hands with him.

BROOKS: Did he talk?

NORDAHL: Well, only a few words. Oh yes, I like Mr. Truman very well.

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BROOKS: You got a good impression of him?

NORDAHL: Yes, a very good impression of him. He was a good fighter.

BROOKS: Did you have any special impressions of General Marshall or Averell Harriman, or Will Clayton?

NORDAHL: I met Harriman at a dinner party in New York, but I did not have any conversation with him.

BROOKS: Well, did you feel that these people understood the problems of Norway and that they were approaching them intelligently?

NORDAHL: Yes, they understood the problems of Europe.

BROOKS: Did you meet Bevin or Bidault or any of the French or the British leaders?

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NORDAHL: Yes, Ernest Bevin. I met Bevin during the war in London.

BROOKS: He was, of course, one of the most active people in getting the Marshall Plan underway.

NORDAHL: Yes, I remember that. He was Secretary of Foreign Affairs at that time.

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