

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM

Interview With

POVL WESTPHALL

Copenhagen, Denmark
May 1964

by Randall S. Jessee
for the HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

THE HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY
Independence, Missouri
January 1966

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

NOTICE

These are transcripts of tape recorded statements made for the Harry S. Truman Library. Drafts of the transcripts were edited by the interviewees but they made only minor emendations; therefore, the reader should remember that these are essentially transcripts of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

RESTRICTIONS

These transcripts may be read, quoted from, and cited by researchers. Publication rights, however, are retained by the Harry S. Truman Library.

HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM INTERVIEW

POVL WESTPHALL

NOTES

Mr. Westphall is one of the leading journalists in Denmark. He was quite active in the Resistance Movement during the war and is still a very active and well known person. He was, at the time of the interview, the leading reporter of the *Berlingske Tidende*, a conservative newspaper, with a circulation of 172,000. Mr. Westphall is of interest both because he knew a great deal about the Marshall Plan, and because he attended a press conference of President Truman's and at another time heard him speak.

I met Mr. Westphall while I was in Denmark but could not arrange the interview before I left. It was therefore conducted by Mr. Randall S. Jessee, formerly of Kansas City, who was then press officer of the United States Information Service in Copenhagen.

EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM INTERVIEW

with

POVL WESTPHALL

Copenhagen, Denmark

May 1964

By Mr. Randall S. Jessee, Press Attache, United States Information Agency, Copenhagen, Denmark, for the Harry S. Truman Library

MR. RANDALL JESSEE: Mr. Westphall, we're interested in your experiences of attending Presidential press conferences. Would you tell us when and where these took place? What other persons of special interest were present, if you remember, and what were your impressions?

MR. POVL WESTPHALL: Well, in September of 1945, shortly after the liberation, the United States Government invited a group of eight Danes, newspapermen, mostly from the underground movement, and we started for the United States

[2]

in early October 1945. We came down to Washington after a week's briefing in New York, and we attended a press conference with President Harry S. Truman.

You must understand that we in the occupied countries did not know much about the President at that time. We had only read about him and heard about him on radios, which we were listening into illegally. There was a lot of confusion about his person and what he really stood for.

The group who came to Washington was, among others, our present Ambassador to Thailand, His Excellency, Ebbe Munck and the former editor-in-chief of the daily Politiken, in Copenhagen, Sven Tillge Rasmussen, Borge Houmann Abildtrup, and two late colleagues of mine, Hans Hansen and Gunnar Nielsen. After the press conference, we presented the Danish Freedom Fighters armband to the President. It took place in the President's

[3]

private office, after the press conference.

The press conference, itself, is still a very, very clear memory to me, although it is nearly twenty years ago that it happened. Because for the first time, I realized what a strong personality, President Truman was. He was remarkably sharp, and fast in his answers to all the questions, which were shot at him at this enormous press conference. The knowledge behind the answer was an obvious thing. It created immediately very, very great respect for the man's ability and personality.

JESSEE: Well, what impression did you have of President Truman, personally, as a President? You can be very frank, because this is for the Library files.

WESTPHALL: Personally, I must say it was a very, very warm hearted person we met, when we talked

[4]

about Denmark during the five years. We spent, let us say, twenty minutes in his room alone with him, and saw several other things which he had got as memorials from the wartime from other nations. We talked about his cooperation with our late Ambassador Henrik Kaufman, and the special conditions of our little country. You could feel his deep interest, and that he had really been briefed on Denmark before we had arrived, because he could ask questions, which surprised us.

It was later that we got the impression of the great American leader. Of course, when you only have a first impression of a man, you just get a dim picture. But, I had the opportunity, just three years later, to meet the President again.

JESSEE: That was during the 1948 campaign?

[5]

WESTPHALL: Yes, I happened to be on the first round-the-world flight a Dane took part in and I stopped off in Minneapolis and St. Paul. That was at the time when President Truman was speaking and Governor Dewey was soon coming in.

It was said to me in all the important circles of the town that nobody could expect a reelection of President Truman and that it would be a landslide for Governor Dewey. I was listening in to one of the speeches President Truman gave. I could feel he was a very relaxed and convinced person, convinced of his own right attitude towards internal policy and toward the rather complicated international situation.

But, even with that impression, I left the United States late October 1948, with a feeling that there would be a change in the

[6]

government. But out in the Far East, I got a message about what really happened, and everybody was as surprised as I was. Where I happened to be was in Shanghai.

JESSEE: Now, as to the Marshall Plan, Paul. There are several questions that have been used, and I think that the journalist's opinion would be quite valuable in analyzing the Marshall Plan. Were you or were the people of Denmark surprised that the United States would take such a vigorous stand as in General Marshall's speech at Harvard on June 5, 1947? Had there been so much preliminary discussion that something like this was expected?

WESTPHALL: No, definitely not. You see, this country – Denmark -- was in a very shabby condition. The Germans had been rather hard to us during the five years and we needed something to give us

[7]

strength back again, because we were in a transitional period, where an agricultural country turned into being an industrial country, and that process was stopped by the war.

When the Marshall Plan came up, we listened with a little bit of, I won't say suspicion, but with some doubts, whether it would be a reality or not. But that day, when it became a reality, we could see in perspective the work done by the great nation, the United States.

JESSEE: You were amazed at the rapidity with which the plan was put into operation in the preparatory committee meetings in Paris in 1947, then?

WESTPHALL: Yes, that's true. But then, you see in that period, Denmark was in a situation where we had a lot of difficulties. We still had rationing of many, many products. We still had

[8]

unemployment and many difficulties. The political effects of the Marshall Plan did not have the great echo. It was the reality when it came into work. When Mr. Marshall was sent over here to represent the Marshall Plan, we realized that something was going to happen. You can see for yourself today, if you go into some of the big Danish industrial installations, what really has been put to work in this country by the citizens of the United States, by the taxpayer of the United States -- new machinery, new ideas, new production tempo, and an inspiration. This gave us a push which was the background, let us say, for the whole development of the new industrial epoch in this country which later gave us a possibility for increasing the export not only to European countries but also to the United States -- where, when the Marshall aid started, we only had an export a

[9]

year of around \$70 million -- and then last year it was, so far as I remember, nearly a billion Danish kroner. In that perspective, you can see what really was put down from the United States. But, I must say something, the doubtful people in this country -- there were a few of them -- they still say it and I think they meant it -- that this is not done by the United States for our "blue eyes" sake, there must be something behind it. That was an attitude that you could meet in many circles. But it was later on, of course, forgotten and if today you looked backwards over the history, you have again to pay respect to what the United States has done.

JESSEE: Well, now, did the Danes feel that they were fairly represented at Paris in the CEEC meeting there?

WESTPHALL: I think so.

[10]

JESSEE: And, they felt that the great powers understood their problems?

WESTPHALL: Oh yes. I'm absolutely convinced about that.

JESSEE: The Marshall speech called for close cooperation among the European nations.

WESTPHALL: But that was too early.

JESSEE: Yes. Did you feel that this was possible so soon after the war? In other words, that the Marshall Plan would work.

WESTPHALL: No, at that time it sounded more like a Utopia.

JESSEE: It was just too much to hope for.

WESTPHALL: Too much to hope for, because there were too many ruins, too many difficulties, too many

[11]

complicated political situations, too many barriers between the European nations. It took more, really more than ten years after the Marshall Plan started, before the ideas of a closed European cooperation economically and in other ways really became a reality. But I must say, I think that the Marshall aid, as such, was a foundation for the whole thing.

JESSEE: In other words, it was of first interest to the Danish economy?

WESTPHALL: Yes, definitely.

JESSEE: Did the Danes feel that Great Britain, France, or any other power took too much leadership in Paris at that time?

WESTPHALL: It is an obvious thing that the bigger nation always will take leadership. That's an obvious thing.

[12]

JESSEE: They didn't think it was an unusual...

WESTPHALL: No. They were listening with respect to what was said from Norway and Denmark, the smaller countries -- Holland and Belgium too.

JESSEE: Now, you will recall that Russia was invited and Molotov went to Paris to confer with Bevin and Bidault. What was the Danish feeling towards Russian participation in the Marshall Plan?

WESTPHALL: I don't think that many people at that time really believed that it would be a reality.

JESSEE: Do you think the plan would have worked with Russia in it?

WESTPHALL: If there would have been realities behind it. I mean if it had been a constructive thing. There was more talk and wishful thinking than anything else. Because at that time,

[13]

you remember, the Russians had already started the veto tactic in the United Nations, and so on.

JESSEE: So at that time, there was some distrust of the Soviet? What was the Danish feeling toward German recovery, the level of industry to which the Germans would be allowed to redevelop? Was there some discussion of that here in Denmark?

WESTPHALL: You must remember that a lot of emotion would be involved in the relationship between Western Germany and Eastern Germany too, especially Western Germany, and Denmark and Norway and other countries which had been occupied. It took some time to readjust a mentality where we could come in for, let us say, a real clean cooperation. It was an occupation country for a long time. When it

[14]

appeared that Germany was coming back on her feet again, several of us were thinking, "Why some of the important and big powers hadn't been so wise that they had put up a kind of a demand on the German economy. For instance put in, you can call it a foundation or saving fund, whatever you will, a sum of money each year which represented a part of the defense costs which all the other countries in Europe got, but not Germany. So for twelve years, Germany was in the situation, they could rebuild their industrial power and do it without too many cuts on their own national budget, any kind of...

JESSEE: Reparations?

WESTPHALL: Yes, as we had to do it. It was much for the small countries, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and Denmark, to mention some of them.

[15]

That of course left some bitterness. But then today, when you see the development, what has followed after the Marshall aid, what has followed after the critical period, and what has followed after when we established the Atlantic Treaty cooperation in NATO, then you realize that it was good that foresighted men and calm thinking were behind the attitude when the new revolution was coming.

JESSEE: Then, in other words, perhaps we could say it this way. That at first the reaction was psychological and later on, realistic and economic factors entered into it. I guess Germany is a consumer for Denmark, aren't they?

WESTPHALL: The next to the biggest we have. We have, you know, a very close trade cooperation, and a traditional one with Great Britain, then we

[16]

have Western Germany, and then the United States. We have created an export from this little country, which is far more than we expected or dreamt of when the war ended. We have been fortunate that the things we have produced have been accepted in a way which is to our benefit. Because you must remember, everything we produce is a reproduction. We have no raw materials.

JESSEE: So it's fabrication?

WESTPHALL: Yes, it's fabrication the whole way through.

JESSEE: Did the differences of opinion in Denmark divide along lines, such as labor, agriculture, industry? Were there different groups that were in favor of the Marshall Plan or against it?

[17]

WESTPHALL: No, I won't say that.

JESSEE: It didn't divide itself in groups?

WESTPHALL: Apolitical difference, and that is if you look at the left wing part of the country, which at that time was not so weak as it is today, they had a strong word against it. For instance, I, myself, was called in the Communist paper "a horse in front of the American carrier." Because I was too pro-American in my whole attitude to many things.

JESSEE: To the Marshall Plan and all...

WESTPHALL: To the Marshall Plan, to NATO, to what was going on in the United States. I saw an inspiration in what you could give Europe in the matter of using the modern technique in the right way. Don't forget that fifteen years ago

[18]

we were worrying in this country about the American materialistic form of living -- today we have it. Exactly the same.

JESSEE: So it divided itself along political lines, rather than along labor, agricultural and industry. Did the Danes believe or hope that the Marshall Plan would lead to economic union, or a common market, or even political union?

WESTPHALL: They couldn't do that when they started.

JESSEE: They didn't believe this in 1947 and 1948.

WESTPHALL: No, they couldn't think that far. The people with imagination, who were behind the whole thinking must undoubtedly have had that...

JESSEE: But in Denmark, you didn't hear this

[19]

discussed much at that time.

WESTPHALL: Not so much, no. It came later than you could see with this background the possibility. It became a better, let us say, a better prepared soil for the cooperation, between the European countries.

JESSEE: But, it appeared to relatively few people at that time this would eventually lead to something like that.

WESTPHALL: It has nothing to do with dividing Europe into the Six and the Seven, because that's much, much later.

JESSEE: What were the general beliefs about the motives of the United States? You covered some of this. To what extent was it considered to be idealistic or working in its own interests to build up markets?

[20]

WESTPHALL: We who were the so-called pro-American people, we believed -- because we knew the American attitude towards life, the American philosophy, the American way of thinking -- that when they gave something away, they meant it. It was done in the spirit in which it was given. But there was a lot of doubt as I said before, especially among the left wing people who would try to put political side of the picture into it and say that...

JESSEE: Well, how would you say this was divided, 60-40, 50-50?

WESTPHALL: Oh, no, definitely not. 20-80 maybe. Eighty for and twenty against. But even among the eighty, you could find people, say "One day, you would get a bill for this."

JESSEE: There was some doubt but generally...

[21]

WESTPHALL: But generally it was not only accepted, but accepted gratefully, especially by the responsible people in the country, in the government, and in all the organizations and the institutions, in the labor leaderships, and in the industrial groups and so on. They expressed very, very often, very openly how grateful we had to be to the United States for what they have given us possibility to do ourself with the new machinery, with the aid, and so on.

JESSEE: Would you like to just say anything you can think of as how the Marshall Plan is regarded today as compared...do you think that some of this 20 percent that were opposed to it at that time...

WESTPHALL: Today, everybody who would be honest to himself will say, "We have a lot to say

[22]

thanks for to the United States. It has been expressed several times. I must emphasize that when the Scandinavian alliance introduced the Polar Flight from Copenhagen via Greenland to Los Angeles in November 1954, the Prime Minister, Hans Hedtoft, gave a big speech in the auditorium in Pasadena. He underlined very strongly how grateful we had to be to the United States for what they had done for us through the Marshall Plan and through the defense program and through the cooperation in NATO. Later on another Prime Minister, H.G. Hansen, underlined exactly the same. And many important persons have at big occasions expressed this feeling.

JESSEE: I know in my brief stay of two and a half years in Denmark, I have never seen a large public gathering at which some of the American

[23]

leaders were present, where the chief Danish speaker has not acknowledged Marshall Plan aid.

WESTPHALL: That's true. You could even find it at our fourth of July celebration at Rebild National Park in northern Jutland, where 50,000 people -- Danes -- every year celebrate your fourth of July. And it has often been mentioned there by our Ambassadors to the United States and by the present Prime Minister and Secretary of State.

JESSEE: I know there was a group of people, I believe, from North Carolina here not too long ago and Mr. Benzon, Agricultural Minister, he also mentioned this.

WESTPHALL: Yes, and our present Prime Minister, Jens Otto Krag, was going to New York now and to Washington later. He was commercial attache

[24]

in Washington at the time when the Marshall Plan came true. He had the best background for value of the whole thing to see what is behind it.

JESSEE: I see. And this accounts perhaps for some of the enthusiasm that he has shown in later years for it.

WESTPHALL: Yes, you can say that.

JESSEE: Can you think of anything else, Povl, that would be of interest to students who are studying this phase of American history at the Truman Library?

WESTPHALL: Yes. I would think that if you study the period of President Harry S. Truman's work for the United States and for the world, you would have to take into consideration, what world it was he was working with and for.

[25]

Because it is completely different from this you have today. Don't forget that it was a period with very, very strong emotions, after a hard time of war, in the Far East and in Europe, bitterness, sorrow, a lot of disappointment, but also a lot of belief. For what he did with his unusual common sense and intuition in a very, very difficult time created great respect for him as a leader and for the United States as a nation.

When we came to the White House in '45 in October, I had with me hidden in the pocket, the book called *This Man Truman*. And when the meeting was over with the President, I said, "Mr. President, I have taken courage to bring this book with me because I would like to try to show that I have studied a little bit about you before we arrived here. Would you be so kind as to sign this book for me?"

[26]

"It'll be a pleasure," said Mr. Truman.

And he signed this book with a friendly word and his signature. When we came out, our present Ambassador in Thailand, Mr. Ebbe Munck, said, "You're crazy. You couldn't do that thing."

"Why couldn't I do it, I have it here."

JESSEE: Can you think of any other anecdotes that happened on that trip that Mr. Truman was involved in? Did he joke with you or anything?

WESTPHALL: Oh yes. Lots and lots. He had a fantastic sense of humor. I found out that again when I presented myself in St. Paul during the campaign.

JESSEE: That armband you presented him should be in the Library.

WESTPHALL: It was with a card, you know. We all

[27]

signed it.

JESSEE: Do you suppose if we can't locate it in the Library, we can get another one?

WESTPHALL: Yes, you can get another one.

JESSEE: All right, Dr. Brooks if you can't find that armband, because there were so many things. This is an important one, but it's so small, you know, that it could have been lost or something. So if you don't find it, let Povl or me know and we'll get you another one.

WESTPHALL: He [Mr. Truman] was very keen [interested in] on the Danish school ship, *Danmark*. He had seen Captain Knud Hansen. You know he got permission to train...

JESSEE: Yes, I was one of the cadets on it.

WESTPHALL: Oh, you were. He had received Knud

[28]

Hansen in the White House and they had had a long talk about this *Danmark* fate where the schoolship was ended up in Florida. I think that Knud Hansen trained some ninety American officers.

JESSEE: Oh, I think more than that, finally 1,500.

WESTPHALL: Oh really, something like that.

JESSEE: And I was one of the 1,500.

WESTPHALL: You were?

JESSEE: Yes, so that was my only relation with Denmark before I came here. So the first person I called on when I got here was Captain Knud Hansen. I rode with him when she left and went on her present cruise.

WESTPHALL: We also talked about "Big" Bill Knudson, whom, of course, Mr. Truman knew very well. He

[29]

was the leader for war production for...

JESSEE: At that time, he was General Knudson.

WESTPHALL: He came from General Motors, as you know.

JESSEE: And Mr. Truman knew he was a Dane.

WESTPHALL: Oh yes, so he could joke a little about the big Danes in a little country.

[30

INDEX

Abildrup, Borge Houmann, 2

Belgium, 12, 14

Berlingske Tidende, i

Bevin, Ernest, 12

Bidault, Georges, 12

Brooks, Philip C., 25

Common Market, 18-19

Copenhagen, Denmark, i, 1, 2, 22

Danish Freedom Fighters, 2

Danmark, 27-28

Denmark, i, 4, 12

and the Common Market, 18.-19

and Germany, 13-15

and the Marshall plan, 6-8, 11-12, 16-18, 20-22, 23

and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 13

and the United States, 22-23

Dewey, Thomas, 5

European unity, 10-11, 18-19

France, 11

General Motors Corporation, 29

Germany, 6, 16

and Denmark, 13-15

Greenland, 22

Hansen, H. G., 22

Hansen, Hans, 2

Hansen, Knud, 27-28

Harvard, 6

Hedtoft, Hans, 22

Holland, 12, 14

Jessee, Randall S., i, 27-28

Jutland, Denmark, 23

Kansas City, Missouri, i

Kaufman, Henrik, 4

Knudson, "Big" Bill, 28.-29

Krag, Jens Otto, 23-24

Los Angeles, California, 22

Marshall, George, 8

Marshall plan, 15

and Denmark, 6-8, 11-12, 16-18, 20-22, 23

and European unity, 10-11

and Krag, Jens Otto, 23-24

and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 12-13

and the United States, 19-22

and Westphall, Pov1, 1, 17

Minneapolis, Minnesota, 5

Molotov, V. M., 12
Munck, Ebbe, 2, 26

New York, New York, 23
Nielsen, Gunnar, 2
North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 15, 17, 22
Norway, 12, 13, 14

Paris, France, 7, 11, 12
Pasadena, California, 22
Politiken, 2
Presidential election campaign, 1948, 4-6

Rasmussen, Sven Tillge, 2
Rebild National Park, Jutland, Denmark, 23

St. Paul, Minnesota, 5, 26
Shanghai, China, 6

This Man Truman, 25
Truman, Harry S.:
 personality of, 3-4
 and presidential election campaign of 1948, 4-6
 press conference of, i, 1-3
 and Westphall, Povl, i, 24-29

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics:
 and Denmark, 13
 and the Marshall plan, 12-13
United Kingdom, 11, 15
United Nations, 13
United States, 16
 and Denmark, 22-23
 and the Marshall plan, 19-22
 and the United States Information Service in Copenhagen, Denmark, I

Washington, D.C., 23
Westphall, Povl:
 and *Berlingske Tidende*, i
 and the Communist party paper, 17
 and the Marshall plan, 1, 17
 and the resistance movement, i, 1
 and Truman, Harry S., i, 1-6, 24-29