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### **The Shovel is our Weapon: The Norwegian Labour Service and the paradox of nationalist internationalism**

#### **Introduction**

‘We fight as soldiers of the shovel, for freedom and for Norway’.<sup>1</sup> These lyrics, taken from the songbook of the wartime Norwegian Labour Service (*Arbeidstjenesten*, or AT), evoke images of uniformed young men, hardened by physical labour and full of nationalist ardour, ready to exchange their shovel for a rifle. Labour service was a widespread phenomenon between 1920 and 1945. More than a dozen countries, ranging from the Nordic democracies to the fascist dictatorships, introduced voluntary and compulsory labour services. What set labour service apart from other forms of unemployment relief work or obligatory labour was how it targeted the youth as a specific social group, which it aimed to educate through organized physical labour in rural areas, while instilling semi-military discipline and a patriotic sense of serving the fatherland. There was naturally great variation across countries in how these elements were brought together, and in interwar Norway several voluntary services shed their sweat in the fields, well before the AT emerged as a fully fledged obligatory labour service during the German occupation (1940-1945).

The Norwegian AT strove to present itself as a national institution, even though the obligatory, state-run labour service was created during the Nazi occupation and under direct German oversight. Contemporary observers, former participants and historians have therefore described the Norwegian AT as directly modelled on the German *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich

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<sup>1</sup> *Arbeidstjenesten, Sangbok*, 96, 97. ‘Vi kjemper som spadens soldater, med fridom og norskdom i sinn’ My translation.

Labour Service/RAD), as being characteristic of Nazi thought, or as a ‘branch of the Nazi tree in Norway’.<sup>2</sup> Despite these portrayals of the AT as a distinctively Nazi organization, we lack detailed institutional analyses, and the labour service largely figures in Norwegian historical literature as a target for the resistance movement.<sup>3</sup> This runs the risk of turning labour service into an alien element, an object of German rather than Norwegian history. It reduces the Norwegian actors to obedient implementers, obscuring their agency and selective resistance, adaptation and cooperation with the German counterparts.

Twentieth century nationalism was deeply entangled with internationalism.<sup>4</sup> Historians have frequently skirted around the issue of international cooperation between the ultra-nationalistic movements in different countries, owing to their inherent anti-universalism or exclusionary focus on national characteristics and goals.<sup>5</sup> Fascism was famously not for export, and even among the target audiences, such as within the Norwegian fascist party *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union/NS), charges of ‘importing national socialism’ were used to discredit dissidents.<sup>6</sup> While it seemed paradoxical to contemporaries, historical investigations of nationalist internationalism or what we could call trans-national socialist exchanges, are yielding rich results. The breaking of national historiographical moulds reveals commonalities of nationalist convictions, crisscrossing webs of connections and patterns of transnational political and social practices that cut across borders and established chronologies.<sup>7</sup> The Norwegian voluntary and obligatory labour services provide many

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<sup>2</sup> Semimilitære fascistorganisasjoner i Norge, London 5.4.1943, RA, S-5014 Norges Arbeidstjeneste, Y, L0003; Vagts, *Second Army*, 149; Aune, ‘Arbeidsteneste (AT)»; Dahl, Hagtvedt and Hjeltnes, *Nasjonalsosialismen*, 92; Kraglund and Moland, *Hjemmefront*, 180.

<sup>3</sup> Moland, *Mobiliseringstrusselen*; Grimnes, *Hjemmefrontens ledelse*. But see Larsen, ‘Funksjonsanalytisk studie’ which provides much valuable information on AT.

<sup>4</sup> Sluga, *Internationalism*

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, *Fascism in Europe*, 160-1; Love, ‘Generic Fascism’

<sup>6</sup> Looek, *Nasjonalsosialistiske revolusjon*, 90-91.

<sup>7</sup> Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, *Fascism without Borders*; Albanese and del Hierro, ‘*Transnational Fascism*’.

instructive instances of how nationally oriented, right-wing activists closely observed their foreign counterparts and cultivated contacts abroad.<sup>8</sup>

The Norwegian labour service comprised more than simply extremist ephemera espoused by fringe groups or a model foisted upon the country by a foreign dictatorship. The idea entered the domestic political mainstream in the interwar period and garnered popular support across the political spectrum as a means to deal with youth unemployment. In Norway, as in other countries, the discussion of labour service centred on the balance between its economic, educational and social components, and whether its role was to cultivate the land or to prepare the youth for military service. Foreign models also needed to be deconstructed, stripped of their contentious connotations and reconfigured in a particular domestic context. A crucial preoccupation for any labour service, but particularly for those created under German oversight, was to maintain their identity as national institutions.<sup>9</sup> The asymmetrical power relationship inherent in the occupation gave the German authorities firm control over the Norwegian labour force, but in practice the RAD allowed the AT substantial autonomy. This created a policy space for Norwegian actors, whether civilian or military, NS or not, to realize their long-held ideas and plans. This article will discuss how the wartime AT formed a nexus between the pre-existing national services and the influx of German demands and practices, while establishing its own mission, identity and program.

### **The socioeconomic chimera: Interwar debates on labour service**

Labour service mobilizes the individual capacity for physical labour through a collectively organized endeavour to carry out tasks of societal value. Although easily caricatured as ‘youth singing, and with shovels shining, digging motorways for the *Führer*’, the labour service

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<sup>8</sup> Emberland, *Ariske Idol*; Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge*.

<sup>9</sup> Haynes, Rebecca. ‘Romanian Legionary Movement’; Korb ‘Croatian Labours Service’.

movement was not inherently fascist.<sup>10</sup> It emerged within a broader current of thought extolling the virtues of the work camp for educational purposes. This encompassed the scout movement and student organizations, and even the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1935 embraced the idea through a recommendation on special public works for unemployed young persons. The idea was embraced by widely divergent political movements, ranging from strongly nationalistic paramilitary societies to Pierre Cérésolle's *Service Civil International* (International Voluntary Service), which stressed volunteerism, pacifism and internationalism.<sup>11</sup> Like the mythological chimera, the Labour Service was an ideational hybrid creature, consisting of different educational, economic, military and social policy elements. On an individual level, it was supposed to provide access to vocational training, provide a social safety net, and instil a work ethic and a sense of belonging to the national community. By cultivating the land, the youth would cultivate itself. For the state, it provided a tool for shaping the individual, stabilizing the labour market, or to direct workers to tasks that were socially valuable but otherwise economically unrealizable.

Labour service was not merely manual labour for the sake of improving the individual or alleviating unemployment. The labour services provided instruction that could range from training in basic skills to ideological indoctrination in ethno-nationalist (*völkisch*) ideas.<sup>12</sup> A program of indoctrination was not a prerequisite, but its potential was readily apparent: a Swedish proposal for a voluntary labour service therefore stressed that political agitation would be forbidden, and many other national services declared their apolitical nature.<sup>13</sup> Like the chimera, the mental images conjured by the labour service suggested sharp claws. Many services in Europe and the US exhibited clear militaristic traits, replete with command structures, camp deployment, an emphasis on discipline and improvement of the nation's

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<sup>10</sup> Dahl, 'Arbeidstjeneste', 199.

<sup>11</sup> ILO, *Unemployment Recommendation*; Brewis, *Student Volunteering*, 93; Epting, *Arbeitslager*.

<sup>12</sup> Seifert, *Kulturarbeit im Reichsarbeitsdienst*.

<sup>13</sup> *Svensk Läraretidning*, vol. 52 no.20 (1933), 461-2.

physical stock. For some countries, labour service was a replacement for military training. Opponents and proponents alike easily envisioned the shovel being replaced by a rifle.

Bulgaria was the first country to enact a compulsory labour service in 1920, which the prime minister described as ‘an entirely novel organization of human labour’.<sup>14</sup> Switzerland was another early mover. Germany followed suit through a voluntary welfare program open to many types of organizations. It allowed democratic communitarians as well as authoritarian, militaristic and *völkisch* organizations to mobilize the unemployed for work projects.<sup>15</sup> On the surface, the attempts at international cooperation among labour services highlighted the paradox of nationalistic internationalism. The proceedings from international labour service conferences, in Germany in 1934 and in Switzerland in 1937, reveal an acute awareness of how the different labour services were rooted in their respective national economic, political and social environments. Perhaps unusually, these international gatherings left the participants with a sense that there was limited use for international guidelines.<sup>16</sup> Norwegian labour service activists also expressed similar reservations, stating that ‘[m]utual influence is one thing. But imitation is an embarrassment and a paradox.’<sup>17</sup>

One reason for the difficulties of communicating across borders was that the Nazi takeover changed the nature of the German labour service programme. The ‘blood and soil’ ideology manifested itself through rhetoric and cultural programs promoting German handicraft. The nature of the work projects changed from public health developments towards agriculture, land cultivation and forestry.<sup>18</sup> The Weimar-era voluntary labour services were consolidated and brought under Nazi control, and RAD became obligatory in 1935. The

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<sup>14</sup> Translation of Explanatory introduction to the Bill for compulsory labour, addressed by the prime minister to the Deputies of the Sobranje, 25.2.1920, LONA, R-1193.

<sup>15</sup> Patel, *Soldiers of Labor*, 41-43; Heyck, ‘Labour services’.

<sup>16</sup> Diederichs, ‘Der Akademisch-Pädagogische Austausch’; Schweiz. Zentralstelle, *Arbeitsdienst in 13 Staaten*.

<sup>17</sup> Strand, ‘Norsk Arbeidstjeneste’. Gjensidig påvirkning er en ting, men kopiering er en latterlighet og et paradox.’ My translation.

<sup>18</sup> Humann, *Arbeitsschlacht*; Schlaghecke, *Kulturarbeit*.

Nazis used the RAD to transform young men into hardened recruits for the armed forces, indoctrinated with racist ideology of Germanic superiority and infused with a martial, masculine spirit. Initially engaged in non-military projects, the RAD later served as an auxiliary force for the *Wehrmacht* (German armed forces). The RAD achieved international recognition as a symbol of state action against economic crisis and became a key reference point in contemporary debates over labour organization.<sup>19</sup> As these discussions reached the Nordic countries, open admirers of Nazi Germany quickly picked up on the idea, including in far-flung Iceland.<sup>20</sup> But even far less radical measures, such as summer youth camps or voluntary land service, were discredited as ‘made in Germany’ or ‘pocket-format RAD.’<sup>21</sup> This clearly underlined the need to create distance from the German service.

### **The interwar political debates over labour services in Norway**

The labour service idea spread gradually in Norway. Opponents of obligatory service argued that there were better ways to clear land, build roads, or improve the population’s health and social cohesion.<sup>22</sup> The provocateur Erling Winsnes became an influential proponent with his book *Den neste Stat* (The next state). He warned that the aping of Southern manners had severely degraded the Norwegian character, which needed to be regenerated through toiling on the soil. He demanded that a stint in the labour service be a prerequisite for receiving a last name or holding public office, while shirkers should be rolled in tar and feathers.<sup>23</sup> Winsnes agitated in conservative and radical newspapers. He found fertile ground on the political fringes after Karl Meyer established *Den Nationale Legion* (The National Legion) in 1927, a short-lived curiosity tailored after the fascist parties on the continent. Winsnes influenced the

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<sup>19</sup> Patel, *New Deal*, 88-90.

<sup>20</sup> Gudmundsson, ‘Intet Fotfeste’

<sup>21</sup> Richardson, *Hitler-Jugend I Svensk Skol*, 29. ‘den tyska arbetstjänsten i fickformat.’ My translation.

<sup>22</sup> *Stavanger Aftenblad*, 12.09.1918.

<sup>23</sup> Winsnes, *Den neste stat*; Winsnes, *Veien vi ikke gaar*, 42-48; Krog, Hoel, and Winsnes (eds.) *Erling Winsnes*, 95-97.

Legion's first programmatic statement, which demanded that physical labour had to replace university over-education.<sup>24</sup> A new nationalistic, socialistic and anti-Semitic party in the German mould, the *Norges Nasjonalsosialistiske Arbeiderparti* (Norwegian National Socialist Labour Party/NNSAP), formed in 1930. Winsnes joined a circle of radical friends in the NNSAP, many of whom became enthralled with the labour service idea.<sup>25</sup>

Vidkun Quisling's NS quickly gravitated towards the idea of labour service. The delegates at the first national party meeting in 1934 formulated a program including the introduction of voluntary labour service as a means to strengthen national solidarity.<sup>26</sup> The delegates that drafted the program included not only NS ideologues and policy practitioners, but also young radicals drifting between NS and NNSAP, as well as senior military officers. As Lars Borgersrud has documented, there were strong NS and fascist sympathies among many career officers who pushed the idea of labour service, and who later joined the AT.<sup>27</sup> Career officers Nils Bøckmann and Hans Hiort explicitly pointed to the success of labour service in Germany in strengthening the national economy and hardening the youth.<sup>28</sup> Conservative military officers also promoted such ideas. Jon Dugstad, the editor of *Norges Vern*, brought extensive reports on how the RAD was rebuilding German strength.<sup>29</sup> Many right-wing Norwegian officers, like their continental counterparts, saw the labour service as a replacement for military training, a way to get around budgetary or political limitations.

As Quisling lost the support of the radical right-wing in the NS, the renegades gathered around Hans Jacobsen and his journal *Ragnarok* to develop a radical pan-Germanic program.<sup>30</sup> They embraced the labour service, but grew disenchanted with the RAD after

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<sup>24</sup> Emberland, *Nasjonale Legion*, 99, 101, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Pryser, *Okkupasjonshistoriske sideblikk*, 111; Borgersrud, *Et militært parti*, 173-176.

<sup>26</sup> Andenæs, *Det vanskelige oppjøret*, 299-303.

<sup>27</sup> Borgersrud, *Et militært parti*, 19, 176-179.

<sup>28</sup> *Dagsposten* 13.4.1934; Bøckmann and Hiorth, *Vårt Land, Vår Plikt*.

<sup>29</sup> *Norges Vern*, no. 8 (1934), 5-7; *Norges Vern* 7 (1935): 10, 13-14. Copies in RA, PA-628.

<sup>30</sup> Emberland, 'Ragnarok-kretsen, SS og Ahnenerbe'.

visiting the 1935 Nuremberg rally as guests of the German Nazi Party. There was too much marching and not enough *dugnadsånd* (community work spirit). After encountering the Romanian Corneliu Codreanu, they decided that their enterprise should be rooted in national culture.<sup>31</sup> Winsnes' apostle Tor Strand thereafter distanced himself from the RAD. While there was something to learn from RAD's singing and festive arrangements, its yelling and 'cadaver discipline' had to be avoided. Strand argued that labour services necessarily differed in mentalities and goals due to dissimilar national histories, but also geography. Germany was flat and intensely cultivated, reducing the labour service to simple, monotonous tasks which Strand described as the a tragedy for the individual. Norway's harsh and unforgiving nature could only be conquered through individual ingenuity, strength of will and character. The Norwegian labour service therefore required a synthesis between the individual and the community.<sup>32</sup> Hans Jacobsen drew different conclusions, however: 'Do not be afraid to learn from the Germans... And don't forget the song, that rhythmic song!'<sup>33</sup>

From the political fringes the labour service idea seeped into the mainstream and attracted support both among radical urban youth and in conservative and agrarian circles. Leading members in the Norwegian scout movement expressed similar sentiments and made several suggestions for work camps.<sup>34</sup> In 1932, the Norwegian church organized *Ungdomshjelpen* (Youth Aid), a national undertaking of money collection, labour training and work placement for parish youths, while agitating for Christian solidarity with the unemployed.<sup>35</sup> The *Frisinnede Folkeparti* (Liberal People's Party) in 1933 included voluntary labour service in its program, proposing to crush unemployment by clearing land and building new farms.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Emberland, *Ariske idol*, 214-223.

<sup>32</sup> Strand, *Norsk Rikstjeneste*; Strand, 'Norsk Arbeidstjeneste'; Strand 'Flere momenter', 42; Strand, 'Tysk og Norsk AT'

<sup>33</sup> Jacobsen 'Norsk Rikstjeneste', 79. 'Vær ikkje redd for å lære av tyskerne. Og glem ikkje sangen, den taktfaste sangen!' My translation.

<sup>34</sup> Schaaning, *Barneridderne*, 412-413, 574-576.

<sup>35</sup> Ungdomshjelpen, *Beretning*.

<sup>36</sup> Frisinnede Folkeparti, *Arbeidsfred*.

The parliamentary group of the conservative party, *Høyre*, in 1935 suggested organizing *Riksarbeidsskoler* (National labour schools) with assistance from the military establishment. It received support from the moderate *Venstre* and the Farmers' parties in Parliament. The labour press vilified this as a suggestion for 'concentration camps', and the newly installed Labour party government killed the motion by threatening to resign.<sup>37</sup>

The ideal of working the soil to increase national strength resonated in *Bondepartiet* (the Farmers' Party) and *Norges Bondelag* (Norwegian Farmers Association).<sup>38</sup> The compatibility of labour service and land reclamation also proved attractive for the settler societies, particularly *Ny Jord* (New Soil). The Norwegian settler movement was a political force that received state backing for 'inward colonization' through land reclamation.<sup>39</sup> It was closely aligned with the Danish *Hedeselskapet* (Heath society), which after 1866 had sought to cultivate moorlands to replace the territory taken by Prussia.<sup>40</sup> The Norwegian settler societies themselves looked to the German settlement (*siedlung*) movement for inspiration, but regretfully noted its aggressive participation in the Germanization of Polish territories.<sup>41</sup> Beyond using young unemployed men from the cities to build access roads for new settlements, *Ny Jord* hoped to entice them to embark on a life as settlers themselves. *Ny Jord* became a working partner with the early voluntary services, and the leading figure of agrarian politics, Johan Mellbye, lent his considerable authority to the idea.<sup>42</sup>

The Norwegian left, like their German counterparts, opposed the labour service for a long time. They used similar arguments, such as that it reduced salaries, separated the unemployed from the organized labour movement and militarized the youth.<sup>43</sup> The Norwegian left

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<sup>37</sup> Norland, *Høire og arbeidsledigheten*; Danielsen, *Borgerlig oppdemningspolitikk*, 252.

<sup>38</sup> *Norges Vern*, no. 6, 1934: 4; *Nordisk Tidende* 1934.06.2

<sup>39</sup> Selskapet *Ny Jord*, *Ny Jord*, 99; Paulsen, 'Bureisingen'.

<sup>40</sup> Norske Myrselskap, 'Danske Hedeselskap'.

<sup>41</sup> Gjelsvik, 'Tysk kolonisasjonsarbeide'.

<sup>42</sup> Aukrust and Strand, *Norsk Arbeidstjeneste*.

<sup>43</sup> Dudek, *Erziehung durch Arbeit*, 92, 214; *Arbeiderbladet* 21.06.1932

dismissed the suggestion as an imitation of Hitler's labour service and an instrument for fascist officers engaged in political speculation in unemployment.<sup>44</sup> Socialist study circles used it to illustrate how the Norwegian NS emulated the German NSDAP.<sup>45</sup> Prominent Labour politicians described labour service as means for the reactionary bourgeoisie to ensnare the youth, train them in the 'craft of murder' and use them as tools of repression.<sup>46</sup> After 1935, the socialist opposition gradually softened. The first voluntary service seemed to function like a job-creation scheme, and labour politicians in district municipalities welcomed it.<sup>47</sup> Olav Oksvik, an MP popular in rural areas, raised the idea of compulsory labour service in 1938. He suggested that the uneasy co-existence of democracies and dictatorships required a willingness to learn about labour mobilization, whether from Russia, Italy or Germany. Oksvik's intervention made the idea more palatable in moderate and leftist circles.<sup>48</sup> The Labour party in 1939 decided to consider the introduction of civilian community service. But it remained controversial and still evoked comparisons with fascist and semi-fascist pre-schools for military service rather than being seen as a means to improve the morale of the youth.<sup>49</sup> The German RAD cast long shadows.

### **The Happy Cavaliers of the Shovel. Interwar labour services in action.**

The first labour service, the *Arbeidsfylkingen* (The Labour formation) was borne out of the great unemployment of the early 1930s. It officially launched in 1933 with a formal event at the University in Oslo attended by the crown prince couple. The occasion was slightly ruined when a communist seized the microphone and disparaged it as a Nazi organization. This did

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<sup>44</sup> Lange, *Nazi og Norge*, 120, 126.

<sup>45</sup> Lange, *Studieveiledning i Fascismen*; Arbeidernes Opplysningsforbund, *Fascisme - ute og hjemme*, 20.

<sup>46</sup> Meyer, *Det Norske Arbeiderparti*, 181.

<sup>47</sup> 'Arbeidsfylkingen får ros. Frå arbeidarpartiet'. Newsclipping dated 23.8.1933, in IKAR, A-294, Da, L0015, L0002.

<sup>48</sup> Oksvik, 'Tvungen Arbeidstjeneste'; *Arbeiderbladet* 1939.07.26

<sup>49</sup> Norske Arbeiderparti, *31 ordinære landsmøte*, 28-32. Quote p.31; *Nordlands avis*, 28.06.1938.

not prevent the service from receiving substantial support around the country, as churches and municipal committees solicited funds for the fight against unemployment with ministerial backing.<sup>50</sup> The entrepreneurial drive was provided by Walter Fürst, a former member of the *Nasjonale Legion*. The board consisted of men and women of standing, chaired by the Minister of Social Affairs, Jacob Vik (Farmers' Party) and received political backing from all the parties except Labour, which refused several invitations to join the board.<sup>51</sup> More than any of the later labour services, *Arbeidsfylkingen* resembled a public works scheme. However, its aim was not to provide funds for as many unemployed as possible, but rather to target the youth as a socially vulnerable group. Although officially *Arbeidsfylkingen* was private and voluntary, it could tap into public funds to cover some of its costs and the image of official support was carefully cultivated.<sup>52</sup>

Annual fundraisers for *Arbeidsfylkingen* enabled its short existence from 1933 to 1936. It received financial contributions from the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the main committee solicited funds through printed forms that enabled contributors to pledge 2% of their income for 20 weeks.<sup>53</sup> *Arbeidsfylkingen* drained swamps, built bridges and cleared land in close cooperation with the Directorate of Roads and *Ny Jord*. *Arbeidsfylkingen* hoped to enable 8400 people to settle at its main sites in Nerskogen, Murudalen and Hustad, remote areas in Mid-Norway that encompassed large swathes of unoccupied, flat terrain. Smaller contingents laboured elsewhere, including at the Storfosen estates of Frederik Prytz, Quisling's ideological mentor and later Finance minister. The *Arbeidsfylking*, while expressly apolitical, became shrouded in communitarian-nationalistic rhetoric. Its promoters spoke of it as a return to nature, and waxed lyrical about how toiling on the land would stop degenerative

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<sup>50</sup> Rundskriv fra Kirke og Undervisningsdepartementet til menighetsrådene, 17.3.1934. SATR, S-0091, Fde, L0215, L0006; Brevig, *Parti til sekt*, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Jakob Vik, 'Oprop, Vårt siste og avsluttende år' 2.1.1935; Referat fra møte i hovedkomiteen 3.3.1934, RA, S-1660, E, Ea, L0014.

<sup>52</sup> *Arbeidsfylkingen*, Årsberetning 1933; Gjør din plikt, n.d IKAR, A-294, Da, L0015, L0002;

<sup>53</sup> Foreløpig rapport for *Arbeidsfylkingen* i 1934, n.d. RA, S-1660, E, Ea, L0014.

decadence, strengthen the youth, and plant it with strong roots in Norwegian soil.<sup>54</sup> Despite grand ambitions, *Arbeidsfylkingen*'s annual contingents numbered only a few hundred men. It folded after the work season of 1936 due to diminishing financial support from the public, content in the conviction that *Arbeidsfylkingen* had paved the way for a fully fledged obligatory Labour service.<sup>55</sup>

*Arbeidsfylkingen* was first supplemented and then supplanted by more overtly political labour services. The NS took the first steps to establish its own service in 1934, and early drafts note that the objective was to use voluntary and party-funded labour service to create demand for a publicly organized obligatory labour service. The NS organization claimed it would only work for settlers and people of humble means as an expression of apolitical solidarity.<sup>56</sup> The NS *Ungdomsfylking* (NS Youth Formation/NSUF) described its labour service as a way to reduce class antagonism and bring young people 'away from street corners and restaurants' to a life of health, strength and discipline. Despite the talk of political neutrality, NS-members involved in the *Arbeidsfylking* saw great propaganda potential in their new service. It used the NS songbook during meetings, and party publications described it as a duty for all members and as true socialism in action.<sup>57</sup>

The NS service utilized semi-militarized language, referred to instructors as officers, and fundraising as economic campaigns. Its first camp in 1934 only involved a few youths in the Malvik municipality outside Trondheim. NS involvement politicized the labour service question further, leading to street fighting after public meetings.<sup>58</sup> Although planning for obligatory service, NS-leaders underlined the voluntary nature of the initiative; 'press-

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<sup>54</sup> T.C. Buchholdt, 'Bureisning for norsk ungdom' n.d.; Otto Skirstad, 'Rapport om Arbeidsfylkingens arbeide på Storfosen sommeren 1935' 10.03.1936, RA, S-1660, E, Ea, L0014.

<sup>55</sup> Referat, møte i hovedkomiteen 19.10.1934, RA, S-1660, E, Ea, L0014; Kjartan Kamban, 'Arbeidsfylkingen'

<sup>56</sup> Utkast til organisasjon av N.S frivillige arbeidstjeneste, 2.12.1935, RA, PA-760 F, Ff, L0042.

<sup>57</sup> *NS-Ungdommen*, vol.3, no.11 (1936), 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Dagsposten*, 13.4.1934.

ganging' should be avoided.<sup>59</sup> The NSUF *Frivillig Norsk Arbeidstjeneste* (Voluntary Norwegian Labour Service) was divided into the three regions of North, West and South Norway under the leadership of Bjarne Barkbu. Camps were organized in 1935 at Jonsvannet and Sandar near Sandefjord, in 1936 at Storelvdal and in 1937 at Klæbu and at Bergsbygda in Telemark.<sup>60</sup> The NS camps attracted a small, slowly growing number of participants, rising from 80 in 1935 to 120 in 1940.<sup>61</sup>

The dissolution of *Arbeidsfylkingen* provided a new opportunity for Walter Fürst, Tor Strand and other right-wing dissidents to establish their own alternative to the NS service. After attending the NS labour service summer camp in 1936 they left the party to develop a political platform distinct from both the NS and the RAD.<sup>62</sup> *Frivillig Norsk Arbeidstjeneste* (Voluntary Norwegian Labour Service) held its first camp as a competitor to NS in 1937, with substantial continuity from *Arbeidsfylkingen*. The new organization kept the remainder of the funds, former volunteers flocked to the new organization, and the board included former *Arbeidsfylkingen* patrons Jacob Vik and Johan Mellbye. Its local branches consisted of a mix between activists and venerable agrarian politicians like Jon Leirfall. Per Imerslund, an adventurer in transnational right-wing radicalism, joined the organization and shared tales of how fighting in Germany, Mexico and Spain left him pining for the fjords and fields of his homeland. The organization changed its name to *Norsk Riksdugnad* (Norwegian Community Work) in 1939 to further distinguish it from NS and stressed that 'Labour Service belongs to the youth and the Norwegian people, not a political party'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Notat, Bjarne Barkbu og Finn Dyrbeck. 10.2.1937, RA, PA-760 F, Ff, L0042.

<sup>60</sup> Notat, Generalsekretæren, NS, 4.6.1938; Arbeidstjeneste-cirkulære nr.1 NS Undomsfylkings Arbeidstjeneste, RA, PA-760 F, Ff, L0042.

<sup>61</sup> Norsk Arbeidstjeneste, *Årbok 1941*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Tor Strand, 'Mitt forhold til Arbeidstjenesten og NS' n.d. RA, L-Sak Tor Strand.

<sup>63</sup> Tor Strand, 'Frivillig Norsk Arbeidstjeneste', 75. 'Arbeidstjenesten tilhører ungdommen og folket, ikke et parti' My translation.

The first year the *Riksdugnaden* continued the work at the *Arbeidsfylkingen* field at Nerskogen with three dozen participants. It quickly acquired more members and sought foreign contacts in Copenhagen, Helsinki, Stockholm and Berlin. However, no Norwegians participated in the 1937 international labour service conference in Switzerland. Likewise, their attempt to organize an inter-Nordic conference in 1938 was a fiasco, with only 5 Swedish and 4 German visitors.<sup>64</sup> By the summer of 1939, *Riksdugnaden* had mobilized around 200 men and also organized a separate camp for women. The activists saw themselves as avant-garde and hoped to make compulsory labour service a political priority. To rebut the frequent charges of imitating Nazi Germany, Fürst argued that Bulgaria had introduced labour service before there was such a thing as national socialism.<sup>65</sup> There was little in the way of an organized educational program, beyond a few lectures on Norwegian history.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, establishing their Norwegian identity was an important preoccupation for the volunteers, who spent their evenings around the campfire reciting Norse verses. Fürst often highlighted that labour service was a way to reconnect with the ancestral land, and that after a summer of work ‘we had become one with the Norwegian soil’.<sup>67</sup> While the Norwegian efforts in the late 1930s were noted with rising interest in Berlin, the RAD observers concluded that a proper Norwegian labour service would require far more decisive state leadership.<sup>68</sup>

### **Labour services in wartime.**

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<sup>64</sup> Frivillig Norsk Arbeidstjeneste A.T., ‘Årsberetning for 1937’ n.d., PA-760 F, Ff, L0042; Schweiz. Zentralstelle, *Arbeitsdienst in 13 Staaten*, 230-6; Fyrst, *Min sti*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> *Fylkestidende for Sogn og Fjordane* 14.08.1939.

<sup>66</sup> Lindheim, ‘Arbeidstjenesten i praksis’.

<sup>67</sup> Fürst, ‘Norrøn Ånd i AT’, 251. ‘Vi var blitt ett med Norges jord’. My translation.

<sup>68</sup> Müller-Brandenburg, ‘Arbeitsdienst in fremden Staaten’

The German invasion in April 1940 created challenges and opportunities for the Norwegian labour service activists. *Reichskommissar* Josef Terboven, the supreme head of the German civilian administration of occupied Norway (*Reichskommissariat für die besetzten norwegischen Gebiete*) pushed for a national labour service at an early stage, and his persistent support gave the service considerable clout.<sup>69</sup> Terboven's *Reichskommissariat* initially reached out to Jacobsen, who put them in contact with Fürst. But establishing a national service was far beyond the capabilities of *Riksdugnen* alone, and other political entrepreneurs entered the scene in the hope that a labour service would strengthen the Norwegian position vis-a-vis the Germans. Former *Arbeidsfylkingen* leaders started preparing a voluntary labour service of 5000 to 10 000 men, while rumours swirled of forced labour mobilization.<sup>70</sup> Ingolf Christensen, the chairman of the *Administrasjonsrådet* (Administrative Council), the caretaker government for the Norwegian occupied areas after the invasion, also threw his hat in the ring. For *Administrasjonsrådet*, a new service could be a tool to tackle the economic disruptions and unemployment created by the invasion. Terboven and *Administrasjonsrådet* also shared an interest in blocking Quisling from building up his own service, since both wanted to get rid of the troublesome coup-maker.<sup>71</sup> Most importantly, a labour service would keep hot-headed youths and the demobilized and demoralized Norwegian officer corps engaged.<sup>72</sup>

*Administrasjonsrådet* established a cross-party committee to hammer out the new service on May 31, 1940. Fürst, claiming a mandate from Terboven, established himself as the *de facto* leader of the service. He integrated the new service with the existing structures of the *Riksdugnad* and embarked on a camp establishment spree that sparked sharp criticism of his

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<sup>69</sup> Reichskommissar für die besetzten norwegischen Gebiete, An die Dienststelle , Kirkenes 10.10.1942, RAFA-2174, E, Eci, L0075; Bormann, 'Arbeitsdienst in Norwegen'

<sup>70</sup> Andreas Baalsrud, Dagboksnotat, 31.5.1940, NVM, A-0003, Fa, 0001, 03, 001; Nielsen, *Jord og ord*, 683.

<sup>71</sup> Høidal, *Studie i Landssvik*, 336; Looock, *Nasjonalsosialistiske revolusjon*, 329.

<sup>72</sup> Borgersrud, *Like Gode Nordmenn*, 257

autocratic style, nepotism and excessive spending.<sup>73</sup> He established camps without approval from the political committee, and even named a camp after himself. At the end of July 1940, the new service ran 39 camps for 2718 men and 25 camps for 747 women. Like its predecessors it was voluntary, and participants only received pocket money and some vocational training in exchange for their work to secure the ‘cultural and material livelihood of the Norwegian nation’.<sup>74</sup> The national character of the service was signalled in other not very subtle ways. The first camp was established at Eidsvoll and dubbed the ‘1814-camp’ as an explicit reference to Norwegian sovereignty. The new service developed a cultural program to promote national art, local history and music, folk tales and medieval literature. Uncertain of the future, artists and labour service ideologues shared the hope that the service would preserve the unique characteristics that would make the Norwegian nation immortal.<sup>75</sup>

Amidst internecine squabbling, pointed demonstrations of Norwegianness and rumours that the new service would become a resistance army hiding in plain sight, Terboven asked the head of the RAD, *Reichsarbeitsführer* Konstantin Hierl for assistance. Hierl dispatched the leader of Arbeitsgau (RAD district) IX Brandenburg-West, *Oberarbeitsführer* Herbert Bormann as his representative in Norway (*Der Beauftragte des Reichsarbeitsführers Norwegen*). Bormann was an old hand steeped in RAD tropes about labour service as selfless dedication to the national community. He had joined NSDAP in May 1932 and the SA in June 1932, before leaving the latter for the RAD in September 1932.<sup>76</sup> Bormann arrived in early June 1940 and was attached to the *Reichskommissariat*. He answered to Terboven, while remaining directly subordinate to Hierl. Bormann quickly decided to base the labour service

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<sup>73</sup> O. Kirkvaag og G.H. Paulsen til Administrasjonsrådet, 6.8.1940, RA, S-1004, D, L0011; Styret for Administrasjonsrådets Arbeidstjeneste til Finansdepartementet, 27.6.1940 RA, S-1334, F, Fa, L0001.

<sup>74</sup> Administrasjonsrådets Arbeidstjeneste, *Arbeidstjeneste er landets fremtid*, n.d., RA, S-5014, Y, L0003. ‘å sikre det norske livsgrunnlaget, kulturelt og materielt’. My translation.

<sup>75</sup> Håkon Stenstadvold, P.M om kulturpleie i A.T, dated 7.1940, RA, L-Sak Tor Strand .

<sup>76</sup> *Nationalsozialistisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 13, (1939): 249; Führer des Arbeitsgaves IX-Brandenburg, *Wir vom Arbeitsgau IX-Brandenburg*; Interrogation report, RA, RAFA-3915, D, Db, L0004, Herbert Bormann.

on Norwegian foundations and legal authority. He would spare the rod and the blueprints of the RAD.<sup>77</sup> As in other spheres of Norwegian labour politics, the German authorities preferred to tweak and adapt the Norwegian laws and institutions, rather than to transplant their German models wholesale.

The arrival of a RAD overseer changed the political situation. Bormann consciously excluded the one existing NS camp from the labour service to maintain its political neutrality. Left to itself, the NS service instead morphed into the *Norsk Landtjeneste* (Norwegian Land service) and *Germansk landtjeneste* (Germanic Land Service), equivalents to the *Hitler-Jugend Landdienst* (Hitler Youth Land service).<sup>78</sup> Bormann forged an alliance with the military establishment, which early indicated a willingness to use the existing staff, planning and logistics structures to run a compulsory labour service.<sup>79</sup> Bormann deemed Fürst unsuitable for leadership, and replaced him with Magnus Hagem, a career officer. Hagem was a former classmate of Quisling at the military academy, conveniently without NS membership. The choice of Hagem and the recruitment of many career officers pleased the Wehrmacht, in part because it resulted in a militarization of leadership style and methods.<sup>80</sup> By October 1940, the voluntary service had brought 6438 men into service in 56 camps, and 1672 women in 35 camps.

### **The wartime compulsory labour service, AT**

On 25 September 1940, Terboven declared that the Norwegian king and the government were deposed, the *Administrasjonsrådet* disbanded, all political parties except NS were prohibited

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<sup>77</sup> S.A., Vermerk, 15.6. 1940, RAFA-2174, E, Ec, Eci, L0075.

<sup>78</sup> *Morgenbladet* 10.4.1942

<sup>79</sup> Forsvarsdepartementet til Bormann og Christensen, 6.7.1940, RA, S-1004, D, L0011.

<sup>80</sup> Der Beauftragte des Reichsarbeitsführers Norwegen, 30.1.1945, RA, RAFA-3915, D, Db, L0004.

and that the ‘path to regain freedom and independence for Norway leads through the NS’.<sup>81</sup> Terboven appointed acting secretaries of state (*konstituerte statsråder*), predominantly from the NS, to lead the Norwegian ministries. Quisling was kept outside the government, and had to exert his influence as the party leader of the NS. The landowner Axel Stang took the helm at the new Ministry of Labour Service and Sport. He immediately announced that labour service would become obligatory, and that the AT would be a school for cultural upbringing and forging national solidarity.<sup>82</sup> Magnus Hagem also took to the radio waves to explain that AT would inherit the social functions of military recruit schools, such as medical check-ups and providing an arena for socialization across class boundaries.<sup>83</sup> The goal was to enrol 18 000 men in successive three-month contingents starting in May 1941.<sup>84</sup> This entailed the labour service becoming obligatory in the summer of 1941, just as the vast German construction programs had created a labour shortage that would persist for the duration of the war.<sup>85</sup>

The AT organization was erected on the pre-war military structure. To bring in recruits in such large numbers, the officers turned to the military enrolment system they already knew.<sup>87</sup> This further increased the imprint of the military on the AT, but this was militarization through continuity of bureaucratic form, rather than the adoption of militaristic ideology from the RAD. While officially a part of the Ministry of Labour Service and Sport, the labour service section was organized as a military staff unit, headed by the Chief of the AT with the rank of General.<sup>88</sup> The ministerial level of the service contained six divisions:

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<sup>81</sup> Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen*, 13 ‘Der Weg für das norwegische Volk, Freiheit und Selbstständigkeit zurückzugewinnen, führt über Nasjonal Samling’. My translation.

<sup>82</sup> Statsråd Axel Stang taler om det nyopprettede Departement for idrett og arbeidstjeneste, 01.10.1940, NRK, NB.

<sup>83</sup> Oberst Magnus Hagem taler om Arbeidstjenesten, 16.10.1940, NRK, NB.

<sup>84</sup> *Sozialpolitische Weltrundschau*, vol.2 no.2 (1941), 27.

<sup>85</sup> Frøland, Hatlehol and Ingulstad, ‘Regimenting Labour’

<sup>87</sup> Borgersrud, *Like gode Nordmenn*, 249-50.

<sup>88</sup> Debes, *Sentraladministrasjonens historie*, 97.

organization, personnel, planning, medical, administration and education.<sup>89</sup> AT-men were required to wear uniforms and to salute all Norwegian SS-men and police, as well as foreign officers. However, the uniform requirement proved difficult to enforce for office personnel, even for former officers.<sup>90</sup> The military structure was more evident in the field organization. The country was divided into six Labour-districts, each consisting of three to four labour-counties equivalent to the pre-existing counties. The labour-counties were led by a *fylkesfører* (county leader), who commanded a *fylking* (formation) of 660 men. A *sveit* (Norse military term for a small force) was the basic organizational unit for encampment and work. It consisted of 160 men, including 16 officers, divided into three troops consisting of three teams each.<sup>91</sup> The AT itself drew a tight line between labour service and public works: ‘Labour service is not a labour placement service... Our forces are deployed under command, management and control’.<sup>92</sup>

The professedly apolitical AT became an arena for competing political visions. Many officers sympathized with the NS, but were distressed by the evident German influence. At the first large gathering for future AT-leaders, NS Party Secretary Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang stressed that labour service was neither German or Italian, but Norwegian and Nordic.<sup>93</sup> These attempts to highlight the national character of the AT were undermined by Bormann. While Bormann’s reputation as a moderate and supporter of an independent AT survived the war, he insisted on the introduction of a cultural education program and the use of the German salute by officers. AT Chief Hagem, already bristling at the RAD staff’s daily visits and hostile to

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<sup>89</sup> Kunngjøring til Arbeidstjenesten, 8.1.1942, in *Kunngjøring til Arbeidstjenesten*, vol 2. no.1 (1942), 10.

<sup>90</sup> Barkbu til Frølich Hanssen, 20.1.1944, RA, L-sak Frølich Hanssen.

<sup>91</sup> Departementet for Arbeidstjeneste og Idrett. Dets oppbygning, funksjon og arbeidsområde, n.d. RA, S-1334,G,Gb, L0004.

<sup>92</sup> Frølich Hanssen ‘Arbeidstjenesten’, 196-7. ‘Arbeidstjenesten er no engang ikke noen arbeidsformidling... Våre styrker settes inn under kommando, ledelse og kontroll’. My translation.

<sup>93</sup> Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang, ‘AT kan ikke isolere seg. Nøitral gis ikke’, n.d., RA, PA 0739, F, L0002.

what he described as attempts to Germanize the AT, resigned.<sup>94</sup> His successor, Carl Frølich Hanssen, was a veteran of far-right esoteric politics. While Frølich Hanssen formally joined the NS at a late stage, he had been a member of the unsuccessful precursor to NS, *Nordisk Folkereisning* (Nordic People's Uprising), a quasi-conspiratorial effort to build a movement around Quisling and ideas of Nordic racial superiority.<sup>95</sup>

Under Frølich Hanssen the NS and Nazi influences became more pronounced. Jews were legally, and redundantly, excluded from labour service in 1941, and in the fall of 1942 an AT formation aided the police in the search for two Jewish refugees.<sup>96</sup> An NS party ordinance made the Chief of the AT the party's highest representative in the labour service, and he answered directly to Quisling *ex officio*. Bjarne Barkbu was appointed NS-liaison officer in the AT staff, and headed an NS party group within AT, in which NS-members were automatically enrolled.<sup>97</sup> Først wrote and directed a full-length propaganda movie, *Unge Viljer* (Young wills) supposedly based on true events from the early years of the NS. He used the labour service for its dramatic denouement, replete with labour service propaganda, grateful settlers, and bare-chested youth returning to the soil.<sup>98</sup> The NS and Nazi entanglements were apparent in the organization's charter texts. The 1941 ordinance on Labour Service stated it was an 'ærestjeneste' (service of honour), with the goal of 'raising Norwegian youth in a Norwegian national spirit, to instil discipline, a communal spirit, and respect for physical labour'.<sup>99</sup> The essential paragraphs in the 1941 ordinance and the subsequent 1943 law on labour service were so similar to the German

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<sup>94</sup> Domsforkynnelse mot Axel Stang, n.d.; Magnus Hagem, 'Statsråd Stang og Arbeidstjenesten', 22.9.1945, L-sak Axel Stang.

<sup>95</sup> Dahl, *Fører blir til*, 158-165

<sup>96</sup> Borgersrud, *Like Gode Nordmenn*, 473-475.

<sup>97</sup> Til NS-medlemmene i Arbeidstjenesten, 30.4.1943, *Kunngjøring til Arbeidstjenesten*, vol.3 no.4 (1943): 76-77.

<sup>98</sup> *Unge viljer*, 1943.

<sup>99</sup> Lov om Norges Arbeidstjeneste, Lnr.53/1943, Digitalarkivet; 'oppdra den norske ungdom i nasjonal ånd til disiplin og samkjensle og til vyrnad for kroppslig arbeid'. My translation.

*Reichsarbeitsdienstgesetz* (National Labour Service Act) of 1935 that the resemblances could not have been missed in Berlin.<sup>100</sup> The AT also paraded when Quisling was installed as *Ministerpresident* (head of government) on February 1, 1942, and thereby glorified the entrenchment and expansion of the role of NS in the occupation regime.<sup>101</sup>

The growing Nazi influence was mirrored by an effort to emphasize the AT's independence and national character. Quisling issued guidelines that banned recruitment in the camps, and Frølich Hanssen forbade overtly political lectures, even from fellow NS officers. NS meetings or recruitment drives were required to be held elsewhere, although they were announced within the camps and participants were assured leave.<sup>102</sup> While the NS and the AT were intertwined behind a façade of neutrality, competing narratives circulated about the organization's political roots and meaning. The Ministry of Labour Service and Sport tended to elevate the NS labour service as the pioneers and standard-bearers of the movement, with *Riksdugnaden* relegated to a supporting role. The Ministry described *Arbeidsfylkingen* as a false start that foundered due to weak leadership and lack of ideological drive.<sup>105</sup> These portrayals evoked sharp reprisals, even from within the ranks of NS. Several senior NS officials had been involved with *Arbeidsfylkingen* and resented this 'warping of the AT history'.<sup>106</sup> On the other side, former *Riksdugnaden* leaders like Tor Strand and 'Little Adolf' Egeberg oversaw the *AT-bladet* (The AT Bulletin) and the AT Yearbook. In the accounts published under their supervision the *Riksdugnad* was considered at least the equal to the NS

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<sup>100</sup> Gesetz über den Arbeitsdienst in Norwegen, 2.4.43, BA, NS 5-VI, 33318; Reichsarbeitsdienstgesetz vom 26 Juni 1935.

<sup>101</sup> Sunding, 1. februar 1942, 71-73.

<sup>102</sup> Vedtak av Ministerpresidenten 21.8.1943, Frølich Hanssen to Klevenberg, NS Rikspropagandaledelse, 19.11.1942, RA, L-Sak Carl Frølich Hanssen.

<sup>105</sup> Departementet for Arbeidstjeneste og Idrett. Dets oppbygning, funksjon og arbeidsområde, n.d. RA, S-1334, G, Gb, L0004.

<sup>106</sup> Knudsen til Lassen, 24.10.1944; Eggen to Lassen, 24.4.1945, RA, S-1334, G, Gb, L0006. 'denne forkvaklingen av A.T.s historie.' My translation.

service, and the schism between the services was described as an exodus of the best men from the NS to *Riksdugnaden*.<sup>107</sup>

The AT devoted a lot of time to education and relied heavily on history to impart its worldview and underline its own national character. Aspiring leaders at the AT-school in Gausdal heard lectures on labour in Norwegian culture, the history of the AT, and its future as the school of the nation.<sup>108</sup> The length of service was expanded from three to six months in 1943, and one month was set aside for education. The technical training program was developed in close cooperation with RAD staff, and according to the latter derived almost entirely from the RAD's educational materials.<sup>109</sup> The cultural program, although created at Bormann's behest, stressed national regeneration rather than Pan-Germanic solidarity. The course materials were extracts from Norwegian literature, poetry and history. Lecture notes described Norwegian history as a nexus between the blood and the soil, and ascribed the collapse of the Viking realm to the loss of the sacred connection to the land. The AT would ensure that the realm would not be lost again.<sup>110</sup> The educational guidance manual described the AT in communitarian terms as the embodiment of a living Norwegian socialism locked in eternal struggle against Nature.<sup>111</sup> British or American songs were allowed, but only after they had been set to new melodies based on Norwegian folk music. The Horst Wessel Lied kept its original tune, although the text was riddled with errors.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Norsk Arbeidstjeneste, *Årbok 1941*, 42.

<sup>108</sup> Tor Strand, Rapport om undervisning i kulturelt 'Arbeidstjeneste', n.d. 1941; Einar Syvertsen, rapport, 23.3.1941, RA, L-sak Tor Strand; Norsk diktning, et utdrag av eldre og nyere norsk diktning til bruk i Arbeidstjenesten, n.d. 1941, RA, S- 5014, Dae, L0131.

<sup>109</sup> Oberstfeldmeister Krug, Inhalt meines Vortrages über die arbeitstech. Schulung im Norwegischen Arbeitsdienst vor Gen.arbf Tholens, am 4.7.1941, RAFA-2184, L0003.

<sup>110</sup> Kontoret for kulturell fostring, Momenter for kulturell fostring, nr 4, 25.6.1941; Foredrag Gruppe 1: Vårt land – Vårt Folk, n.d. RA, S-1334, F, Fb, L0001.

<sup>111</sup> Arbeidstjenesten, *Foreløpige retningslinjer, H1*; Arbeidstjenesten, *Kulturell fostring, H3*.

<sup>112</sup> Arbeidstjenesten, *Sangbok*, 8-9.

The further the AT slid into Nazified forms, and with it the public estimation, the further back into history NS and AT propaganda projected its Norwegian roots. Quislings's court philosopher, Hermann Harris Aall, claimed that while the RAD was an example to others of how a labour service should be managed, the original idea was Norwegian. According to Aall, Hierl himself attributed the idea to Knut Hamsun's 1920 Nobel Prize winning book *Growth of the Soil*.<sup>114</sup> Other frequent examples included the tradition of *dugnad*, proposals from priests G.R. Reimers during the Napoleonic war or Christopher Bruun after the Danish-Prussian wars.<sup>115</sup> In a similar vein, the Danish National Socialist Youth insisted that labour service was a Danish rather than a German institution, first invented by queen Thyra Danebod for the construction of the Danevirke defensive wall.<sup>116</sup> In reality, such attempts to nationalize the history of the labour service, or indeed Nazi symbols like the German salute, were efforts by much smaller parties to write their way out of the German shadow. Whether by design or historical circumstance, these creation myths pointed to a thousand years of conflicts where the Germans were on the other side.

While labour service propagandists in the occupied territories felt the need to create their own national histories, the RAD acknowledged and sought to accommodate this need.<sup>117</sup> The RAD developed guidelines to win over foreign labour service leaders through excitement and training. The guidelines stressed that the national services all had arisen under different conditions and experiences, and that rather than imposing a schematic blueprint, the most important aspect was to share the RAD's experiences with regard to organization, training and work.<sup>118</sup> The RAD offered schooling for AT-members of all ranks at the RAD-school in

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<sup>114</sup> Aall, *Nasjonalt livssyn*, 335.

<sup>115</sup> Arthur Crowo, 'Arbeidstjenesten' *Nasjonal Ungdommen*, 8 (1943); Norske Arbeidstjeneste, *Årbok 1941*, 31.

<sup>116</sup> Kirkebæk, *Nationalsocialistisk Ungdom*, 169-170.

<sup>117</sup> Müller-Brandenburg, 'Arbeitsdienst in Europa'

<sup>118</sup> Richtlinien[sic!] für die Einweisung, Ausrichtung und Betreuung höherer ausländischer Arbeitsdienstführer im Reichsarbeitsdienst, 17.8.1944, RAFA-2184, L0001.

Miltenberg, and lobbied for a sizable Norwegian contingent.<sup>119</sup> The candidates were scrutinized for ‘progressive’ political views, but both NS and non-NS-members were included.<sup>120</sup> After arrival, the AT-men inevitably compared themselves with Serbs, Croats, Flemish, Walloons and Danes who also passed through Miltenberg. They immodestly concluded that the AT was the most highly developed service, with the natural exception of the RAD.<sup>121</sup> Miltenberg bred familiarity with RAD methods, but also uniform envy. AT-men complained of their own shapeless work suits with varying cuts and shades, as opposed to RAD troops smartly turned out in military-style uniforms. While admittedly inferior in military gymnastics, the Norwegian AT felt its technical training was just as good, and its housing was better. Norwegian AT leaders also observed that German recruits were better prepared for the service, which they ascribed to national characteristics, ingrained discipline and the *Hitler-Jugend*.<sup>122</sup>

The deployment of the AT was a question of great interest for the German stewards of the Norwegian economy. The AT was launched before the German construction program had drained all the available labour from the market, but by 1941 the *Reichskommissariat* was concerned that between the *Wehrmacht* and the AT, there were not enough workers left to gather the harvest.<sup>123</sup> Cornfields therefore became the AT’s main field of action. Bormann’s staff estimated that 73,8 % of AT engagement was in agriculture, 4,5% in forestry, 3,4% in road maintenance, and the remainder in various relief work during the summer of 1941.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Frank an Reichsarbeitsführer, Abt. für auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 15.3.1943; RAFA-2184, L0003.

<sup>120</sup> AT personalavdeling, Oppgave over sveitførere og troppførere som beordres til kurs i Tyskland 1943/1944, n.d.; vurdering av nestsveitførerne og troppførerne som er beordret til kurs i Tyskland 1943/1944, 17.11.1943., RA, L-Sak Axel Stang .

<sup>121</sup> *Fritt Folk* 15.4.1944

<sup>122</sup> Rapport fra brigadefører Galaas studiereise i Tyskland, dated april 1944, RA, L-sak Frølich Hanssen.

<sup>123</sup> Reichskommissariat Gruppe Arbeitseinsatz und Arbeitslosenversicherung, Vermerk betr. landwirtschaftlicher Arbeitseinsatz, 10.2.1941; Kasper an Bormann, 4.3.1941; Bormann an RK Abt. Arbeit und Sozialwesen, 6.3.1941, RAFA-2174,E, Ec, Eci, 0075.

<sup>124</sup> Das Werk des männl. Arbeitsdienst im Sommerhalbjahr 1941, n.d, RAFA-2184, L0003.

The introduction of a voluntary *Kvinnelig Arbeidstjeneste* (Women's Labour service/KAT) reinforced this trend, as the KAT primarily assisted farmers with the harvest.<sup>125</sup>

Growing labour shortages led the NS to introduce the *Nasjonal Arbeidsinnsats* (National Work Effort), a term that described conscription of workers under a series of ordinances from 1941 and finally an Act in 1943.<sup>126</sup> While the NS feebly portrayed *Nasjonal Arbeidsinnsats* as a measure to solve urgent societal tasks, it lacked the ideological and pedagogical dimensions of the AT. Instead, it was purely a means to redeploy workers from non-essential occupations to forests, fields or German construction sites.<sup>127</sup> As the demand for labour rose further, the German authorities crossed the boundaries erected to maintain the AT's apparent autonomy. While German institutions could not officially transfer workers from the AT, the *Reichskommissariat* repeatedly intervened to have labourers returned to factories deemed vital to the war industries. Significantly, it was the RAD staff, the *Reichskommissariat* and the *Wehrmacht*, rather than the AT, who made a compact to transfer skilled workers from the service in 1944.<sup>128</sup> The German authorities were tightening the screws on the war economy, and with it on the AT.

The RAD not only oversaw the AT, but also entered onto the AT's home turf. Already during the German invasion, RAD troops helped repair and prepare roads and airports to provide supplies and logistical support to the advancing *Wehrmacht*.<sup>129</sup> Bormann was appointed *Höherer RAD-Führer beim Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Norwegen* (Higher RAD-leader with the Commander of the German Armed Forces) in the spring of 1941. Five RAD

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<sup>125</sup> *Fritt Folk*, 23.3.1945; Nørregaard, 'Kvinnelig Arbeidstjeneste'

<sup>126</sup> Direktoratet for Arbeidsformidling og arbeidsløshetsstrygd, Arbeidskraft til ekstraordinær virksomhet. Utfyllende direktiver, rundskriv nr 142, 10.6.1942, ARBARK, LO-Krig, Dc, L0036; Digitalarkivet, Lov nr 1 om gjennomføring av loven om nasjonal arbeidsinnsats, 23.2.1943, Lnr. 34/1943.

<sup>127</sup> Hatlehol, 'Norwegeneinsatz', 134-160.

<sup>128</sup> Reichskommissariat, Abt Arbeit und Sozialwesen an Beauftragte des Reichsarbeitsführers beim Reichskommissar, 31.5.1944; Frölich til Lenschow, 22.5.1944, RAFA 2174,E,EC, Eci, L0088; Johlitz an den Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in Norwegen, Der Chefintendant, 4.6.1942, RAFA, 2471, E, Ec, Eci, L0075.

<sup>129</sup> Pfrogner, 'Der Einsatz des Reichsarbeitsdienstes in Norwegen 1940', 26-31.

units were dispatched to Norway and scattered from Arendal to Kirkenes. These RAD contingents embarked on road construction, maintenance and snow clearance and assisted in the construction of coastal defences. This marked a clear divergence from how Bormann wanted to use the German and Norwegian labour service troops. When *Organisation Todt* (OT) wanted the Norwegian AT to accept assignments in 1942, Bormann laid down a set of prohibitive conditions. OT was charged with the fortification of the Norwegian coastline, and Bormann apparently did not want the AT to be closely associated with work for the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>130</sup> He had no such compunctions about the RAD. The RAD roster peaked at 6000 men in the summer of 1941, and then dropped to 3600 in the fall as two units crossed the border into Finland.<sup>131</sup> The AT mustered 10 281 men in the same year. The pressures of the war economy made it difficult to maintain distance from the *Wehrmacht*. In 1943 an AT *sveit* was sent to chop wood in Finland, and in 1944 it took over assignments on Norwegian railroads previously carried out by Serb Prisoners of War. In this regard the AT not only followed in RAD's political, but also its actual, footsteps.

### **Militarization though mobilization: AT, NS and SS**

The German encroachment on the AT workforce was an indication that Germany was considering the use of Norwegian manpower in their war effort. The spectre of militarization had haunted the AT since its inception, when opponents of the occupation regime hoped for the reconstruction of the Norwegian army under the cover of the labour service. On the other hand, in Berlin it was rumoured in July 1940 that Terboven would sideline the RAD and give the SS control over the labour service.<sup>136</sup> For Heinrich Himmler the labour service represented a pool of purebred, partially militarized workers, and he had followed the

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<sup>130</sup> Hatlehol, 'Norwegeneinsatz', 134-5.

<sup>131</sup> Der Höhere RAD-Führer H VIII, 30.1.1945, RAFA 3915, D, Db, L0004, 0001

<sup>136</sup> Undersøkelseskommissjonen av 1945, *Innstilling vol III*, 203-211.

Norwegian movement with interest since the days of the *Riksdugnad*.<sup>137</sup> In numerous cases the AT provided inspiration and a stepping stone for young men who volunteered to fight with the German armed forces.<sup>138</sup> As the tides of war turned, Quisling and the ministers for the Police and Justice, both SS members, pondered mobilizing the AT men for the eastern front. Quisling hoped that by shedding blood for the German cause he could induce Hitler to end the occupation of Norway.<sup>139</sup>

When Heinrich Himmler and the SS made moves to step up recruitment of AT men, they ran into resistance from Frølich Hanssen and Bormann. This was a delicate situation for Bormann, who saw himself as a mediator in the conflicts between the NS and AT, and who resented the intrusion of the SS.<sup>140</sup> Together they appealed to *Reichsarbeitsführer* Hierl, who saw the AT as a reflection of his own RAD. Hierl brought the matter to the top, and argued that the AT would make a more important contribution by winning Norwegian workers for German ideas and creating a corps of future Norwegian leaders.<sup>141</sup> After being rebuffed Himmler replied that he was a farmer himself, and understood that these things had to grow organically. He agreed that the AT was of ‘extraordinary importance, especially in its current form, independent of party politics’. Himmler promised not to recruit without the blessing of the Chief of AT, or to undermine the AT by depleting its leader corps.<sup>142</sup> Hierl instructed Bormann to support the enlistment of AT men for the SS after their service period ended, while Himmler was to keep his distance so that the AT did not become perceived as a breeding ground for the Waffen-SS.<sup>143</sup> As the setbacks on the Eastern front continued,

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<sup>137</sup> Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge*, 461.

<sup>138</sup> Christensen, *Den Andre Siden*, 123; Blindheim, *Nordmenn under HITLERS fane*, 128; Fjørtoft, *De som tapte krigen*, 84-85, 91, 115.

<sup>139</sup> Moland, *Mobiliseringstrusselen*, 16-17.

<sup>140</sup> Bormann til Evang, 6.11.1946, RAFA-3915, D, Db, L0004, 0001.

<sup>141</sup> Hierl an Himmler, 24.04.1943, BA, NS19/3451.

<sup>142</sup> Himmler an Hierl, 11.08.1943, BA, NS19/3451

<sup>143</sup> Hierl an Himmler 23.08.1943, BA, NS19/3451.

Himmler and his Norwegian allies revived the suggestion on several occasions, even during the last months of the war.<sup>144</sup>

Reports of the plans to mobilize the AT for the war effort reached the Norwegian resistance movement, which made the labour service a high-priority target. The government-in-exile warned from London that while the AT had seemed ‘a relatively innocent affair’, its camps could be turned into prisons and the young men shipped from the country like cattle to the slaughter.<sup>145</sup> The resistance targeted AT offices with slogans and bombs to keep recruits from turning up during the campaign against the AT.<sup>146</sup> The *Sicherheitsdienst* reported changes in the popular perception of the AT; whereas it initially had been seen as a harmless initiative, it had now been branded as a Nazi institution. Particular blame was attached to the cultural education program, which was seen as a conduit for German propaganda and made the AT appear to be ‘a cross between a Norwegian *Hitler-Jugend* and a military formation’.<sup>147</sup>

Whether the AT could be mobilized as a military unit is another question. AT units at the *sveit*-level were issued 3 rifles in 1944, allegedly to hinder a single armed resistance member to take an entire camp hostage. Although only 20 bullets were issued per firearm and any other use was expressly forbidden, it generated unrest among the men, the officers and the local population. To calm the waters Frølich Hanssen issued clear instructions that AT men were not to obey any orders from any other Norwegian or German authorities relating to mobilization.<sup>148</sup> Norwegian AT defectors who fled to Sweden also estimated that a successful, secret mobilization of the AT was highly unlikely.<sup>149</sup> When the RAD division for Foreign

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<sup>144</sup> Avhørsreferat, Frølich Hanssen, 25.6.1945, Avhørsreferat Dagny Egeberg-Holmsen, 23.5.1945, RA, L-sak Axel Stang; Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge*, 465-467; Borgersrud, Like Gode Nordmenn, 466.

<sup>145</sup> Parole fra Hjemmefrontens ledelse om Arbeidstjenesten 15.3.1944, NRK, NB.

<sup>146</sup> Grimnes, *Hjemmefrontens ledelse*, 194, 344.

<sup>147</sup> Ugelvik, *Meldungen aus Norwegen*, 1280-1. ‘einem Mittelding zwischen einer norwegischen Hitlerjugend und einer Militärformation’. My translation.

<sup>148</sup> Utlevering av våpen til sveitene, 25.6.1944, Tor Strand til Sør-Trøndelag arbeidsfylking, 16.8.1944, Resumé fra møte hos A.T.sjef og Stabsjef 24.5.1944, RA, L-sak Tor Strand.

<sup>149</sup> Fortrolig til Orientering, 22.4.1944, S-5014 Norges Arbeidstjeneste, Y, L0003.

Affairs inquired about the number of AT men volunteering for military service in the fall of 1944, Bormann replied that while he could not give any precise figures, there were only a few isolated cases and the number was dwindling. Bormann suggested that it had little to do with a ban Terboven had placed on recruitment in the camps, and everything to do with the enemy propaganda targeting the AT.<sup>150</sup>

In late 1944, Hierl and his coterie still insisted that the labour service idea would conquer Europe in the same way it had conquered Germany. The storm flood of war would clear the mud of bolshevism, and prepare the soil for the seed of labour service.<sup>151</sup> The situation in Norway was not particularly encouraging in that regard. During the first year of obligatory service 10 000 men served, rising to nearly 15 000 in 1942. But from there it dropped back to 10 000 in 1943, and finally 7700 men were called in for summer service in 1944.<sup>152</sup> Jan Egil Larsen has pointed out that even the low the figure reported for 1944 is probably inflated, and estimates that only 5254 men served altogether in 1944 and 1945. This brings the total number of men that served in the AT during the war to approximately 40 000.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, AT planning for extensive deployment continued late into the spring of 1945, whether due to a dogged determination to complete its projects, outright denialism, or hopes of perpetuating the labour service in the post-war era.<sup>154</sup>

Despite the scorn and charges of treason heaped on the AT by the government-in exile and the resistance movement, AT participation was not made a punishable offence during the post-war legal processes. To be a punishable offence there had to be serious additional circumstances, such as the use of a position in the AT to promote German influence and NS

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<sup>150</sup> Bormann an Abt. für auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 7.9.1944, RAFA-2184, L0001.

<sup>151</sup> Müller-Brandenburg an Bormann, 9.10.1944, RAFA-2184, L0001.

<sup>152</sup> Oppgave over antall innrullerte, utskrevne og gjort tjeneste i 1941,1942, 1943 og 1944, 6.6.1944, RAFA-2184, L0001.

<sup>153</sup> Larsen, *Funksjonsanalytisk studie*, 33.

<sup>154</sup> Sommerplan für den Norw. Arbeitsdienst 1945, 13.4.1945, RAFA-2184, L0001.

propaganda.<sup>156</sup> There were practical, political and geopolitical considerations behind this approach. To criminalize the AT would have drastically expanded the number of treason cases and weakened the Norwegian officer corps just as the cold war was setting in.<sup>157</sup> The courts also to some extent accepted the argument that labour service represented a valuable institution in itself, an idea that had been widely shared before the war. Nevertheless, the labour service was tarnished, and the job of dismantling the AT organization and camp system was quietly left to the Ministry of Defence.<sup>159</sup> Little now remains of the labour services and their history, beyond a few local place names and a handful of memorial plaques gracing the sides of dirt roads to nowhere.

### **Concluding remarks.**

During a grand speech at the University of Oslo in 1942, AT Chief Frølich Hanssen thanked the RAD and asserted that both services were part of a larger phenomenon: ‘We are doing this as a part of our people’s struggle for its existence. Therefore the AT also falls within the framework of Europe’s struggle for its existence’.<sup>160</sup> The labour service transcended borders even as it was subservient to a regime that reified the differences between peoples. As the NS Minister of Culture and chief propagandist Gulbrand Lunde explained this paradox, the NS did not copy foreign examples. The AT and other NS initiatives resembled foreign programs merely because they were Norwegian expressions of the natural progress of the order of things, as the spirit of the times manifested itself in many countries through similar measures.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> For more details, see *Om landsvikoppgjøret*, 182-4.

<sup>157</sup> Borgersrud, *Like gode Nordmenn*, 255-6.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Avvikling av Arbeidstjenesten’ *Stortingsforhandlinger*, vol. 98 Nr. 4 (1954), 40-45.

<sup>160</sup> Departementet for Arbeidstjeneste og idrett, Generalens foredrag i Universitetets Aula, 8.5.1942, RA, L-Sak Frølich Hanssen. ‘vi gjør det som et ledd i vårt folks kamp for sin eksistens. Dermed faller Arbeidstjenesten også innenfor rammen av Europas kamp for sin eksistens’. My translation.

<sup>161</sup> Gulbrand Lunde, *Norges plass i det nye Europa* (Oslo: NS Presse og propagandakontor, 1941).

This Hegelian interpretation of the labour service, with Konstantin Hierl in Napoleon's place as the world-spirit on horseback, naturally obscures more than it reveals. While numerous voluntary and compulsory labour services were created in many countries between 1920 and 1945, there was nothing straightforward about how they exchanged ideas and influenced each other through emulation, adaptation and rejection. Functional similarities arose in different contexts and for different reasons. A conspicuous feature of labour service debates in the interwar era was the recognition of an unsolvable tension between the national and international dimensions of labour service development. While this tension was almost unbearably salient for the national services that operated under German occupation, it also posed a problem for the German labour service proponents themselves. The RAD in this sense had inherited something of the pluralistic view from the interwar labour service movement. Its guidelines recognized that services in occupied countries needed space to develop some distinctive features and their own historical narratives of national uniqueness. The labour services were thereby shaped by complex negotiations between the RAD and the domestic regimes about the which ideas and practices could, or even should, be imported from Germany .

In Norway the German authorities determined the scope of action for the AT, but they did not require that it copy the RAD's solutions. The AT nevertheless developed several features that were strongly reminiscent of the RAD, but for somewhat different reasons. The emphasis on agricultural work was prevalent in both countries in the mid-1930s, but while the RAD assumed a military role, the AT remained in the woods and the cornfields. Both proponents among the officers and anti-German opponents of labour service portrayed it as a means to provide pre-military training in the interwar years, and Norwegian volunteers on the Eastern front had experience from the AT. But the AT itself did not become a military preschool that churned out men prepared for armed combat. While the AT did adopt organizational

structures, administrative apparatus, personnel and terminology from the pre-war military establishment, this was dictated by practical considerations rather than ideology.

The educational aspect of the labour service also exhibited some paradoxical traits. RAD demanded the introduction of the educational program, which became perceived as a means to Germanize Norwegian youth. Yet the program itself was left in the hands of Norwegian veterans from the interwar services, some with long track records of scepticism towards the German example. These ideologues used the opportunity to assert the distinctiveness of Norwegian history and culture. The AT cultural education program thereby developed as a mirror to the RAD's own efforts to promote national culture in Germany, not as a copy that stressed Germanic superiority and solidarity. While the Norwegian labour service activists sought to maintain their distance from the RAD in many ways, they were nevertheless ready to close ranks with the RAD to champion their common cause: 'This is what the AT is – a handshake across social borders and across national borders'.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Tor Strand, 'Tysk og Norsk AT'. Det er dette AT er, et håndtrykk over sosiale grenser og over landegrenser.

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