

## **Anticipating Norwegian Fascism: The Radicalization of Urban Right-Wing Nationalism in Inter-war Norway**

Salvatore Garau

*European History Quarterly* 2013 43: 681

DOI: 10.1177/0265691413496495

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ehq.sagepub.com/content/43/4/681>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *European History Quarterly* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://ehq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://ehq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Sep 13, 2013

[What is This?](#)



# Anticipating Norwegian Fascism: The Radicalization of Urban Right-Wing Nationalism in Inter-war Norway

European History Quarterly

43(4) 681–706

© The Author(s) 2013

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0265691413496495

ehq.sagepub.com



Salvatore Garau

## Abstract

This article argues that the transition from a liberal to an authoritarian form of nationalism in Norway after the First World War, although little studied outside Norway itself, provides an interesting and useful case study for a fuller assessment of the radicalization of European nationalism. The article looks at the forms that urban Norwegian nationalism adopted by analysing the ideas espoused by three inter-war movements, namely the *Norges Samfundshjelp* (Norway's Community Aid), the *Samfundsvernet* (Community Defence) and the *Fedrelandslaget* (Fatherland League). These movements radically modified Norway's previously liberal nationalism and introduced a set of new, but home-grown, ideas onto the Norwegian political scene, such as paramilitarism, corporatism, authoritarianism, anti-parliamentarism and territorial expansion. These were the ideas upon which Vidkun Quisling would later base the ideology of his own fascist movement, the *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union).

## Keywords

Anti-parliamentarism, authoritarianism, Denmark, fascism, *Fedrelandslaget*, *Nasjonal Samling*, nationalism, *Norges Samfundshjelp*, Norway, paramilitarism, Quisling, *Samfundsvernet*, Sweden

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, European nationalism went through a profound change in character.<sup>1</sup> From being a force that for much of the nineteenth century had focused on achieving more freedom for oppressed nations, nationalism was now undergoing a

---

## Corresponding author:

Salvatore Garau, Via Addis 6, Sassari, 07100 Sardinia, Italy.

Email: [salvatore.salis.garau@gmail.com](mailto:salvatore.salis.garau@gmail.com)

process of radicalization that was turning it into a central ideological feature of the growing authoritarian right.

The original form of nationalism, which had emerged in England and was originally concerned with civil rights and the individual, had taken its first step towards that change during the French Revolution, when it became increasingly associated with collectivism.<sup>2</sup> In France, moreover, this new concept of nationalism for the first time also accepted that violence might be used in its name for the good of the people as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, for much of the nineteenth century this new collectivist nationalism was used to promote the freedom of oppressed peoples, and hence tended to have a progressive character. Later, however, particularly during the phase of High Imperialism after 1875, nationalism began to lose its progressive character as it moved towards justifying the territorial expansion of the nation. The liberation of oppressed populations therefore ceased to be its focus, and it began instead to be used to legitimize the oppression of other peoples in the name of strengthening the home nation. When the authoritarian right took up this new form of nationalism as a central part of its ideology, nationalism underwent a further radicalization; the fascist movements would ultimately take that process to extremes.<sup>4</sup>

While the development and radicalization of modern nationalism have been extensively studied, the characteristics that this pan-European process assumed in Norway have not received wide attention. Slightly more is known about the most extreme phase of Norwegian nationalism, thanks both to Norway's development of a fascist regime after the German invasion in 1940, and to two biographies of Vidkun Quisling published in English.<sup>5</sup> However, very little is known about the movements that prepared the ground for the establishment of Quisling's fascist movement, the *Nasjonal Samling* (National Unification, NS), in 1933. Yet the rapid process of radicalization experienced by nationalism in Norway between the end of World War I and 1933 is not only very interesting and ideologically rich, but can also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon both in Scandinavia and in Europe more generally.

This article will therefore explore the development of twentieth-century radical Norwegian nationalism by focusing on three movements: the *Norges Samfundshjelp* (Norway's Community Aid, SH), the *Samfundsvernet* (Community Defence, SV) and the *Fedrelandslaget* (Fatherland League, FL), established respectively in 1920, 1923 and 1925. These organizations transformed the face of Norway's previously liberal nationalism and provided the intellectual foundations upon which Quisling would build his Norwegian form of fascism.

Early twentieth-century Norwegian nationalism was still clearly influenced by the country's long history of subordination to Denmark and Sweden. In 1814, following a union with Denmark that had lasted more than 400 years, with Norway was forcibly unified with Sweden, with Norway being once again the weaker party.<sup>6</sup> Nationalism in Norway grew out of a consciousness of this inferior status, and at the same time acquired a unique character from two distinctly Norwegian social traditions.<sup>7</sup> The first was Norway's bureaucratic elite, which

was composed of civil servants and the upper middle class. In a country that had no aristocracy, between 1814 and 1884 these groups were in the driving seat and made Norway into what has been described as a 'Civil Servant's State'.<sup>8</sup> Ideologically, they had embraced the liberal principles of economic growth, but even while seeing capitalism as a highly modernizing force, they also generally assumed that the forces of the market alone would not be effective without the moderating intervention of state planning.<sup>9</sup> Their largely successful attempt to modernize the country was achieved through an effective balance of economic liberalism and state intervention. Norway's dominant bureaucracy generally supported the 1814 union with Sweden, although it opposed any further enlargement of the Swedish king's powers over Norway. Furthermore, despite having helped make Norway into Europe's most democratic country at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the governing classes were opposed to greater democratization.

The second social tradition that was to have a major impact on Norwegian nationalism was the 'countercultural' alliance that increasingly opposed this ruling bureaucracy. It was primarily made up of intellectuals, freeholders and businessmen, who organized themselves into Norway's Liberal Party, the *Venstre*, in the hope of bringing more democracy and civil rights to the country. The *Venstre* was also joined by farmers, to whom the urban bureaucracy seemed fundamentally alien, too centralizing and undemocratic and too prone to shuffling off the costs of the union onto the peasantry through excessively high taxes. While the urban nationalism of intellectuals and freeholders was generally progressive, the farmers brought into the party a form of rural nationalism that was much more conservative, focused on Christianity and in general opposed to modernization and industrialization. This contrast made the *Venstre* a highly diversified party, with both conservative and progressive tendencies that led to the occasional breakaway of splinter groups, although its members' shared distaste for the union with Sweden kept the larger party united. What is interesting to note is that in the decades following the 1905 dissolution of the union with Sweden, the farmers' conservative nationalism would form the seed of the rural, authoritarian and anti-parliamentary nationalism that Quisling's NS would try to incorporate in 1933.<sup>10</sup>

In 1884 the *Venstre* became the dominant Norwegian political force, giving the liberals the political power to begin pursuing their goal of expanding democracy and popular sovereignty. To achieve this, they focused on trying to enlarge the power of the Norwegian *Storting* (Parliament), which could only be achieved by weakening the power of the king of Sweden. Meanwhile, the old bureaucratic elites, backed by moderates in the rural areas, responded to their loss of power by organizing themselves into a party as well, the *Høyre* (Conservative Party). The *Høyre* wanted to maintain the union with Sweden, believing that it brought economic advantages to Norway, guaranteed peace in Scandinavia and would limit the growing radicalism of republicanism.

In contrast, the *Venstre* showed a growing desire to dissolve the union altogether, thereby giving Norway complete independence and real popular sovereignty. This progressive nationalism, which the *Venstre* was pursuing at the

political level, was at the same time being strongly supported by the dominant cultural movement, National Romanticism (also referred to as the 'National Breakthrough').<sup>11</sup> The issue of language, for example, became particularly important, and was fought over by the backers of two competing cultural options. One was to 'Norwegianize' the Danish used by Norwegian officialdom by incorporating into it elements from the Norwegian dialects, and thus bring bookish language to the level of the people (*Bokmål*, 'the language of the book'); the other was to create a brand new Norwegian language that was based on dialects and discarded Danish completely (*Nynorsk*, or 'New Norwegian').<sup>12</sup> Both the political and cultural aspects of Norway's nationalist wave grew out of a defensive stance, which aimed to forestall any increase in Sweden's power, but moved towards an increasingly activist and offensive position, which aspired to the total dissolution of the union. This goal was attained in 1905.<sup>13</sup>

The obvious differences between Norway's and Sweden's power status in the years leading up to 1905 were reflected in each country's concept of nationalism. In Norway, since nationalism had been an important part of the struggle for independence, it had become inextricably linked with concepts such as parliamentarism, democracy, freedom and popular sovereignty; as such it had become a fundamental part of the *Venstre's* ideology. Swedish nationalism, on the other hand, had experienced no such struggle for national independence and was imbued with nostalgia for a lost imperial past and with resentment for Sweden's territorial losses, particularly that of Finland in 1809. No less importantly, Swedish nationalism was not the preserve of the Liberals, as it was in Norway. In fact, Sweden never experienced a clearly defined liberal phase, partly because it did not have to fight against foreign domination, and partly because the Swedish peasantry did not feel as oppressed as its counterparts elsewhere. Instead, nationalism in Sweden became associated with the conservative right and, in the process, it picked up various ideological features that were characteristically conservative. For example, instead of championing liberal ideals as in Norway, it was associated with contempt for parliamentary rule and opposition to the expansion of civil rights. The Swedish path towards democracy and parliamentarism was, in fact, typified by a bitter tension between the nationalist conservative right and forces such as the Social Democrats, who were pushing for greater democratization of political life.<sup>14</sup> The key controversy between them was whether or not the king should be subject to the authority of the parliament for the formation of a government, with the Conservative Party siding with the monarch and aiming to preserve his powers as they were expressed in the 1809 constitution. Some sectors of the Swedish right went even further, and openly asked for the establishment of a personal authoritarian monarchy, which would have effectively put an end to the emerging parliament. The leading theorist of these groups was Rudolf Kjellén, who, after World War I, began to discuss establishing an authoritarian system, not necessarily a monarchy, that would be led by one strong man.<sup>15</sup>

One final difference between Swedish and Norwegian nationalism that should be noted is the degree of variety found in each. Norwegian nationalism, as mentioned

above, contained both an urban and a rural version, which were profoundly different from each other. Swedish nationalism, on the contrary, was much more uniform, since the Swedish peasantry felt relatively little antagonism towards the Swedish political system, and therefore did not challenge the concept of nationalism that was being developed in the Swedish cities.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Norwegian nationalism was much closer to that which was developing in Denmark.<sup>17</sup> The Danes, like the Norwegians, saw nationalism as something that was relevant only to their country's internal issues; it did not dictate their attitude to other nations or encourage nostalgia for a greater past. Moreover, as in Norway, Danish nationalism contained both an urban and a rural version. At the same time, however, there were differences between Denmark and Norway. Most importantly, the contrasting attitudes of the *Venstre* and *Høyre* towards the union with Sweden made nationalism a divisive issue both before 1905 and afterwards, with the *Venstre* presenting itself as the only real national force in Norway. After 1918, the establishment of a Norwegian revolutionary socialist movement fully committed to internationalism meant that nationalism was to become even more contested. In Denmark, however, this was never to happen, and nationalism retained broad support, even on the left.

The originally progressive and liberal nature of Norwegian nationalism, however, did not prevent it from undergoing a process of radicalization in the late 1910s which was similar to that which had already taken place in other European countries. This new radical nationalism began to emerge amongst certain sectors of the Norwegian right, and was intimately connected to contemporary political events on both a national and international scale.

Although Norway did not participate in World War I, the country was still hit by the economic repercussions of the war, especially, from 1917 onwards, in the form of an economic slowdown.<sup>18</sup> Facing straitened circumstances, the working classes grew increasingly restive, while employers not only suffered their own financial losses, but also began to fear active organization on the part of their workers. In addition, the success of the 1917 Russian revolution helped shift the balance of power within *Det norske arbeiderparti* (The Norwegian Labour Party, DNA), with the revolutionary wing taking control of the party, radicalizing its propaganda and beginning to invoke revolution as the key means of seizing power and establishing a socialist state.<sup>19</sup> For its opponents, this development raised the spectre of a Bolshevik revolution in Norway, particularly in the northern part of the country (Finnmark), where local socialist leaders were overtly working to establish a communist republic.<sup>20</sup> As a reaction to socialism's proclaimed internationalism, a new idea of nationalism began to take root among bourgeois economic organizations, as well as among sectors of the political right, such as the *Frisinnede Venstre* (Liberal Left Party, formed from an offshoot of the *Venstre*'s conservative faction) or the ultra-conservative sectors of the *Høyre*. This nationalism also found favour among the radically anti-socialist elements in the military and in the conservative elements of rural society, which in 1920 would find expression in the *Bondepartiet* (Agrarian Party). Nationalism, in fact, seemed to many to be a powerful tool for

unifying the political, social and economic forces that opposed DNA's radical vision of a new society. However, since parliamentary democracy now appeared to be at fault for granting political legitimacy to socialism and thereby permitting its growth, this new radical nationalism began to suggest that nationalism's traditional commitment to greater democracy needed to be abandoned. Instead, radical nationalists started to debate whether parliament was really effective, and to wonder whether such an open system was not destined to bring about its own destruction.

These developments were mainly confined to the cities, but the growing links between radical urban nationalists and their agrarian counterparts makes some understanding of rural nationalism necessary. Rural society's historic dissatisfaction with the urban bureaucracy, and the importance of the farmers' conservative nationalism within the early *Venstre*, has already been mentioned. The dissolution of the union with Sweden, however, did not appease the farmers. Especially after 1918, they became increasingly vocal against state regulations that had been introduced during the war and, feeling once again that the urban political elites were not protecting their interests, they organized themselves into the *Bondepartiet* in 1920.<sup>21</sup> Charged with nostalgia for the past, the party became a vehicle for the farmers' frustration with current conditions.<sup>22</sup> In consequence, it began to express discontent with parliamentary rule, incorporate some eugenic ideas in the belief that the farmers were the 'healthy' part of the Norwegian population, and develop a form of nationalism that sometimes verged on authoritarianism, while the party's journal *Nationen* often published anti-semitic opinions, although these were never incorporated into its programme. These ideas interacted with urban nationalism in the 1920s and would become especially significant later on, when Quisling's NS began to absorb them.

As noted previously, from the late nineteenth century nationalism throughout Europe had become increasingly anti-liberal and anti-parliamentary, and it had also been used to promote imperialism abroad. Similar ideas were spreading throughout Norway in the 1910s, centred on the dream of a 'Greater Norway' that would be created mainly by expanding into the Arctic territories.<sup>23</sup> One important goal, based on medieval Norway's discovery and control of Greenland, was to gain control over East Greenland, particularly after 1921 when Denmark extended its rule over the whole island. Such nationalist-expansionist ambitions were partly realized when the 1920 European peace congress acknowledged Norway's sovereignty in the Svalbard Islands, although other demands, such as the gift of a German colony as a reward for the country's political friendship with the Allies during the war, were not granted.<sup>24</sup>

Within Scandinavia, these post-war expansionist tendencies could also be found in Sweden, Denmark and Finland, even though all four Nordic countries had escaped the main battles of the war.<sup>25</sup> Denmark, for example, hoped to regain its territorial losses of 1864, and actually managed to reincorporate the Northern part of Svesvig through a referendum. Sweden was unsuccessful in claiming the Åland islands, which remained under Finnish control, although they were



demilitarized and granted greater autonomy. Finland, meanwhile, obtained Petsamo but failed to extend its control over Karelia. In these other Nordic countries, as in Norway, such dreams of territorial expansion were a sign that something was changing in the nature of nationalism: as had happened previously in mainland Europe, it was moving from being an instrument of national liberation to becoming an anti-liberal and even expansionist force. In Norway, a crucial step in this transition took place at the very beginning of the 1920s with the creation of the SH and SV.

### **The Norges Samfundshjelp (SH) and Samfundsvernet (SV)**

In 1920 and 1923 respectively, two paramilitary groups were founded, the SH and SV, which shared a high level of nationalism and a thorough contempt for parliamentary democracy.<sup>26</sup> Together, they represented the first organized Norwegian form of the new radicalized, and ultimately anti-liberal, nationalism on which the FL and Quisling's fascism would later build their more detailed ideologies. Both the SH and the SV were established with the purpose of providing an armed force to suppress any possible strike that the DNA and the *Norges Kommunistiske Parti* (Norwegian Communist Party, NKP) might organize; both were also shaped into paramilitary movements, based on intense activism.

The creation of both the SH and SV was closely related to the politicization of the military, a development found in many European countries, which had been triggered by the transition from the 'old professionalism' to the 'new professionalism'.<sup>27</sup> In the former, the military had seen its job as being limited to protecting the nation from external threats, and hence tended to remain politically neutral. With its assumption of the 'new professionalism', however, the army began to include guarding against internal dangers among its main responsibilities, and thus began to interfere in politics to a much greater degree; the rise of socialism was, unsurprisingly, a crucial factor in this change of attitude. This politicization of the military frequently took place alongside a new attitude, found in both the army and in semi-legal paramilitary groups, of believing itself more capable than civilian institutions of confronting threats such as revolutionary socialism.

This application of military methods to politics at the beginning of the 1920s is often deemed to be a consequence of the first-hand experiences of World War I. However, the case of Norway challenges this assumption, for the country had remained neutral during the war. Thus, the emergence of paramilitarism in Norway should not be seen as a direct product of the war, nor can it be interpreted as the political adoption of methods already experienced during combat. Instead, Norwegian paramilitarism arose both as a consequence of the growing politicization of the military and because several bourgeois groups, worried by the advance of the left, came to the conclusion that anti-Marxism should enter a new phase, namely the adoption of the same violent means that were used by socialists and communists.

The SH's political programme stressed that the movement had not been created to support any specific party or particular interests, and insisted that its aim was to



protect the nation as a whole rather than any one class.<sup>28</sup> Yet the movement was highly political, in the sense that it was both the clear expression of the middle class and, at the same time, the direct product of Norway's specific political situation. Norwegian politics were characterized by a major split between the left and right: the former composed, as already mentioned, by the DNA and NKP, the latter made up of four main parties: the *Venstre*, *Høyre*, *Bondepartiet* and *Frisinnede Venstre*. These parties, although collectively called the *borgerlige* (bourgeois, or anti-socialist) parties, were failing to form a united front against socialism and were beset by continuous divisions. The SH was specifically created for the purpose of protecting these four parties, with force if necessary. Likewise, far from seeing themselves as responsible for protection of the nation as a whole, both the SH and SV placed themselves solidly on the right of the political spectrum. In fact, any political legitimacy of the left was denied, with the SH journal *Samfundet* ('Society') announcing that the communists 'are not a party' and dismissing them as being merely a group of seditionists working on the side of Norway's enemies to destroy society.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, both the founding of the SH and SV and their memberships show the marked class-based character of the two movements. For example, the initiative for the funding of the SH was taken up by six business and employers' federations worried that the *borgerlige* parties alone might be incapable of stopping the advance of the socialists or of suppressing, if necessary, any strikes organized by DNA and the *Landsorganisasjonen* (Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions, LO).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the SH had been founded by an army captain, Oswald Nordlie, facilitated its immediate welcome by large sections of the army, which had already been asking for the establishment of a paramilitary group. In consequence of this support, the SH soon became dominated by soldiers and officers and attracted members particularly from the middle and upper classes.

The forces behind the founding of the SV were substantially the same as those that led to the establishment of the SH. The first initiative to form the SV in fact originated in upper-class circles in Oslo, with some of the same organizations that supported the SH backing the SV too. The SV's membership was also drawn largely from the Norwegian bourgeoisie and from the military, and its leaders were army officers: until 1925 it was led by the highly decorated Major Johan T. Sverre, who was succeeded by Major Ragnvald Hvostef, a friend of Quisling and later a member of the NS.<sup>31</sup> Due to the similarities between the two groups there was some degree of overlap in membership, and SV numbers were boosted by several SH members who joined it soon after its establishment. In fact the SV became numerically larger than the SH, with an estimated membership ranging between 12,000 and 15,000 – a considerable number indeed.<sup>32</sup>

Although the SH was created as an 'armed hand' and declared its goal to be the protection of the status quo, the established order took a cautious approach towards the movement, for it could perceive that the SH, by placing itself between loyalty and dissidence, displayed both conformist and deviatory attitudes.<sup>33</sup> Particularly in Bergen, it was developing a very radical profile; Norway's state

institutions were well aware that any movement that accepted the use of violence to restore order might well end up disrupting democracy, just as Mussolini's Fascist movement was doing in Italy.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, while the SH sought direct links with the government, the government took a very cautious approach towards the SH. Those opportunities that the SH did find to establish links with the government were provided by its relationship with the highest ranks of the army, and the respectability of many of its members. This was the case in 1921, for instance, when an army general intervened in an SH appeal to be given heavy weapons by the army, in order to fight the socialists effectively in case they should ever gain control of Bergen. Through his mediation, the SH in Bergen obtained a meeting with the Minister of Defence, although he ultimately refused to comply with their request.<sup>35</sup>

Just like the SH, the SV was not interested in defending the constitution in itself since it was the constitution that guaranteed the existence of 'subversive' parties, such as DNA, and which allowed the election of governments too fragile to deal with the left. Not only did the movement draw up plans for the defence of Oslo in case of a socialist uprising, but it also took measures to ensure that no 'extreme party' would ever gain power, even if it were to achieve a strong parliamentary position.<sup>36</sup> Such plans were obviously aimed at socialists and communists, whose eventual victory in a democratic election would therefore be overthrown by an armed counter-revolution in order to save the country. In 1928, the group was granted a role by the government as a reserve police force but, despite its now semi-official position, it continued to prepare itself to fight independently against the revolutionary left, showing once again a complex relationship between its mission and respect for parliamentary democracy.

The ambiguous relationship of the SH and the SV with the established order and the fact that they embraced both anti-Marxism and a high degree of nationalism, believed in a more authoritarian state, and had been founded to defeat socialists and communists by means of a radical paramilitary organization, encouraged contemporary commentators and later historians to draw parallels between these movements and fascism.<sup>37</sup> In the SH's *Samfundet*, in fact, fascism was praised for being the reaction of Italian youth against communism and was generally depicted in a positive light.<sup>38</sup> These fascist sympathies, as well as the SH's radicalism, were naturally denounced by the left. Christian Gottlieb Hilt, a member of DNA who joined the NKP in 1923, wrote a pamphlet entitled *Fascismen i Norge* ('Fascism in Norway'), in which he established a parallel between the role of the SH in Norway and the development of fascism in Italy.<sup>39</sup>

While it is unsurprising that the activity of the SH might have been perceived as 'fascist' by the Norwegian left, it is more remarkable that an analogy between the SH and fascism should have been drawn within the *borgerlig* front, too. A minister in the Norwegian government who had spent some time in Rome, and who had therefore seen the Fascist regime personally, suggested in 1924 that the SH could 'develop into some sort of fascism'.<sup>40</sup> *Bergen Aftenblad* ('Bergen Evening Paper'), the organ of the *Høyre* in Bergen, noted in

1923 that the SH closely resembled Italian Fascism in its strong opposition to parliamentarism.<sup>41</sup>

The growth of Norwegian paramilitary nationalism is interesting not only because of what it shows about trends in Norway, but also because of the way it paralleled developments in Sweden and Denmark. In Denmark, just as in Norway, after World War I fears grew of a possible socialist uprising, with the Danish Combined Trade Union Opposition aiming to achieve a socialist revolution via general strikes. Knowing that the Danish police, like the police of the other Scandinavian countries, were particularly weak, and fearing that both the army and police would prove incapable of defeating the socialists in the event of such a revolution, General Ellis Wolff of the Danish army established the so-called 'P orders'. This was a special and secret list of conscripts who had been chosen on political grounds as not having any socialist sympathies. Created in 1919, its existence was initially not even communicated to the Ministry of War. Later, in 1924, the 'P orders' recruitment criteria were extended to the whole army, expanding the force to almost 35,000 'dependably' anti-socialist conscripts. However, despite the fact that at times the army was actually used to crush socialist unrest, the 'P orders' security force was never called upon as such, and was disbanded in 1932 when the Social Democrats and Radical Liberals gained power.<sup>42</sup>

Something similar happened in Sweden, too, although on a lesser scale. After 1918, in response to fears of socialist unrest, the government formed special units of men with proven anti-socialist feelings, drawn from both military and civilian volunteers. After 1921 the project lapsed, but it was restarted after a new conservative government came to power in 1929, looking for more instruments to prevent a hypothetical communist revolution. By 1937, the number of men involved in security forces had reached 25,000. Although Sweden had nothing comparable to the Norwegian SH or SV, some smaller movements did exist, such as the *Landstorm*, which brought together members of nationalist circles who wanted to become involved in the security forces.<sup>43</sup>

From its foundation in the 1920s, paramilitarism in Norway persisted throughout the 1930s, and another paramilitary force called *Leidangen* formed in 1931.<sup>44</sup> By building upon the previous experiences of the SH and SV, *Leidangen* grew to the point of being incorporated into Norway's official police in 1933 by Vidkun Quisling, then Minister of Defence in the Agrarian government. Quisling's act was prompted by his closeness with military circles, but it was supported by the *borgerlige* parties, who continued to fear a socialist revolution; DNA, meanwhile, saw his law as a first step towards the fascistization of the state.<sup>45</sup> It was only in 1936 that DNA, now in government with the Agrarian Party, brought paramilitarism to an end by passing a law that made private military groups illegal, and by depriving the now official *Leidangen* of the funds necessary for its survival.<sup>46</sup> However, the developments that had found expression in the SH and SV had already taken place, such as the politicization of the military, the popularity of voluntary military training with openly political overtones, and the widespread *skytterbevegelsen* ('Rifle Movement') which – again – had strong political ties.

All of these would continue to impact Norwegian political life, to the point of becoming an important element in Quisling's NS in the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> Before then, though, the SH's and SV's nationalism, anti-socialism, anti-parliamentarism and belief in a more authoritarian state would be developed and radicalized by a number of movements that appeared in the 1920s, the most important of which was the FL.

### **Fedrelandslaget (FL)**

The FL was formed at a time when the *borgerlige* parties were becoming increasingly worried by the growing strength of revolutionary socialism. In the 1924 parliamentary election the NKP had performed well, polling 6.1 per cent of the vote, which considering that it had been established only a few months earlier seemed ominous. It had come into being after DNA, led by Martin Tranmæl, had decided to withdraw from the Third International: at this, many members of DNA's youth organization had abandoned the party and joined the newly-formed NKP, followed soon after by 13 DNA *Storting* (Parliament) members. Yet despite the split, DNA retained a position of strength. Still proposing a revolutionary programme, in the 1924 parliamentary election it received 18.4 per cent of the vote, and although this was less than its previous 21.3 per cent in 1921, the decrease indicated less a loss of momentum for DNA than an upsurge in the popularity of the NKP. Thus, taken together, in 1924 the revolutionary left accounted for nearly a quarter of the total vote. It was an improvement on its 1921 performance and signalled a period of growth which, three years later in 1927, would lead to DNA taking 36.8 per cent of the general vote.

The motivation behind the creation of the FL, therefore, resembled that which had led to the establishment of the SH and SV, namely the determination to check the advance of the revolutionary left and unify the *borgerlig* front. Nevertheless, the founding of the FL was primarily a political rather than a paramilitary response to this progress, and the result of more mature analysis of the political situation. The *borgerlige* parties appeared incapable of successfully challenging the development of DNA and the NKP, for the *Venstre*, *Høyre*, *Bondepartiet* and *Frisinnede Venstre* could not reach any effective agreement on forming a united front, let alone a government. Their disunity produced weak governments and unstable parliamentary majorities, which in turn led to widespread doubts about the effectiveness of the parliamentary system itself.

The FL's primary aim was to unify and consolidate the *borgerlig* front and create a strong government based on national unity. In order to achieve this goal, unlike the SH and the SV, the FL did not adopt a paramilitary structure, as its purpose was not to present itself as a militia ready to fight the socialists in the streets. Instead, it initiated a dialogue with all the non-socialist parties, hoping to find a broader agreement which could lead to the formation of a government of national unity. At the same time, through its newly established journal, *Norges Fremtid* ('Norway's Future'), the FL tried to combat revolutionary propaganda by strengthening the idea of the nation, stressing the necessity of overcoming class

war, and promoting the idea of solidarity both among classes and between cities and the countryside as the only way to achieve progress as a nation.

Interestingly, the FL's views of its own political programme closely resembles those of early Italian fascists, who had admitted that their programme was not new, since aspects of it could be found in other parties' programmes, but maintained that it was enriched by a national spirit unique to fascism. Similarly, the FL's second journal, *Fedrelandet* ('Fatherland'), freely confessed that the movement did not have an original political programme.<sup>48</sup> However, the journal argued that while the political programmes of the other parties lacked a 'national line', it was precisely the centrality of the nation that the FL wanted to place at the heart of its political activity.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the FL claimed, the programmes of the other parties were aimed at protecting the interests of specific groups or social classes, but the FL believed that the nation should come before every partisan interest.<sup>50</sup>

The enthusiastic reception given to the FL by the *borgerlig* press appeared to strengthen the possibility of eventually forming a government of national unity, although the liberal *Dagbladet* ('The Daily Magazine') was less welcoming, mirroring the *Venstre*'s scepticism.<sup>51</sup> Leftist newspapers expressed real concern at the emergence of a new right-wing movement which, thanks to its highly respected leadership, might be able to unify the *borgerlig* front against socialism. *Arbeiderbladet* ('The Workers' Newspaper'), the publication of DNA, presented the FL as a dangerous reaction against the progress of workers' rights, while *Norges Kommunistblad* ('Norway's Communist Newspaper'), the newspaper of the NKP, argued that the FL was not only a conservative party, but actually the first form of Norwegian fascism.

One of the reasons why the FL was favourably viewed by some is that, initially at least, it was not perceived as a new competitor in the political arena as the FL did not run candidates, and did not present a risk to the traditional parties in parliamentary elections. As Michelsen pointed out in one of his speeches, the FL would 'welcome the *Høyre*, the *Venstre*, and all who want to be with us', seeking from the start to attract party members from across the entire political spectrum.<sup>52</sup> The favourable response to the founding of the FL on the part of the government and established order, as well as the respectability of figures such as Nansen and Michelsen, led several members of the *Frisinnede Venstre* to propose that Nansen actually become Prime Minister, and head a government of national unity formed of all the *borgerlige* parties. The idea was welcomed by sections of the *Bondepartiet* and by the *Høyre*, and for a while it seemed that the FL could achieve the goal for which it had been established. Eventually, though, resistance from the *Venstre* overwhelmed the project.

The FL's ambition to form a strong government of national unity, and the fact that it came close to achieving this aim, is extremely interesting for a number of reasons. First, the FL had assumed the form of a movement because of its distrust of party politics, and its attempt to form a government of national unity must be seen in this light. It believed that the system of parliamentary elections would

thwart the formation of a strong government, and therefore tried to create such a government without going through regular elections.

In fact, the FL's position regarding the parliamentary system was one of extreme hostility from the very beginning. In June 1925, the *Frisinnede Venstre's* journal *Tidens Tegn* published an article by Joakim Lehmkuhl, the FL's spokesman, which presented the political profile of the FL. The article claimed that the Norwegian people had begun to 'feel disgust' because the 'compromise' upon which contemporary politics was based was often 'a concealed form of corruption'. Indeed, Lehmkuhl declared that Norway was in a state of decay on account of party politics. Both conservative and liberal policies, in his eyes, ought to subordinate themselves to the overarching concept of the nation.<sup>53</sup> Critiques of parliamentarism pervaded the FL press, with headlines often referring to the 'failure of parliamentarism'<sup>54</sup> and the 'crisis of democracy and parliamentarism'.<sup>55</sup> The FL's *Norges Fremtid* stated that parliamentary democracy should go through a process of major change,<sup>56</sup> perhaps in a more authoritarian direction. The same ideas were expressed by *Fedrelandet*, which argued that the parliament should either be replaced by a new political system or else be thoroughly reformed to make it once again a meaningful political instrument.<sup>57</sup>

The FL's attempt to create a government of national unity, therefore, was intended as a means of overcoming party politics, which were, Michelsen declared, 'irrelevant' to the movement.<sup>58</sup> It would also circumvent parliamentary democracy because, if it were successful, Norway would gain a government of national unity without the FL's having had to go through regular elections.

It is interesting to note that such antipathy towards parliamentarism was not only expressed by the FL, but also began to appear among broad sectors of the *borgerlige* parties. Indeed, as has been shown above, the SH and SV had already demonstrated strong opposition to parliamentary democracy, and by the mid-1920s several *borgerlige* newspapers and journals were seriously questioning not only parliamentarism, but also the effectiveness of democracy itself. *Morgenavisen* ('The Morning Newspaper'), the publication of the *Frisinnede Venstre* in Bergen, advocated an anti-communist, anti-parliamentary and pro-fascist position, and argued that a bourgeois dictatorship was needed.<sup>59</sup> Likewise Christian L. Rolfsen, the Minister of Justice in Otto B. Halvorsen's *Høyre-Frisinnede Venstre* government, wrote that there were many who desired a Norwegian Mussolini.<sup>60</sup> The director of *Tidens Tegn*, Olaf Anton Thommessen, who was a member of an Italian-Norwegian association named 'Dante Alighieri', also displayed enthusiasm for the Italian Fascist regime. Finally *Nationen*, the publication of the *Bondepartiet*, expressed a distrust of party politics and favourably portrayed the development of Mussolini's regime.

Mussolini was widely praised in the FL press, too. *Norges Fremtid* hailed the 'triumphal progress of Italian fascism', depicting Mussolini as the saviour not only of Italy, but also of Europe and America, from the communist assault. The journal denied that 'Mussolini and his government tyrannize over parliament by unconstitutional means' because Mussolini could count on an 'overwhelming majority' in



parliament.<sup>61</sup> Even before the establishment of the FL, the *borgerlig* press tended to portray Mussolini's semi-constitutional government as one that could restore order and prevent a socialist revolution. Sympathetic Norwegian journals invested Italian Fascism not only with a political character but also with a spiritual meaning, in the sense that it seemed to be the only force capable of unifying a people, like the Italians, who had previously been so divided as to come close to civil war. From a *borgerlig* standpoint, fascism appeared to be a positive model, for it seemed to have unified the bourgeois forces in Italy and marginalized socialism, and this was exactly what the *borgerlige* parties hoped to achieve in Norway.

This political climate needs to be understood in order to comprehend the FL's attitude towards parliamentarism. In light of the keen interest that the Norwegian press demonstrated towards Italian Fascism and the positive terms in which it was described, it is evident that some of the FL's political aims echoed the fascist experience in Italy. However, this does not mean that the FL was a fascist movement. Nansen distanced himself from fascism and argued that the FL should not work against the established order; on the contrary, it should fight all subversive forces that might impose their views on society through 'brute force', either fascist or communist.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, broad sections of the movement were far more sympathetic to fascism than Nansen was. *Fedrelandet* acknowledged that fascism was 'the most dangerous word'; however, 'at the risk of being called fascists', should the FL be forced to decide between the Russian or the Italian political experiment, the movement would without hesitation choose the latter.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the majority of the FL felt that theirs should be a completely Norwegian movement and, as such, should avoid imitating foreign models. *Norges Fremtid* explained that some aspects of fascism, such as a dictatorship with a single leader, were ill suited to the Norwegian character; and in general, the FL believed that a new system of government could not be imported, or even modelled on the Italian template, but should instead be created by a totally national and independent process.<sup>64</sup>

The FL's anti-parliamentarism and opposition to party politics did not emerge only from an analysis of the current Norwegian political situation. It was based on a broader perception that Norway, and, more generally, Europe, were threatened by social, political and cultural decadence.<sup>65</sup> As Nansen stated in a public speech, the present period was a 'time of crisis' globally, with a future that might be even darker. This world catastrophe was characterized by mistrust and hatred that existed not only between different peoples, but even within a homogeneous people, among its social classes.<sup>66</sup> As *Fedrelandet* wrote, 'party is against party, class against class, idea against idea, a spirit of intolerance rules'.<sup>67</sup>

One of the factors behind this global destabilization was, in Michelsen's view, modern industrialism. Therefore, while broad sectors of Italian Fascism displayed a modernist ethos, some leading figures within the FL tended to view the economic effects of modernity negatively. In a speech made in Bergen at the beginning of 1925, Michelsen criticized the development of an industrialism that threatened the basis of modern society. In his view, the main consequence of industrial development was that the working class, which should be just one element – albeit an



important one – of production, had become ‘the centre and the leading force of the whole of production’.<sup>68</sup> Despite this different perspective on modernity, in response to the more frightening aspects of modern society the FL had, in common with Italian Fascism, concluded that the reunification of employers and employees was necessary, namely the establishment of the corporate state. Bringing together employers and employees, restoring a spirit of solidarity among social classes, and re-establishing national unity were the solutions that the FL proposed to overcome the present crisis.<sup>69</sup> The nation was therefore perceived as the focal point around which all social classes should gather. Moreover, the FL began to conceive a more aggressive military policy, particularly directed against Denmark in regard to Greenland; taking up the theme that radical nationalists had begun in the 1910s, the FL insisted that the ‘Land of Erik the Red’ should be returned to Norway.<sup>70</sup>

Despite its aggressive character, the FL’s nationalism was also very much connected to religious values. In the movement’s propaganda, Christian moral values were granted primary importance. The centrality of Christianity in the FL’s ideological profile was first and foremost a response to the threat posed by DNA and the NKP to the role of religion in Norwegian society. The FL challenged the idea, advocated by DNA’s leader, Tranmæl, that ‘religion should be a private matter’.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, where the NKP aimed to ‘eradicate religion in our land’,<sup>72</sup> the FL believed that Christianity should be ‘a categorical imperative’ and that its values should be the grounds on which society was built.<sup>73</sup> The defence of religion was also linked, from the FL’s ideological perspective, to the rejection of materialism. As the pamphlet *Kristendom og Kommunisme* (‘Christianity and Communism’) underlined, the FL wanted to challenge the idea that people decided which party to vote for purely on economic grounds; the FL believed, instead, that individuals’ actions were influenced by moral beliefs too.<sup>74</sup> While communism was ‘thoroughly materialistic’,<sup>75</sup> the FL wanted to appeal to people who were motivated by spiritual and moral needs, and it was these people who were invited to participate in the movement.

Although the FL did not assume the form of a paramilitary group, from its inception it attempted to appear more active than any of the other *borgerlige* forces. Activity of this sort was particularly attractive to the young generation that had grown up witnessing the First World War, the Russian revolution, the weakness of parliament, post-war economic problems, and socialist revolutionary activity. The FL publications underlined that the main goal of the movement was ‘first and foremost to unify youth’, an idea which was very much a leitmotif in the movement’s propaganda.<sup>76</sup> In this attempt to appeal to the restive younger generation, the FL mirrored Italian fascist efforts to garner youth support. The *Konservative Studenterforening* (Conservative Students’ Association) was extremely critical of the *Høyre* for its lack of dynamism, and had already been demanding a new form of conservatism that would display energy and activism. The FL appeared to provide exactly this, and many students hoped to find in the FL what they felt had been lacking in the *Høyre*. Several years later, many would look for the same activism in Quisling’s NS.

The conservative and nationalist profile of the movement, the respectability of its leaders, and the capacity to attract young members soon led to a significant expansion of the FL's membership. Between 1928 and 1930 it experienced a 'violent process of change' and 'rapid growth', reaching its peak by the end of the 1920s with a declared membership of 100,000.<sup>77</sup> The real figure was probably slightly lower, but all major Norwegian scholars agree that the FL at this point was genuinely strong and that its membership was massive. This membership, however, was limited in nature: the FL's forceful anti-socialism meant that its appeal was strongest among the Norwegian upper and middle classes, where concern about socialism's revolutionary propaganda was greatest. It was also a predominantly urban movement, drawing many more members in the cities than in the countryside. Nevertheless, in the 1930 elections DNA saw its share of the vote fall from 36.8 per cent to 31.4 per cent, while the NKP failed to return a single MP: this, in addition to the FL's own numerical expansion and growing success, led the FL to hail the result of the 1930 elections as 'the first great defeat of the socialist and communist parties'.<sup>78</sup>

Although the FL had placed itself solidly on the right of the political spectrum at the time of its founding, by the end of the 1920s this appeared to be changing. The FL remained incapable of attracting workers and ex-socialists in large numbers, but it nevertheless did appeal to some individuals with socialist experience or those looking for an original form of 'national socialism'. The FL thus succeeded in attracting Eugène Olaussen, formerly a leading figure in DNA and later in the NKP, who after embracing revolutionary syndicalism came to question its premises and moved towards an interpretation of socialism that had a more national and productivist flavour. Writing in 1929, Olaussen stated that the 'workers' interests can be defended through the accomplishment of the economic revival that is the FL's central program'.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the protection of the proletariat lay in an improvement of domestic production. Productivism, the 'unification of people' beyond class and party divisions, and the centrality of the nation were to become key aspects of Olaussen's thought.

Another point to note is that towards the end of the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s, and therefore during its period of greatest strength, the FL began to incorporate more radical members and ideas.<sup>80</sup> Most significant among these radical members was Vidkun Quisling, who within three years would launch his NS and by 1930, while still a member of the FL, had already established the basis for his future ideology. Quisling was educated in a military academy, and with excellent academic results to his name began a successful career in the army. Having risen to the rank of major, he spent the 1920s detached from direct involvement in domestic politics; instead, he spent most of the decade abroad, joining Nansen on a humanitarian mission to Russia to help relieve the deadly famine that was striking the country.<sup>81</sup> Drawing on his experience in Russia, Quisling published a book entitled *Russia Og Vi* ('Russia and Ourselves') in 1930, which was not only an account of the Russian political and social situation and a strong and detailed account of Marxism's failure, but also expounded some of his own political

ideas.<sup>82</sup> In particular, after having been sympathetic to socialism in the 1920s, Quisling now showed himself to have wholly rejected its internationalism and turned instead to nationalism.<sup>83</sup>

Quisling's newly emergent nationalism was not, however, the right-wing and bourgeois nationalism that characterized the FL. Rather, it was a nationalism that acknowledged the importance and centrality of the working masses for the political strengthening of the nation. In this aspect particularly, Quisling's nationalism showed the influence of his previous connections to socialism. Indeed, Quisling was attempting to reconcile socialism and nationalism.<sup>84</sup> Into this ideology he was also clearly incorporating a racist vision of history, which he depicted in *Russia Og Vi* as being a long-running struggle between the Slavic and Nordic peoples. In particular, he was increasingly beginning to explain Bolshevism's role in history as a Slavic assault against the Nordic race.<sup>85</sup>

Despite Quisling's later notoriety, at the beginning of the 1930s he was just one among many of the FL's new radical members who were proposing an overtly racist and socialist form of nationalism. Other notable radical members of the movement were Odin Augdahl, Arne B. Bang, Webjørn Gudem Larsen and, above all, Hans Solgaard Jacobsen. These, like Quisling, were coming to embrace a form of anti-bourgeois and 'socialist' nationalism that was different in character from that which had previously characterized the FL. In fact, this more leftist variant of nationalism was much less inclined to seek support among industrialists and ruling elites and tended to address its critiques against the structures of modern capitalist society; it despised the role of finance and was highly critical of traditional values (often including Christianity), which in its supporters' view merely helped preserve the status quo. Ultimately, this form of national socialism, as proposed by Jacobsen, Augdahl, Bang and Larsen, owed much to nationalist myths of racial belonging and national regeneration. As members of the FL, these radical members tried to campaign for a more national socialist political line, with the hope of radicalizing the FL ideology.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, even the main FL press did not conceal its approval for the achievements of Mussolini and even those of Hitler.<sup>87</sup>

In November 1933, Jacobsen, Augdahl, Bang and Larsen elaborated a political programme clearly oriented towards national socialism and proposed it to the FL leadership.<sup>88</sup> The rejection of their proposal marked a defeat for the national socialist group within the FL, and induced these members to leave the movement and join Quisling's new NS, where they received a much more favourable hearing. When Jacobsen's initiative was rejected, a new programme, '*Et Norsk Program*' ('A Norwegian programme'), was approved for the FL, comprising six points. While less radical than Jacobsen's, the new programme nonetheless marked a radicalization of the FL's previous policies. The FL now called for 'national and moral reconstruction', while maintaining the centrality of 'an unsparing and broadly charged battle on Marxism, against the false doctrine of materialism and against all imported customs'. Although not advocating dictatorship, its calls for 'strong government power with full executive authority' and a state that 'solicit[s]

unquestioning loyalty from its civil servants' were clearly marked by authoritarian tendencies. The FL's traditional distrust of parliamentarism featured in the new programme, too, for the proposed strengthening of the authority of the government was to be achieved through a reduction of the functions of the *Storting* and of the number of its members. The programme also called for social justice and harmony in the relationship between workers and owners. Evidently inspired by the Fascist Charter of Labour, the programme maintained that a Law of Labour should be issued to solve 'the question of organization upon corporatism and national solidarity'. It also called for a 'prohibition against strikes and lockouts', proposing instead 'social resolution of all labour-related disputes'.<sup>89</sup>

The 1933 FL programme unquestionably represented a radicalization of the movement's profile. At the same, this radicalization was part of a much broader trend towards authoritarianism that was appearing throughout Europe, Italy and Germany being, of course, to the fore. In Norway, while the FL was certainly the leading force in radical nationalism, such ideas had permeated various mainstream parties, most notably the *Frisinnede Venstre* and the *Bondepartiet*.<sup>90</sup> The extent to which some of these parties were willing to flirt with corporatism and were starting to scorn parliamentarism can be seen by looking at the youth organization of the *Høyre*, which at the beginning of the 1930s began to express discontent with the old generation's management of the party and openly called for a fascist turn.<sup>91</sup> According to their journal, *Minerva*, Norway needed 'an authoritarian state to which everybody must yield, commanding obedience through a powerful government independent of the organs of the state and local self-government', which would 'govern the economy of the country' and be based on 'an assembly of representatives, like an advisory council, from the interest organizations and certain other associations and institutions'. 'What we need in other words', concluded the journal, 'is the fascist system'.<sup>92</sup>

The sympathy felt by Norwegian conservative youth for fascism was shared to a large extent by their counterparts in the other Scandinavian countries.<sup>93</sup> For instance, the youth organization of the Danish Conservative Party expressed disdain for democracy, while upholding corporatism as the best political system. When the organization's leader was removed in 1936 due to his fascist sympathies, a considerable number of members left both the organization and the Conservative Party, and joined the Danish National Socialist Workers' Party (DNSAP).<sup>94</sup> However, apart from the Conservative Party's youth organization and, in part, the Independence Movement in Southern Jutland, anti-parliamentarianism did not gain a significant foothold in Denmark.<sup>95</sup>

In contrast, Sweden offers the most notable example of the fascination that fascism could hold for young Scandinavian conservatives. The youth branch of the Swedish Conservative Party featured ultra-nationalism, anti-parliamentarism and open approval of fascism. Furthermore, while in Norway the young conservatives limited their ambitions to radicalizing the *Høyre*, in Sweden many of the conservative youth quickly moved past the idea of changing their own party and in 1934 actually established a party of their own, the National Party, through which

they intended to pursue a policy more similar to fascism. The break-away of the conservative youth does not mean, however, that the Swedish Conservative Party was categorically opposed to any sort of authoritarianism. As was shown earlier, the Swedish Conservative Party had traditionally been critical of the expansion of democracy and parliamentarism. Views that were a product of that tradition were still being voiced in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in the most radical sectors of the party.<sup>96</sup> Under the influence of thinkers such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels, these sections of the Conservative Party openly criticized democracy and party politics. In fact, the defence of democracy was practically non-existent in the conservative press all through the 1920s, while conservative writings instead continuously stressed the need to strengthen the executive branch at the expense of the legislative power. With feelings towards Mussolini's Italian and Primo de Rivera's Spanish dictatorships being generally positive, even the idea of a Swedish dictatorship was not discounted by some ideologues, and was kept as an option if democracy failed.<sup>97</sup>

Against this background of comparative radicalism, the FL can be seen to have been part of an international phenomenon that involved both Scandinavia and Europe in general. Within Norway, the FL was the chief player in this process of radicalization before 1930, but thereafter its appeal began to wane. This decline was caused in part by Nansen's death in 1930, but, above all, resulted from DNA's decision to relinquish its revolutionary programme in the early 1930s. With the socialists accepting reformism, the struggle against them was seen, even within the *borgerlig* front, to be less urgent. Moreover, in 1933 several of the FL's members began to leave the party to join Quisling's now fully active NS, and the FL found itself sinking into an irreversible decline. The FL would survive until 1940, but although it transformed itself into a party and ran in the political elections of 1933 and 1936, these were a fiasco: the once powerful League failed to elect a single candidate. In the aftermath of the German invasion, the FL then tried to establish links with the Nazis, in the hope of being chosen to head a government both national and loyal to the invaders. The Nazis, however, chose Quisling as the leader of the new puppet regime and rejected the FL.

## Towards Fascism

Despite its decline after 1933, the FL had played a very significant role in developing a more radical urban nationalism, advocating distrust for the parliamentary system and providing an opportunity for different nationalisms – both those leaning towards socialism and those that were conservative – to begin to converge. Its numerical expansion made it a powerful forum, which allowed individuals who supported different strands of nationalism to come together, discuss and act: in many respects it was an embryonic attempt to create a nationalist alliance of disparate forces, which is one of the typical characteristics of fascism. The radicalization of nationalism, too, which had already been initiated by paramilitary

movements such as the SH and SV, was taken another step forward by the FL when the movement developed radical nationalism into a structured ideology. Despite its growing radicalism, however, the FL never allowed its national socialist members to take control and, ultimately, never attempted to develop a paramilitary profile through which its political struggle could be taken to the streets.

Nevertheless, the FL's increasing authoritarianism, anti-parliamentarism, corporatism, and dreams of territorial expansion were all to become central features in the first forms of Norwegian fascism. These were represented by several small fascist movements that made their appearance well before the NS had become the authoritative version of fascism in Norway. Unarguably imitative, they incorporated both foreign fascist ideas from Italy and Germany and radicalized forms of the urban right-wing radical nationalism that had been initiated by the SH, SV and FL.

The first of these movements to openly label itself fascist was *Den Nationale Legion* (National Legion), founded by Karl Meyer in 1927. From the beginning, it attempted to distinguish itself from traditional conservatism and the *borgerlige* parties in a more marked way than the FL had done.<sup>98</sup> For instance, it criticized the *Høyre* for being a purely conservative movement, boasting that the NL sought not to preserve the status quo, but rather to challenge it by offering a radical political alternative.<sup>99</sup> Meyer defined the NL as a radical-conservative movement that was seeking to simultaneously defeat the socialist threat and the decadence of parliamentary democracy.<sup>100</sup> Its vision was to restore both the authority of the state and traditional national values, and it would do this through radical methods of political struggle. In other words, the NL tried to integrate revolutionary methods with a national-conservative profile.<sup>101</sup>

Another of these radical groups was the *Norges Nasjonal-Socialistiske Arbeiderparti* (Norway's National Socialist Workers' Party, NNSAP), whose derivative nature was patent not only in its German-inspired name but also in other characteristics such as its Nazi-style rhetoric, programme, uniform and symbolism.<sup>102</sup> Although the movement remained very small, it achieved real significance by launching the political careers of individuals such as Adolf Egeberg, its leader, who was to play an important role in Quisling's NS. Other such small groups, such as Walter Füst's *Nationale Klub* (The National Club) and Quisling's own *Nordisk Folkereisning* (Nordic Folk Awakening) anticipated the definitive radicalization of nationalism that the NS would bring about.

The proliferation of small fascist movements was not limited to Norway; in fact during the 1920s and 1930s Sweden was home to nearly one hundred small fascist or fascistic groups. These typically had an exceptionally small membership; indeed, the only one to acquire any degree of numerical significance was the Swedish National Socialist Freedom League, which was founded in 1924 and revived in 1930, when it merged with the Fascist Combat Organization to form the National Socialist People's Party.<sup>103</sup> Denmark produced at least seven fascist movements, but again only one achieved any sort of numerical strength. This was the Danish



Nationalist Socialist Workers' Party, founded by Cai Lembcke and led by Frits Clausen after 1933.<sup>104</sup>

All of the Norwegian movements described so far, both those discussed in some detail like the SH, SV and FL, and the briefly mentioned *Nasjonale Legion*, *Norges Nasjonal-Socialistiske Arbeiderparti*, *Nationale Klub* and *Nordisk Folkereising*, represented a process of radicalization that took urban Norwegian nationalism in a dramatically different direction from its liberal and progressive origins. This is key to understanding the rise and development of Quisling's NS in the 1930s. However, in order to explain both what the NS tried to achieve and why it was different from its predecessors, one final aspect must be discussed: rural nationalism. The *Bondepartiet*, as has already been mentioned, was the main political expression of the farmers' frustrations, but other tools were found outside the party to represent rural concerns. Most notably, the *Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp* (Rural People's Crisis Aid) had been formed to take direct and violent action against the foreclosures of farms during the post-1929 depression, which had gravely affected Norway's rural society and economy.<sup>105</sup> The radicalism of rural nationalism expressed by the *Bondepartiet* and the *Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp* led both to flirt with Quisling in the 1930s; in fact, an Agrarian government chose him as their Minister of Defense in 1930. His NS was even originally perceived as the urban version of the *Bondepartiet*, before the latter distanced itself from the NS's subsequent radicalization; meanwhile, the *Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp* officially allied itself with the NS, bringing the NS many extra votes from some rural areas in the 1933 general election.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, this alliance proved detrimental to the reputation of the *Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp*, which declined in the mid-1930s.<sup>107</sup>

Once again, rural radicalism, like the other forms of radical nationalism mentioned in this article, was not limited to Norway, but was found in Sweden and Denmark too. The Swedish Agrarian party, for example, expressed anti-parliamentary feelings similar to those of rural Norway;<sup>108</sup> in Sweden, these were due to the farmers' feeling that urbanization had left them less and less able to make their voice heard in the Swedish parliament. Parliamentarism therefore seemed unable to promote their interests, and left them dissatisfied with party politics and the electoral system. Instead, they frequently advocated a strong executive power that could surpass party interests.<sup>109</sup> Likewise, the Danish Farmers' Party, which was formed in 1934, assumed a relatively radical profile, and collaborated on a local basis with the DNSAP.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusions

The NS was a unique conflation of two paths of authoritarian nationalism, one urban and one rural. The former, which has been the focus of this article, had developed in a relatively short time and in a context that had previously fostered a strongly progressive and left-wing nationalism. However, the SH, SV and FL managed to introduce and successfully cultivate a number of aspects upon which Quisling's NS could build a genuinely fascist ideology, including anti-



parliamentarism, opposition to democracy, praise for authoritarianism, corporatist tendencies, an increasing closeness between politics and the military, firm anti-socialism and occasional racism. It is, in large part, this dependence of Norway's fascist movement upon the SH, SV and FL that makes Norway so interesting and relevant within the pan-European radicalization of nationalism and growth of fascism, despite its political marginality in the 1930s. Both because of its ideological richness and the velocity with which this radical nationalism took hold, the case of Norway can enhance our understanding of European pre-fascist nationalism in the inter-war period.

## Notes

1. For reasons of clarity, Norwegian movements and parties will be referred to in the Norwegian. When the article refers to movements and parties outside Norway, especially in Sweden and Denmark, it will use their English translation.
2. Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge MA 1992).
3. George L. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism* (Hanover NH 1993).
4. Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison WI 1995), 35–41.
5. Hans Friderik Dahl, *Quisling: A Study in Treachery* (Cambridge 1999); Oddvar K. Høidal, *Quisling: A Study in Treason* (Oslo 1989).
6. An interesting contemporary account of the union between Norway and Sweden is in Fridtjof Nansen, *Norge og foreningen med Sverige* (Kristiania 1905).
7. Øystein Sørensen, 'The Development of a Norwegian National Identity During the Nineteenth Century', in Øystein Sørensen, ed., *Nordic Paths to National Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Oslo 1994), 21–22.
8. Alf Kaartvedt, 'The Economic Basis of Norwegian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', in Rosalind Mitchison, ed., *The Roots of Nationalism: Studies in Northern Europe* (Edinburgh 1980), 13–15.
9. Rune Slagstad, 'The Metamorphoses of Norwegian Reformism', in Jóhann Páll Árnason and Björn Wittrock, eds, *Nordic Paths to Modernity* (New York 2012), 146–147.
10. On the pre-NS Norwegian tradition of anti-parliamentarism see Jostein Nerbøvik, *Antiparlamentariske straumdrag i Noreg 1905–1914: ein studie i motvilje* (Oslo 1969).
11. Oscar J. Falnes, *National Romanticism in Norway* (New York 1933).
12. Kjell Haugland, 'An Outline of Norwegian Cultural Nationalism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century', in Mitchison, ed., op. cit. On the role of history and language in the formation of Norwegian national consciousness see also Sørensen, 'The Development...', 25–32. On the question of the Norwegian language see Einar Haugen, *Language Conflict and Language Planning: The Case of Modern Norwegian* (Cambridge MA 1966).
13. On the dissolution of the union see Franklin D. Scott, *Sweden: The Nation's History* (Carbondale IL 1988), 327–333.
14. On Swedish parliamentarism, see Leif Lewin, *Ideology and Strategy: A Century of Swedish Politics* (Cambridge 1988), 87–122.
15. Ibid. pp. 95–6. See also Bernt Hagtvet, 'On The Fringe: Swedish Fascism 1920–45', in Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet and Jan Petter Myklebust, eds, *Who were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen 1980), 720–721.

16. Ulf Lindström, *Fascism in Scandinavia, 1920–1940* (Stockholm 1985), 27–8.
17. On Danish national identity see Uffe Østergård, 'Nation-Building Danish Style', in Sørensen, ed., *Nordic paths*, 37–53.
18. Nils Avar Agøy, 'When Officers Need Internal Enemies: Aspects of Civil–Military Relations in Scandinavia between the World Wars', *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 33(4) (1996), 272.
19. On the DNA's radicalization see Odd-Bjørn Fure, *Mellom reformisme og bolsjevisme. Norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1918–1920. Teori, praksis* (Bergen 1984).
20. Nils Avar Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende' fra 1905 til 1940: hemmelige sikkerhetsstyrker i Norge sett i et skandinaviskperspektiv* (Oslo 1994). See particularly Chapters 1 and 2.
21. Bjørn Vidar Gabrielsen, *Menn og politikk: Senterpartiet 1920–1970* (Oslo 1970).
22. On the increasing political belligerence of the *Bondepartiet* through the 1920s see Francis Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton NJ 2011), 81–84.
23. Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890–1940* (Cambridge 2002), 170.
24. An interesting account of these claims made by Norway is in F. Wedel Jarlsberg, *Reisen gjennom livet* (Oslo 1932), 366 ff.
25. Salmon, op. cit., 169–170. See also Lindström, op. cit., 28–31.
26. See Agøy, 'When Officers...', 469–481, and Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 254–255.
27. The term 'new professionalism' was introduced in an influential article by Alfred Stepan, 'The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion', in Alfred Stepan, ed., *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies, and Future* (New Haven CT 1976).
28. *Alarm*, 28 August 1920.
29. *Samfundet*, 2 May 1923.
30. See *Alarm*, 28 August 1920. The organizations were the following: *Norges Rederforbund*, *Norges Industriforbund*, *Norsk Landmandsforbund*, *Den Norske Bankforening*, *Norges Håndverkerforbund* og *Norges Handelsstands Forbund*.
31. On the SV membership see Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 251–254.
32. See Agøy, 'When Officers...', 469–481. See also Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 254–255.
33. Sverre Bergh Johansen, *Norges samfundshjelp: konformisme og avvik* (Oslo 1967).
34. Ole-Jan Persen, *Høgrekkestremisme i Bergen 1920–1933* (Bergen 1974).
35. Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 168–169.
36. *Ibid.*, 250.
37. Oddvar Høidal, for instance, pointed out that SH clearly displayed features that might be labelled fascist. See Høidal, op. cit., 52.
38. *Samfundet*, 5 May 1923.
39. Christian Hilt, *Fascismen i Norge: 'Norges Samfundshjelp' og 'Borgernes Samfund'* (Kristiania 1923).
40. Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 261.
41. Persen, op. cit., 74. See also Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 261.
42. Agøy, 'When Officers...', 470–472.
43. *Ibid.*, 474–475.
44. A term difficult to translate, *Leidangen* was a form of conscription to organize coastal fleets for seasonal excursions and in defence of the realm in Scandinavia during the Viking Age.

45. Høidal, op. cit., 114.
46. Ibid., 53.
47. See Lars Borgersrud, *Vi er jo et militært parti: den norske militærfascismens historie 1930–1945* (Oslo 2010). This recent book extensively discusses the connection between the NS and the military.
48. *Fedrelandet*, 1 May 1926.
49. *Fedrelandet*, 1 June 1926.
50. *Fedrelandet*, 1 May 1926.
51. On the reception of the FL in the *borgerlig* press see Andreas Nordal, *Harde tider. Fedrelandslaget i norsk politikk* (Oslo 1973), 35–37.
52. Statsminister Chr. Michelsens tale paa Fedrelandslagets aapningsmøte i Bergen 25. januar 1925 (Oslo 1925), 2.
53. *Tidens Tegn*, 11 June 1925.
54. *Norges Fremtid*, 27 June 1925.
55. *Norges Fremtid*, 6 February 1926.
56. *Norges Fremtid*, 26 November 1927.
57. *Fedrelandet*, 1 July 1926.
58. Statsminister Chr. Michelsens tale, 2.
59. Quoted by Agøy, *Militæretaten og 'den indre fiende'*, 261.
60. Ibid.
61. *Norges Fremtid*, 10 October 1925.
62. Professor Fridtjof Nansens tale 29. januar 1925 i Logens store sal, Oslo (Oslo 1925), 6.
63. *Fedrelandet*, 1 July 1926.
64. *Norges Fremtid*, 15 May 1926.
65. Professor Fridtjof Nansens tale, 2.
66. Ibid.
67. *Fedrelandet*, 1 June 1926.
68. Statsminister Chr. Michelsens tale, 2–3.
69. Professor Fridtjof Nansens tale, 2–3.
70. *Norge – Danmark – Grønland: det norske standpunkt i Grønlands-saken historisk og juridisk belyst* (Oslo 1931), 28–32.
71. *Kristendom og kommunisme: Arbeiderpartiet og religionen* (Oslo 1930), 5.
72. *Fedrelandet*, 1 June 1926.
73. *Kristendom og kommunisme*, 1.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 3.
76. See *Fedrelandet*, 1 May 1926 and 1 June 1926.
77. *Beretning for 1928–1930/utarbeidet ved Landssekretariatet* (Oslo 1931), 7.
78. John E. Nordskog, *Social Reform in Norway: A Study of Nationalism and Social Democracy* (Westport CT 1973), 22.
79. *Norges Fremtid*, 22 June 1929.
80. Terje Emberland, *Religion og rase: nyhedenskap og nazisme i Norge 1933–1945* (Oslo 2003).
81. Dahl, op. cit., 42 ff.
82. Vidkun Quisling, *Russia and Ourselves* (London 1931).
83. Ibid., 274.
84. Dahl, op. cit., 73.

85. Quisling, op. cit., 245–260.
86. Emberland, op. cit.
87. See *ABC*, 16 March 1933 and 11 May 1933; see also Nordal, op. cit., 218–219.
88. Emberland, op. cit., 251.
89. *ABC*, 30 November 1933.
90. An excellent account of how Norwegian mainstream parties reacted to the emergence of fascism can be found in Iselin Theien, 'Norwegian Fascism, 1933–40: The Position of the Nasjonal Samling in Norwegian Politics', PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2001.
91. Ida Blom, 'Unge Høire – mellom konservatisme og fascisme. Forholdet mellom Nasjonal Samling og Unge Høire 1933–1936', in Rolf Danielsen and Stein Ugelvik Larsen, eds, *Fra idé til dom: noen trekk fra utviklingen av Nasjonal Samling* (Bergen 1976).
92. *Minerva*, 13 March 1934, 52. Quoted in Jan Petter Myklebust and Bernt Hagtvet, 'Regional Contrasts in the Membership of the Nasjonal Samling', in Larsen, Hagtvet and Myklebust, eds, op. cit., 643.
93. On the conservative youth's support for fascism see also Henning Poulsen, 'The Nordic States', in Detlef Mühlberger, ed., *The Social Basis of European Fascist Movements* (London 1987).
94. Lindström, op. cit., 11.
95. Ibid., 40.
96. Ibid., 40–42.
97. Hagtvet, 'On The Fringe...', 716–719.
98. Due to its marginality, the movement has been analysed only very briefly in Norwegian historiography. See, for instance, Hans Olaf Brevig and Ivo De Figueiredo, *Den norske fascismen: Nasjonal samling 1933–1940* (Oslo 2002), 19.
99. *Nationalfascisten*, 15 July 1927.
100. Ibid.
101. *Nationalfascisten*, 15 September 1927.
102. Emberland, op. cit., 123.
103. On Swedish fascism and its relevance, despite its almost complete lack of support, see Lena Berggren, 'Swedish Fascism – Why Bother?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 37 (July 2002), 395–417.
104. See Henning Poulsen and Marlene Djursaa, 'Social Basis of Nazism in Denmark: The DNSAP', in Larsen, Hagtvet and Myklebust, eds, op. cit., 702–714.
105. On the *Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp* see Jostein Nerbøvik, *Bønder i kamp: Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp 1925–1935* (Oslo 1991).
106. On the closeness between the NS and the *Bygdefolkets Krisehjelp* see Sten Sparre Nilson, 'Who Voted for Quisling?', in Larsen, Hagtvet and Myklebust, eds, op. cit., 661–663. See also Høidal, op. cit., 148–152.
107. A similar organization in Sweden, the Swedish National Rural Union (*Riksförbundet Landsbygdens folk*) did not go through the same process of fascistization and was able to expand through the 1930s, reaching a membership of 52,000. See Stein Ugelvik Larsen, 'Conservatives and Fascists in the Nordic Countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, 1918–1945', in Martin Blinkhorn, ed., *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London 1990), 258–259.
108. Hagtvet, 'On The Fringe...', 718.

109. Lindström, op. cit., 43.

110. Ibid., 10.

### **Author Biography**

**Salvatore Garau** (PhD, University of London) will shortly be publishing his first monograph with Routledge (2014) under the title *Fascism in Italy, Britain and Norway, 1919–1939*. An article on the internationalization of Italian Fascism and its impact on the British Union of Fascists is forthcoming in *Politics, Religion & Ideology*. He has also published on fascist antisemitism and co-edited a book, *Fascism and the Jews*, published by Vallentine Mitchell.