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Bo Lidegaard, *Countrymen*. Trans. Robert Maass. New York: Knopf, 2013. Pp. x, 396. ISBN 978-0-385-35015-0.

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Any history of the destruction of European Jews under the Third Reich tells a grim tale, extending to countries as disparate as the Netherlands and Lithuania. In much of occupied Europe, both police forces and neighbors either cooperated with the Germans or enthusiastically joined in killing the Jews, with one bright exception. The story of how Denmark saved its Jews is now available in an excellent study¹ by Danish journalist and historian Bo Lidegaard.² He has made good use of the ample literature in Danish, Swedish, and German on his topic as well as original government documents and the unpublished diaries of several Danish Jews who fled to Sweden. The resulting book presents—in alternating chapters—both the high-level political decision-making that enabled the Jews to survive and the personal sagas of their midnight voyages across the Kattegat to safety. Lidegaard carefully situates his account in Holocaust historiography to make clear the high price that Danes paid for this rescue.

Countrymen begins by sketching Denmark's unique situation in occupied Europe. On 9 April 1940, Germany invaded Norway and Denmark. While the Norwegians, with British and French aid, fought back, the Danish government capitulated almost without a fight. While Norway's king and government fled into exile, Danish King Christian X and his country's parliament remained in place. Until summer 1943, this arrangement benefited both Danes and Germans. Danish police continued to patrol the streets, the government continued to collect taxes and administer public services, while the Germans fortified the west coast of the Jutland Peninsula, installed air bases and radar stations, and needed to assign just one Wehrmacht division to occupation duty. More importantly, Danish farms supplied Germany with one-twelfth of its food. In short, from a political perspective, the Third Reich had acquired a new province, whose population was both obedient and Nordic. As Lidegaard points out, Denmark foreshadowed what the Reich might have been like, had Hitler won the war and ruled all of Europe.

The comparatively idyllic conditions in Denmark meant its Jewish population could continue to run their businesses and live their lives. But in summer 1943, the war was no longer going well for Germany. In Denmark, strikes and sabotage, though never serious, were increasing, as was public anger at the nation's formal cooperation with the Nazi regime. Hitler had often contemplated extending the Final Solution to Denmark, but SS-Obergruppenführer Werner Best, the German plenipotentiary in Denmark, had always managed to forestall any action. Though no friend of Jews, he did not wish to jeopardize the continued ease of German rule in Denmark. The Danish politicians he worked with advised him that things would become much more difficult if the Nazis moved against the roughly seven thousand Jews in Denmark. Matters came to a head at the end of August, when the Danish government resigned and the Germans proclaimed martial law. Hitler himself ordered the round-up and deportation of Denmark's Jews.

At this point, the author, writing originally for a Danish audience, inundates his readers with detailed accounts of what individual politicians, journalists, and others did, said, and wrote. At least three high German officials, including Werner Best himself, warned their Danish counterparts that the Jews would soon be arrested and deported. After the cabinet and parliament resigned, the Danish shadow government desperately sought alternative solutions. For example, the Danish police might round up and intern the Jews just as they had the country's few dozen communists, shortly after the German invasion. But the Danes realized that, once the Jews were interned, there could be no guarantee that they would remain on Danish

1. Superbly translated from the Danish by Robert Maass.

2. He is editor-in-chief of *Politiken*, Denmark's leading liberal newspaper.

soil. The interned communists, in fact, had quickly been deported to a concentration camp. When his narrative comes to the day for “action”—Friday, 1 October 1943—Lidegaard shifts focus to a chronicle of the Jews’ desperate efforts to find hiding places and safe passage to Sweden.

For most Danish Jews, things actually turned out amazingly well. Since only the Gestapo and a few pro-Nazi Danes wanted to arrest and deport Jews, just 474 were sent to camps, where fifty-three died. German army commanders and soldiers ignored the action, not wanting to “get their hands dirty.” The Kriegsmarine followed suit, making no effort to intercept the dozens of fishing boats that carried the Jews across to Sweden. The Swedish government welcomed the Jewish refugees and provided them with housing and documents. Children entered schools and adults got jobs. Most Danish Jews returned in May 1945 to find their homes and property intact, waiting for them.

The “story,” then, has a happy ending. But Lidegaard does not ignore the difficult questions that the survival of Denmark’s Jews raises. When *Countrymen* first appeared, a review by historian Claus Bundgård Christensen in Lidegaard’s own paper pointedly noted that “*Landsmænd* will appear in parallel German- and English-language editions. That means an international audience will be presented with the uncomfortable fact that it was the policy of cooperation which saved the Danish Jews. That is itself something worth considering.”³ And, indeed, Lidegaard recognizes this dilemma. Among *Countrymen*’s two dozen photos, maps, drawings, and documents, is a cartoon depicting Danes ignoring a German soldier on the street; a lengthy caption discusses the ambiguities of occupation. “Ever so slowly, from 1942 resistance grew and began to bite in 1943. But this did not put an end to the cooperation, which actually expanded over the last years of the occupation, even as the government stepped down in August 1943. After the action against the Jews in October 1943, sympathy for the resistance grew stronger, but probably most people at the same time maintained their support for cooperation, wanting both to uphold normality as much as possible and yet also to get rid of the occupants as soon as possible” (116).

Near the end of the book, Lidegaard summarizes his argument as it applies to both Denmark and the rest of Europe.

What ultimately stopped the extermination of Jews on Danish soil was the express and entrenched Danish opposition to the project. This, together with our insight into the cynical trade-off between the different policy objectives that were guiding the leading Nazis in respect to the occupation of Denmark and action against the Danish Jews, opens a troubling perspective: Those responsible shrank back when they faced a clear choice between pursuing their overarching interest in Denmark or persecuting the Danish Jews. The many protests from high and low, from church and business, from politicians and state secretaries, confirmed what Best and his people had long known and told Berlin: There was a deeply rooted aversion in the Danish population to the idea of introducing special laws or measures against the Jews. Since 1933 the Danish government had forcefully rejected any attempt to create a divide between the Danes based on descent. Rather, those who attacked democracy had been excluded from the national “us,” while the leading politicians succeeded in equating the nation with the values its social order rested on.... This rejection explains ... the Nazi hesitation that made the rescue possible.... Would something similar have been possible elsewhere? Could the rejection of the logic of the Jewish extermination have stopped the project in other occupied countries—even in Germany itself? The answer is yes—of course.... [But] the Holocaust tells a different story, and the terms of occupation, local conditions, and much else [made] the situation unique in each case. The special Danish example cannot be used to reproach others who experienced the German occupation under far worse conditions than Denmark. (347–48)

Lidegaard uncovers many surprising facts. Besides German soldiers and sailors, Adolf Eichmann, usually seen (with good reason) as evil incarnate, played a moderating role in Denmark. Visiting Copenhagen after most of the Jews had fled, he was briefed on the situation by Best. He sent a secret telegram informing

3. *Politiken* (9 Sept 2013), my translation from the Danish. One of Christensen’s interests is Denmark under occupation and the unpleasant fact that six thousand Danes served in the Waffen SS, at least some of them taking part in the killing of Jews and partisans on the Eastern Front. See further Christensen, Niels Bo Poulsen, and Peter Scharff Smith, “The Danish Volunteers in the *Waffen-SS* and Their Contribution to the Holocaust and the Nazi War of Extermination” [1999], rpt’d. in Mette Bastholm Jensen and Steven L.B. Jensen, eds., *Denmark and the Holocaust* (Copenhagen: Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 2003) 62–101, available online – www.miwsr.com/rd/1505.htm.

Berlin that in the future any Jews over age sixty would not be detained and that the Danish Jews in the Theresienstadt concentration camp would be well treated and visited by the Red Cross. As the Reich collapsed in 1945, a joint Danish-Swedish effort rescued both Danish and Norwegian prisoners. Lidegaard mentions the fact—overlooked in most histories of the Holocaust—that Bulgaria, an ally of Nazi Germany, protected all its Jews. He ends *Countrymen* with a short epilogue on events after the war. Most Danish Jews came home from Sweden and resumed their lives. Those involved in efforts to arrest and deport them either escaped trial or served short sentences.

Student and specialist readers both will profit from reading this well researched⁴ study of a remarkable exception to the sad saga of Nazi-occupied countries' collusion in the Holocaust.

4. Lidegaard is fully conversant with the work of, e.g., Daniel Goldhagen, Jan Gross, and Peter Longerich.