

The Social Movement in Norway

Freedom Press, Anonymous

September, 1889

(By our Trondhjem correspondent.)

It is a mistake to suppose that there is no revolutionary movement in Norway. It is a land where the seeds of revolution have always fallen upon good ground.

After the French revolution of 1848, the Communist idea of that time floated over to Norway and spread so fast that by 1850 the whole country was agitated by the Thraniker movement, so named after its leader, Marcus Thrace. But the most energetic spirits were thrown into prison and the agitation suppressed.

Since that time until last year it has been very quiet here among the workers. But the great social movement which has been growing abroad since the Paris Commune, has also reached the land of the midnight sun. During the last ten years a Social-Democratic propaganda has been carried on in Norway and in the last five years it has become very energetic. At present it is extremely strong and making great way. The organ for the Social-Democratic association is the Social Demokraten, a sheet edited by Carl Jeppesen, the leader of the Social Democrats of Norway. It is published twice a week in Christiania and its able editing has gained it a great circulation.

The Social Democrats or State Socialists, have a strong and effective organization, with Christiania as head-quarters. The Social Democratic Union is a numerous society, holding weekly meetings and often taking part in larger public gatherings. Three years ago there was very little talk of the Socialists and opinion about them among the people was rather adverse than anything else. But now their leader, Mr. Carl Jeppesen, is one of the most popular men in Norway. For instance, last spring when the compositions of Christiania were out on strike, the Socialists announced a public meeting on Tullinlokken, an open space, but the police would not allow the meeting to take place. Great indignation was aroused and there would have been a fight between the people and the police, had not the judicious action of Mr. Jeppesen prevented anything of the sort. About twenty members of the University belong to the Social Democratic Union. There is also a fairly strong Socialistic organization in Bergen, and until lately they have published a socialistic paper.

Until two years ago the people of Norway were little acquainted with Anarchism. Now, however, Anarchist ideas have reached us and have found their advocates. The Norsemen are a very individualistic nation; their individual liberty they love more than anything else, and it is therefore not very hard work to make propoganda for Individualist Anarchism, but the communistic

ideas are new to this generation. Nevertheless Communism is spreading and the hearts of the people are susceptible to the truth. Anarchism has become an intellectual power in this country. I do not mean that the Anarchists are a party organized as such, carrying on political propaganda. No; but the democracy of the Norwegians is developing in the direction of anarchistic ideas—that's to say, into logical individualism.

One of the very first advocates of Anarchism in Norway was Henrik Ibsen, that gifted thinker and writer, who has gained so many admirers in England. That great man of European celebrity, who in Germany is admired as a modern Schiller, is an Anarchist. Yes, indeed, and a strong one too.

These revolutionary plays have been performed on every stage in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and most of them in Germany. Now they begin in England and France, and the light spreads into hundreds of thousands of human brains, making clear the faults of society and the truth of freedom.

Another well-known Norwegian writer, Arne Garborg, is also an Anarchist and has written many excellent articles on that subject. But it is not only among men of great intellectual power that the new ideas have taken root. They are stirring the masses of the people.

In a public letter to the Danish author Gorg Brandes, Ibsen writes: The coming time-how all our notions will fall into the dust then! And truly it is high time. All that we have lived on up till now has been the remnants of the revolutionary dishes of the last century, and we have been long enough chewing these over and over again. Our ideas demand a new substance and a new interpretation. Liberty, equality, fraternity, are now no longer the same things that they were in the days of the blessed guillotine; but it is just this that the politicians will not understand and that is why I hate them. These people only desire partial revolutions, revolutions in externals, in politics, But these are mere trifles. There is only one thing that avails—to revolutionize people's minds."

What Ibsen expects of the new time is a condition where individuality can have opportunity to develop itself free and independent without being restricted-by the state or society. In another letter to Gorg Brandes, written two months later, he says, "The state is the condition of the individual. Wherewith is the state-power of Prussia bought? By that the state is all and the individual nothing. The state must be abolished. That is a revolution I sympathize with. Undermine the state in every direction, set up individual liberty as the foundation for human union- that is the beginning of a liberty which is worth something." This thought, that the state is the enemy of individuality and freedom, and therefore must be done away with, is one of the clearest ideas of Ibsen. The above letters were written before the Paris Commune. But sixteen years afterwards I heard him set forth the same ideas with the same strength and love," writes Henrik Jeger, Ibsen's biographer.

And it is on this fundamental idea that Ibsen has written his modern plays, which commence with "The Pillars of Society," and temporarily end with "The Lady from the Sea." In every one of these plays he put his finger on something rotten in society.

We have an anarchist paper, named Fedraehimen, well edited by Ivar Markenson. The paper is published at Tynnset, and he has made a very energetic propaganda up there, so that part of the world is almost Communist Anarchistic in spite of the fact that people up there are well-to-do farmers. Fedraehimen has a very good circulation. especially among the peasants and farm laborers and the intellectual society of the cities.

My own opinion concerning the movement in Norway is, that it will not take a long time before Norway goes ahead of other countries in the propagation of social ideas, because Norway is little (population two millions) and the people are idealistic and radical in their thoughts. And though Anarchism is new here, the ideas have more admirers than we had imagined ourselves. When the glorious day of revolution comes we shall be ready. To that end and for that cause we are clasping hands across continents and oceans with 0 nationalities, that a warm international understanding may pave the way for the Social Revolution.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Freedom Press, Anonymous
The Social Movement in Norway
September, 1889

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 3, No. 34, online source RevoltLib.com,
retrieved on May 2, 2020.
Freedom Press, London

usa.anarchistlibraries.net