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In the shadow of the Revolution

An analysis of the impact of the Russian Revolution
in Norway, 1917-1920

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Introduction and The Road to Revolution:

Certain moments in history have such far-reaching consequences that irrevocably alter the principles of societal structures and social theory, and most of these moments are tied to revolutions. The motives and causes of revolutions have always been conditionally related to their political contexts, but in common they all want to rapidly alter the social conditions of their society. That Marxism today still upholds influence and importance within the political context is undoubtedly only because it was catapulted into a global canvas by the Revolution in Russia a little more than a century ago. Its impact was felt almost immediately by the countries of Europe, and especially its newly independent neighbour to the west. As a country still in the process of industrialising and adapting to a world dominated by competing power blocs, the Russian Revolution represented for many a natural progression in a world ravaged by imperialism and deadly wars fought between monarchs. By analysing the impact of the Russian Revolution in Norway, one can determine how the ideals of revolution and Marxism was interpreted and managed by different areas of Norwegian society. Because the Russian Revolution is also closely connected with the political polarisation and policies of the Interwar period, it facilitates a better understanding of how politics and ideology were fundamentally different during the 1920s and 1930s than they were before World War 1. This thesis will therefore focus on how the Russian Revolution impacted three areas of Norwegian society: foreign and domestic policy, the labour movement, and the media.

Norwegian relations with Tsarist Russia had before 1905 largely been on an individual level between sailors and traders in Northern Norway.¹ This relationship originates from the trade between Northern Norway and North-western Russia which goes as far back as the late Middle-Ages. The Russian traders became known as *Pomors* and played an important economic role in the many fishing communities and towns along the northern Norwegian coast.² This Pomor-trade had grown exponentially after the Napoleonic wars, so much that the Scottish observer in Northern Norway, Samuel Laing, remarked that the Northernmost parts of Norway was only truly Norwegian eight weeks a year, during the winter.³ Whereas Norwegian foreign policy from the period between 1814-1905 had been dictated from Stockholm, to great discontent at times for the Norwegian parliament, Norway's secession from the union created new possibilities and challenges in the field of foreign relations. Norway's union with Sweden also had the lasting effect of cementing an expansionistic distrust of the great neighbour to the east, the fear of Russian expansion westwards to milder shores along the Gulfstream. This mistrust and fear of Russian intervention in the North is an important point, as it set precedence for the Norwegian policy regarding their much stronger Russian counterpart. The fear of Russian expansion into Northern Norway during the Tsar-regime has however been criticised both during and after the dissolution

¹ Nielsen 2014: 371

² Ibid: 447

³ Laing 1837: 268

of the union between Norway and Sweden. Jens P. Nielsen argues that sources from both British and Norwegian reporters during the 19th century conclude that the border between Norway and Russia does not mark a climatic border where harbours to the east freezes and those to the west prosper. He further argues that if the Russians wanted to expand their naval infrastructure into the White Sea and Barents Sea, it would be incorrect to claim they required Norwegian shores.⁴ In an article published in 2014 Nielsen again argues that the fear of Russian expansionism in Northern Norway was largely a Swedish invention to secure support amongst France and Britain for intervening in the Crimean War and regain control of Finland.⁵ Considering the Swedish king Oscar I was far less pro-Russian than his father and sought to align Sweden closer to the west, the Crimean War provided an excellent opportunity to regain the land lost during the Napoleonic Wars. The Swedish king was however not able to secure British and French support for an offensive in the north, and the ordeal culminated in what became an agreement between the dual kingdom, France and the United Kingdom, called the "November Treaty". A treaty which secured Swedish and Norwegian territorial integrity as long so they promised not to make territorial concessions to the Russians, including harbour rights.⁶ The news of the treaty was obviously not well received in St. Petersburg, who saw the treaty as a blatant and insulting.

On account that Norway did not have their own foreign ministry, Norwegian-Russian relations had throughout the 19th century been dictated by Sweden, and subsequently dominated by Swedish political interests. When the question of Norwegian secession from the union with Sweden began to take hold in the political spheres of Norway, the fear of the 'Russian danger' once again became a topic of interest in both nations. As previously discussed, there is nothing which would suggest that Russia had plans to expand into the coast along northern Norway; this did however not dissuade Swedish politicians from using this ingrained fear of Russian expansionism as a method of preserving the union.⁷ For Tsar Nicholas II and the Russian government they obviously had a vested interest in suppressing nationalistic tendencies and ideals of self-government at home, especially considering their attempts at russification in Finland during the 1890s.⁸ The union-stride between Norway and Sweden also represented an opportunity for Russia to gain influence on the Scandinavian peninsula, as the Swedish royal family's close cooperation with the German Empire would yield their support in the dispute of union, Norway had yet to gain firm support from the other major powers of Europe. More importantly, Norwegian independence represented an opportunity for Russia to gain influence along the North Sea as they could approach Norwegian authorities directly. The Russian optimism for Norwegian independence was further enhanced by the reports from the Russian consul in Hammerfest, G.G zur Mühlen, who spoke positively of Norway and their monarchist traditions.⁹ After the Norwegian government declared independence from Sweden on 7th June 1905, Russia was also the great power nation to formally recognize their independence and delegate an ambassador to Christiania.

The years leading on to the outbreak of World War 1 also saw the creation of the 'Integrity Pact' of 1907, as a replacement for the "November Treaty" signed during the union with Sweden. In this new treaty all the major powers of Europe guaranteed Norwegian territorial integrity, and because Russia was a part of this guarantee it was received better in St.

⁴ Nielsen 1996: 14-15

⁵ Nielsen 2014: 54

⁶ Omang 1968: 70

⁷ Nielsen 1996: 21

⁸ Ibid: 15

⁹ Ibid: 21

Petersburg than the one prior to it.¹⁰ According to Karelin and Nielsen, Russian diplomats in Norway were also instructed to foster good relations between the two neighbours; partly to counteract the Norwegian relationship with pro-German Sweden, and because Norway represented great strategic value in an eventual war.¹¹ When tensions culminated and war between the great powers eventually broke out in 1914, Norway was quick to declare a pact of neutrality with its Scandinavian neighbours. Although it was difficult for Norway to uphold its neutrality with pressure from Britain and domestic political blocs with their own interests and allegiances. However, the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare from the German Empire greatly pushed the political balance and moved Norway closer to the Entente and became what was later characterized as a "neutral ally".¹² The February Revolution in Russia was also well received by Norwegian politicians and the press, as they now had a more democratically inclined neighbour to the east with whom they could continue to foster greater economic collaborations.¹³ As the war progressed the instability in Russia became clearer both for the Allies and for Norway; while protests and food shortage had also been affecting Norway, the failure of the new Russian state to gain progress in the war against the Central Powers culminated in the second Petrograd uprising of 1917; the Bolshevik Revolution. The new government in Petrograd was one the world had never seen before, and Norway now stood at a crossroad in how it would deal with the new socialist Russia on its eastern border.

Research question:

The goal of the thesis is to analyse the impact of the Russian Revolution by examining its effect on three areas of Norwegian society. The first area is domestic and foreign policy, narrowed down this involves the government's response to the growing revolutionary fervour in the labour movement and how they prepared for that which could become a revolution based on the ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution. The second area is how the Russian Revolution impacted the labour movement, where the focus is on the Labour Party and how far the party embraced the ideals of the revolution. The third area is the revolutionary impact on the media focusing on the perspective of the socialist newspapers, where it will examine how the Russian Revolution was initially reported by the press and how the press was affected by the revolution.

Literature review:

There have been no macro studies on focusing on exclusively on the impact of the Russian Revolution on Norwegian society, this thesis is therefore to some degree influenced by other studies with the same question such as R. P. Arnot's "*The impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain*"¹⁴ and Daly's and Trofimov's "*The Russian Revolution and its global impact: A short history with documents*".¹⁵ Because each individual country experienced

¹⁰ Omang 1968: 81-82

¹¹ Karelin and Nielsen 2014: 525

¹² Stugu 2012: 51

¹³ Goldin 1996: 41

¹⁴ Arnot 1967

¹⁵ Daly and Trofimov 2017

the impact of the Russian Revolution differently, the aforementioned literature is only used as a structural guide.

Eriksen argues that the civil war in Finland was perceived as a threat to the territorial integrity of Northern Norway because of underlying disagreements connected to the original agreement regarding the border.¹⁶ Eriksen also argues that because Finland was not a part of the aforementioned treaty, it was a fear in the Norwegian government that they had intentions to alter the borders with or without Norwegian consent. Kristiansen argues however, that the strengthening and defensive focus on the borders of Northern Norway was not directly because of a perceived threat from Finland or Russia, but that the area had gained an increased strategic importance during the World War 1. Kristiansen also argues that since the military border control in Northern Norway created during the war was replaced with a police force in 1920, there could not have been a lasting mistrust or fear of incursion into Finnmark.

Goldin analyses the effect of the Russian Revolution on Norwegian policy by examining the diplomatic activity of Norwegian ambassadors in Petrograd and their role as mediators between the Bolshevik government and the Entente.¹⁷ Furthermore, he emphasises the disputes that arose regarding the border changes between Finland and the Soviet government and how they affected Norwegian policy in Northern Norway. Holtmark, Kasijan and Repnevskij argues that the government's focus was to uphold its neutrality amid growing pressure from political groups within the country and pressure from the already existing power blocs of Europe.¹⁸

Bull, as one of the first to study the Norwegian labour movement argued that the radicalisation of the labour movement originated from the lack of class identity, and that because of the rapid growth of industry the workers developed a more revolutionary mentality than the older, slower growing labour movements in Denmark and Sweden.¹⁹ Fagertun, Fure and Olstad argues that the radicalisation of the labour movement was a result of several different factors, where among the most influential factors was the October Revolution in Russia, which legitimised the ideals of a state with a strong class of workers.²⁰ They also indicate factors such as the inability of the labour leadership to address the challenges of the working class during the war, and that this weakness facilitated the takeover by the radical opposition in 1918, moreover the effect of charismatic speakers within the labour movement such as Martin Tranmæl and Kyrre Grepp.

On the impact of the Russian Revolution in the media, Ottoesen argues that the revolutionary fear caused by the Bolshevik uprising led to a restriction of press freedom, and that the disagreements within the socialist newspapers on how they perceived the new Bolshevik state presaged the split of the Norwegian Labour Party.²¹ Egge emphasises that the Russian Revolution made it easier for editors with more radical views to gain popularity, and that socialist newspapers could use the Russian Revolution as a reference for societal change in Norway.²²

¹⁶ Eriksen 1981

¹⁷ Goldin 1996

¹⁸ Holtmark, Kasijan and Repnevskij 2015

¹⁹ Bull 1922

²⁰ Fagertun 1996; Fure 1983; Olstad 2018

²¹ Ottoesen 2017

²² Egge 2017

Methodologies:

Because the thesis is divided into three chapters, it would be natural to also differentiate between the research methods used for the different sets of source materials. A qualitative method of research will be applied in the first and second chapter of the thesis by going in depth on the sources and secondary literature and contextualizing them with the pre-determined research question. Because most of the archive material associated with domestic and foreign policy during this period is not digitalised, the thesis will mostly rely on secondary literature which have used said archive material in their own studies. A comparative method of analysis will be complementing a qualitative method in chapter three, as the objective of the chapter is foremost an examination of how the Russian Revolution impacted the media. The comparative method is used by comparing the conservative newspaper *Aftenposten* with *Social-Demokraten*, which was a newspaper published by the Norwegian Labour Party. The qualitative aspect comes in the form of choosing specific dates of political importance and then analysing what is written through the context of the research questions. These papers are also available digitally, so they are not analysed with additional commentary.

Chapter 1: The impact of the Russian Revolution on foreign and domestic policy

When the Russian Revolution erupted in Petrograd, the Norwegian government was already struggling to maintain an adequate supply of important goods such as food and coal. The growing unrest among the people concerning the inability of the government to handle the ongoing crises also made discontent rampant. Norway's immediate challenge at the outbreak of the war did not concern its domestic policy, but how it would conduct its foreign policy regarding the warring states on the continent. The fear of becoming a part of the conflict demanded careful manoeuvring as not to offend or give cause for reprimands among the great powers, which was challenging since much of the Norwegian economy relied on its merchant fleet and trade. The Russian Revolution and civil war that erupted in Finland also presented new challenges for a government already struggling with a shortage of necessary goods and a growing political polarisation. The revolutionary fear in the government that arose from the increasing radicalisation of the labour movement also led to stronger countermeasures enacted by the ruling party.

1.1 The revolutionary impact on foreign policy in Russia and Northern Norway

While the new socialist government in Russia appeared to be inspiring among many in the Norwegian labour movement, the same sentiment was not shared among the conservative blocs and especially not the predominantly social-liberal government. The fear and awe experienced by many Norwegians is also tied to the fact that this new government in Petrograd was something completely new, and it was difficult to assess exactly how the situation would develop. Perhaps the most important issue for the Norwegian government was whether the Bolshevik government would reevaluate the border between Russia and Norway. According to the principles of international law, the new Soviet government was obligated to act in accordance with previously agreed upon treaties made by former governments.²³ While the Soviet government did not fully dismiss all the previous treaties, they opted instead that they would incorporate the treaties which they considered important into new agreements with the respective countries.²⁴ Until this point no other country had formally recognized the Soviet government as a legitimate continuation of the Russian state, so these new agreements would have the consequence of an implicit *de jure* recognition their sovereignty. Holtsmark argues that when the other great powers refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet government, the Soviet Commissariat of foreign affairs (NKID) instead chose to appeal towards other small states for recognition, especially Scandinavia.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, many of the decisions made by the Soviet government had alienated them from other countries, both neutral and those aligned with the Entente. One of these decisions was the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March of 1918 with the German Empire, a decision which also met opposition from within the Soviet government. Norway, who had a key interest in maintaining a relationship with the Soviet government, did not fully retract their diplomats from Petrograd despite being instructed by the Entente to do so.²⁶ The reasons for this refusal was possibly tied to the civil war in Finland, since many

²³ Danielsen 1964: 47

²⁴ Ibid: 48

²⁵ Holtsmark, Kasijan and Repnevskij 2015: 31

²⁶ Goldin 1996: 50

within the Norwegian government were distrustful to the Finnish state and feared the war could lead to incursion in Northern Norway. Another reason could be the traditional trade between Norway and Russia in the Barents Sea, where Norway had prospects for a continuation of this trade as it was an important part of the economy of Northern Norway. It is important to note however, the even though Norwegian diplomats maintained their presence in Russia, they had not formally recognized it. Increased tensions between the Soviet government and the Entente prompted many of their ambassadors to leave Petrograd and break their political ties with the Soviet government. In 1919 the Entente would renew their effort in isolating the Soviet government from the neutral states, resulting in that the Norwegian diplomats finally left Petrograd.²⁷ It is important to emphasize that this decision did not wholly reflect the opinion of Norwegian citizens, as there was a strong support for the Bolshevik government in the labour movement who protested this decision.²⁸ From this diplomatic conflict one can argue that even though the Norwegian government was formally neutral in the disputes between the Bolshevik government and the Entente, they still had to choose which side they wanted to align with. Even though public opinion was in favour of supporting the Bolshevik government, the ruling party chose to comply with the demands from the Entente. The alienation of the Soviet government did however result to their exclusion from the peace conference in Paris and a membership in the League of Nations. As a result of their exclusion, Norway, as compensation for their relatively high loss of both men and material on account of Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare, received full sovereignty of Svalbard through the "Treaty concerning Spitsbergen" without interference or objections from the Soviet government, who also had interests in the archipelago.²⁹

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the subsequent civil war which erupted in Finland between the "White Finns" which were supported by the German Empire, and the "Red Finns" which were supported by Soviet Russia, immediately brought the terror, fear and conflict much closer to home for Norway. Having spent almost half a decade negotiating with Tsarist Russia and other great powers with fears that there would be conflicts regarding the strategic value of the Norwegian coastlines, the emergence of a new nation in the area suddenly shifted the balance of power and could jeopardize the agreements of Norwegian territorial integrity in the area, especially now that the German Empire was involved. As the two most northern provinces of Norway (Finnmark and Troms) had a considerable Finnish and Sami minority, whose integration with the rest of country was substantially lower than the average, could also prove to be problematic if tensions were to rise between Norway and Finland.³⁰ As discussed earlier, the fear of a Russian intervention in Northern Norway dominated much of Norwegian foreign policy both during the union with Sweden and in the years after Norwegian independence. The new "Finnish danger" built upon this pre-existing fear of foreign interests in Northern Norway, and with unhinged nationalism and conflict affecting the nation of Finland, it seemed plausible for the Norwegian government that the civil war could lead to territorial incursions.³¹ The ongoing conflicts in Finland and Russia along with an innate fear of the Bolshevik Revolution spreading to the disgruntled workers of Northern Norway, made the Norwegian government enact further plans to integrate and Norwegianize the indigenous Sami and Finnish minorities in the area through boarding schools and employment in Norwegian

²⁷ Ibid: 52

²⁸ Ibid: 53

²⁹ Svalbardtraktaten 1920

³⁰ Statistisk sentralbyrå [SSB] 1951: 51

³¹ Eriksen 1981: 134

firms.³² Norwegian fear and distrust of their new neighbour to the east was made stronger by the Finnish journalist Gunnar Sarva's book *Finlands access to the sea*, which made claims that Finland had undeniable rights to the shores of the Barents sea and neighbouring northern territories with historical, cultural and demographical ties to Finland.³³ The Finnish nationalist organisation 'Lappobevegelsen' was a strong proponent for creating a 'Greater Finland' by integrating the territories previously mentioned, and contributed to the Norwegian distrust of Finland.³⁴ The right-wing organisation was however not affiliated with the Finnish government, and the government denied any plans for incursions into neutral Norwegian territory.³⁵ The mistrust of the Finnish and Sami minority can also be considered as a result of general suppression that these groups have experienced in the last hundred years as Norwegianizing of minorities became a policy in Northern Norway. Because of the oppression and discrimination many of the Finnish and Sami minorities undoubtedly experienced, there were most likely many among them felt culturally and politically closer to Finland than they did to Norway. It is however difficult to assess whether the Finnish government truly had plans to extend their borders at the expense of Norwegian territory, the importance of Finnmark had nevertheless thoroughly changed between the outbreak of the World War 1 and the conclusion of the Finnish civil war in 1920. Kristiansen argues that even though the likelihood of foreign invasion through Finnmark in the 1920s was quite low, the value of harbours which could be used throughout the year along with the increased geo-political importance of Murmansk made the Norwegian government prioritize strengthening of the regional defences of Northern Norway.³⁶ Another consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent civil war in Finland was that communist ideas and propaganda could spread through Northern Norway, which required renewed effort from both the military and the local police force to stop such ideas from spreading further.

1.2 Domestic policy and revolutionary fear

The traditional fear of an armed conflict in Northern Norway became less apparent after the end of the Finnish Civil War and the peace agreement between Finland and the Soviets; as the Soviet government was still embroiled in a civil war against various anti-Bolshevik factions, the Norwegian government deemed it unlikely that the Soviet government had any expansionistic plans on the Scandinavian peninsula.³⁷ The real threat of the Bolshevik Revolution was not the strength of its military, but the ideological influence of the applied Marxism it represented. Instead of an external threat, the government now had to contest that which became known as an 'internal enemy'. The definition of 'enemy' in this context is naturally from the perspective of the conservative groups and the ruling party, as there was not talk of foreigners within the country intending to radically alter the political establishment. What then caused the radicals within the labour movement to be defined as 'enemies of the state'? First of all, it is important to consider that radicals within the labour movement did not originate in the wake of the Russian Revolution, as there had already been voices in the labour movement that argued for stronger measures against

³² Ibid: 129

³³ Ibid: 133

³⁴ Alta Museum 1991: 9; Eriksen 1981: 190

³⁵ Eriksen 1981: 141

³⁶ Kristiansen 1993: 21

³⁷ Fagertun 1996: 64

the current political system in the years prior.³⁸ Because Norway was not self-sufficient in either food-production nor coal, it was also very fragile to sudden changes and fluctuations in the world. As the instability and political polarisation increased in tandem with the war, the radical wing of the labour movement would rise from a fringe position to become the most influential within the Labour Party.³⁹ The growth of revolutionary tendencies within the labour movement was worrying for the government and the bourgeoisie, as this was now a movement capable of using unparliamentary tactics to achieve their political goals. This revolutionary fear was not unfounded, as it appeared as though the revolutionary fervour would spread from Russia to all the countries in Europe. The government had to take all necessary precautions to stop the same revolutionary development that had happened in Finland, among these precautions was the creation of the 'security committee'. This committee had representatives from the General Staff, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Justice, and their mission was to analyse and counteract revolutionary elements within the labour movement.⁴⁰ Among the measures implemented by the committee was the surveillance of socialists whom they deemed dangerous, along with a heightened security at both the local and national level regarding border control and the postal service.⁴¹ The military also became more actively involved as a countermeasure to riots among workers, but as pacifism and anti-militarism were vocal points for the labour movement there was still a reluctance to use soldiers in internal affairs. The anti-militarism among socialists also led to many soldiers from labour backgrounds refusing conscription and the disobedience among them was a problem for maintaining cohesivity in the Armed Forces.⁴² The lack of cohesivity could become a real problem for upholding the integrity of the state, mass protests and demonstrations like the one in the summer of 1917 where 300 000 people across the country protested the high cost-push inflation proved that workers were organized and could impose demands upon the government. Naturally, demonstrations of that scale proved impossible to safely manage for the law enforcement, and the only other option to contain demonstrations of equal scale would be to use the military. Because of the rising tensions between the labour movement and the government, the military also had to secure the various storages of weapons and ammunitions that were spread across the country, as they could be used by revolutionaries in an eventual revolution.⁴³ With the amount of precautions and countermeasures made by the government in order to control and counteract revolutionary elements within the labour movement, it certainly appears as though there was a genuine fear that the ongoing crisis could potentially develop into an armed revolution. It should also be noted that the idea of a 'world revolution' must also have dictated the precautions made by the government, that the revolution did not necessarily have to begin in Norway, but spread from other neighbouring countries.

Despite claims from several politicians and military officials that the Bolshevik Revolution would not last longer than a few weeks, the continued success of the Red Army and the Bolshevik Party would eventually cease all notions of a futile revolution.⁴⁴ Even though the revolution persisted in Russia and spread to other countries in Europe, it never materialised in Norway. This is not because there were a lack of revolutionaries within the labour

³⁸ Ibid: 66

³⁹ Ibid: 66

⁴⁰ Ibid: 69

⁴¹ Ibid: 69

⁴² Ibid: 69

⁴³ Ibid: 70

⁴⁴ Goldin 1996: 44

movement who sought to imitate the Bolshevik Revolution and replace the government with one more akin to the one in Petrograd, though these were only a small minority within the revolutionary circle.⁴⁵ In his doctorate, Fure discusses in depth the labour movement and the question of revolution in Norway.⁴⁶ One of his arguments was the ideological and cultural barriers that hindered the growth of the revolutionary mentality needed for a rapid change in societal structures.⁴⁷ While the Russian Revolution did inspire and garnered support among the workers in Norway, its impact was not in itself influential enough to ignite a revolution among the workers. Whereas Tsarist Russia had been plagued by years of social unrest in addition to the government's inefficiency becoming quite apparent in the war against the Central Powers, Norway's experiences through the war were fundamentally different. Because Norwegian workers were organized through labour unions, had a party that represented their interests in government, and could peacefully protest legislatures and governmental inaction, the necessity for a revolution was not the only viable tactic for societal change. The government was also careful in how it dealt with insurgent among the labour movement; while it could use force to suppress them as it did with the protesters in Kirkenes and Sulitjelma in the spring of 1918, it could also make concessions to the labour movement's demands such as the implementation of the eight-hour workday and the removing the single-member district from the electoral system, as many workers believed the old system had been advantageous to the bourgeois government.⁴⁸ Seeing how the government controlled the labour movement by both accepting certain demands while simultaneously counteracting dissidence with force when necessary, illustrates that there must have been an understanding from leading politicians on how to control revolutionary elements. As by counteracting every protest with force would only result in an increased opposition and lead to more revolutionary fervour within the labour movement, whereas by giving in to every demand of the radicals would only legitimise their political platform and weakening that of the government. Regarding the question of revolution however, it is also important to consider the fact that unlike Tsarist Russia and the German Empire, Norway was not an autocratic nation with a strong aristocratic heritage. A society governed mostly by a hereditary class of influential and wealthy families who enjoyed special privileges creates a clear distinction between those who profits from the political system and those who do not. As the appointment of new nobility in Norway was formally annulled by the parliamentary resolution in 1821 and their privileges repealed in 1824, the same discrepancy between the upper and lower class did not exist in Norway as in did in Russia. This discrepancy is an important factor considering revolutionary rhetoric often targets a social class of few which maintains their power and influence by exploiting an oppressed class consisting of the majority. By not having this social discrepancy, the Norwegian government was already in a safer position compared to many of the autocratic nations of Europe.

⁴⁵ Olstad 2018: 135

⁴⁶ Fure 1983: 502-543

⁴⁷ Ibid: 508

⁴⁸ Furre 1991: 76

Chapter 2: The Russian Revolution and the Norwegian Labour Party

It is not controversial to claim that the Norwegian Labour Party would not be as influential as it was during the Inter-War period had it not been for the role it played during the years following the Russian Revolution. Even though the labour movement was relatively strong in Norway before the Russian Revolution, the new government that arose in Petrograd represented something which until now was only present in the minds of a select few among the radical socialists in the labour movement. Not only did this government bring the issues of the workers to the forefront of their political agenda, they also legitimised it by organizing a successful takeover with popular support from both citizens and soldiers. The idea of replicating the same revolution naturally became the ideal of many within the labour movement who sought improve the social conditions of the workers at the expense of the bourgeoisie. As the Russian Revolution made its impact on the Norwegian labour movement, it facilitated the growth of the radical factions within the Norwegian Labour Party and eventually led to them gaining leadership of party. With a new radical leadership, the ideals of the Russian Revolution became an important part of the party platform.

2.1 Impact of the Revolution on the Labour Party

Edvard Bull argues that the Norwegian labour movement in the early 20th century was in an extraordinary position compared to its Scandinavian neighbours. While Denmark and especially Sweden had invested in industry during the 1800s, their workers did not enjoy the same civil liberties compared to their counterparts in Norway.⁴⁹ As Norway already had established parliamentarism and suffrage for all men by 1898 (with the exclusion of those who received poor relief), workers in Denmark and Sweden would not enjoy similar rights until after the end of World War 1. One would therefore assume that the workers and labour movements in Norway would benefit from a stronger foundation as their adherents had more political influence than those in Sweden and Denmark. The labour movement in Norway could also to a greater extent learn and be influenced by already established labour movements abroad instead of beginning as a *tabula rasa*. Bull argues however, that because of Norway's rapid industrialisation in the early 20th century the new industrial workers, originating mostly from the agrarian sector, did not have as strong sense of class tradition and was therefore more susceptible to radical and Revolutionary ideas.⁵⁰ Olstad argues that the reason workers in Norway became comparatively more revolutionary than those in Denmark and Sweden did not originate from a lack of class tradition, but rather from the evident weakness of both the Norwegian Labour party and the labour movement.⁵¹ The weakness created disunity, and because the ruling party in Norway (Venstre) also had a strong appeal to the working class, the Norwegian Labour Party became more susceptible to political opposition from within the party with more radical views.

⁴⁹ Bull 1922: 4-5

⁵⁰ Ibid: 4

⁵¹ Olstad 2018: 132

The impact of the Russian Revolution on the Norwegian Labour Party was among the most profound and apparent in Norwegian society. Because the border between Norway and Russia had for a long time been used to smuggle both people and literature, many of those who would become prominent members of the Bolshevik Party had contacts with left-wing socialists in Norway.⁵² The close relationship shared among many of the Bolshevik and Norwegian socialists was likely also a factor which inspired the radical wing of the Norwegian Labour Party to seize leadership during the Party Convention in March-April 1918. With charismatic speakers such as Kyrre Grepp and Martin Tranmæl at the front, the Norwegian Labour Party transformed from a social-democratic party on par with other mainline labour parties in Western Europe, to one much more aligned with the Bolshevik Party in Petrograd.⁵³ Even though the Norwegian Labour Party's leadership became more revolutionary in 1918, their radical views were not generally shared by the vast majority of the other members of the party. Tjelmeland also argues that even the radical wing of the labour movement was not cohesive or unified, as they were a mixture syndicalists and Marxists inspired by the Bolshevik Party.⁵⁴ Even with somewhat diverging goals and ideas among its leadership, the Norwegian Labour Party broke ties with the Socialist International and formally joined the Communist International in 1919; becoming one of the very few labour parties in Western-Europe to join while simultaneously being the biggest labour party in their own country.⁵⁵ With the introduction of the Moscow-theses in 1920, the decision regarding membership in the Communist International, mirroring the evident disunity of the party leadership, would begin the series of events that would eventually split the Norwegian Labour Party in three; with only one of the parties choosing to remain in the Communist International.⁵⁶ The split can be seen as a consequence of the fact that many within the Norwegian Labour Party did not share the same ideals regarding the implementation of socialism in Norway. Whereas both the war and the Russian Revolution had highlighted problems within Norwegian society that had to be addressed, the appeasement of the government along with the end of World War 1 signified a development towards stability. The growth of political stability along with the lack of a clear direction within the leadership of the Norwegian Labour Party concerning their affiliation with the Communist International and the Soviet government were the key points that ended the labour movement formed in the wake of the Russia Revolution.

2.2 How far did the Labour Party embrace the ideals of the Revolution

Going back to the summer of 1918, the Norwegian Labour Party can be characterised as a relatively radical labour party compared to their Western-European counterparts, with a revolutionary leadership loosely connected through the ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution and Marxist thoughts. The ideals of the Revolution had to some extent been adopted by the Labour Movement with the creation of Workers' Councils, a process which started in December of 1917 when the Union of Iron and Metalworkers protested the high food-prices.⁵⁷ The Worker's Councils and protests of late 1917 and early 1918 can also be regarded as one of the contributing factors to the radicalising of the Labour Party, as many

⁵² Danielsen, Holtsmark, Kasijan, Nielsen, Rotihaug and Rønning 2015: 140

⁵³ Tjelmeland 2017: 86

⁵⁴ Ibid: 86

⁵⁵ Danielsen, Holtsmark, Kasijan, Nielsen, Rotihaug and Rønning 2015: 141

⁵⁶ Ibid: 142

⁵⁷ Furre 1991: 75

of the workers had lost faith in the old leadership. These Workers' Councils were organized anew after the radical leadership gained power in the spring of 1918 and were to become the active political organ of the party; one which could impose demands and challenge the government with demands and protests and strikes.⁵⁸ The Councils had some success, foremost with the governmental decision to increase the salary for workers to compensate for the higher prices of necessary goods, but also the implementation of the eight-hour workday which had been a longstanding demand within the labour movement. For many within party leadership however, the Workers' Councils were also planned to ideologically prepare the masses for an incoming revolution.⁵⁹ The question of a world revolution was for many now only a question of time; the Bolshevik Revolution had been the spark and it would soon spread among the war-torn countries of Europe. The revolutionary wave that hit the continent in late 1918 did however not materialise in Norway. Furre argues that the Norwegian workers were sufficiently pleased with governmental acceptances to their demands in the period leading up to the revolutionary wave, and that they had no desire for an armed revolution.⁶⁰ Fure argues that of the several factors that impacted the Labour Party's decisions during this period, that the stability of the government was simply too strong for an uprising to emerge or be successful.⁶¹ As the revolutions in Finland, Germany and Russia all emerged from a disintegrating government that allowed a revolutionary movement to grow and seize control in the power vacuum, the situation in Norway did not allow for the same type of revolution to emerge. With the defeat of the socialist uprising in all the countries outside of Russia, it became evident that idea of a world revolution was very unlikely in the foreseeable future. Even the Soviet government were believed by many to crumble under the weight of civil war and interventions and blockades imposed by the allies. The future of Marxism in Europe was by 1920 still very uncertain, and witnessing how politically and economically alienated the Soviet government was by other nations, certainly did not inspire workers during a time with ongoing crises.

Comparing the party platform in 1915 to the one created in 1919 it becomes clear that the party had embraced the many of the revolutionary ideals inspired by the Bolsheviks. Among the various points socialisation of industries and agriculture as well as the abolishment of the capitalist state became principal points for the revitalised party.⁶² Although one should not downplay the fact that the labour movement had in general been influenced and radicalised by four years of war and the various crises that arose with it. The demonstrations against the high food-prices which arose in 1917 is an example of how the labour movement became more inclined to use protests and demonstrations to achieve political concessions from the government. It should also be added that the experiences of war which the younger generations grew up with also had a radicalizing effect.⁶³ The immeasurable destruction and deaths caused by the war, along with a more cynical view of bourgeois governmental policies and the vanity of imperialism undoubtedly made the new generation more revolutionary. This is evident in many of the Workers' Youth Leagues in the country, which were more radical than the older generation's social-democratic tendencies.⁶⁴ It is also important to consider that the potential of capitalism compared to communism was not as apparent in 1918, and considering the incapability of the current political system to address many of the challenges that arose during the war, likely resulted

⁵⁸ Fure 1983: 221

⁵⁹ Ibid 1983: 253

⁶⁰ Furre 1991: 76

⁶¹ Fure 1983: 477

⁶² Det Norske Arbeiderpartiet 1915; Det Norske Arbeiderparti 1919

⁶³ Tjelmeland 2015: 89

⁶⁴ Ibid: 89

in that many believed that the Marxism practiced by the new government in Petrograd was a superior system compared to the existing one. The radicalisation of the younger generations also became more apparent with the creation of Soldiers' Councils in 1918. It can be difficult to clearly define the purpose of the of these councils, as their goal and intent varies depending on the sources used. What is known is that upon their creation their end goal was to abolish the armed forces, but until then infiltrate the military and prevent them from mobilising against the labour movement.⁶⁵ Antimilitarism and pacifist rhetoric had been an integral part of the Labour Party for many years, and this was not news for either the ruling party or the Norwegian General Staff. There were however also parts within the Labour Party leadership that wanted a more militaristic use of the Soldiers' Councils; inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution they sought to utilise the potential of having armed workers with combat proficiency and knowledge of the various weapon-storages across the country.⁶⁶ As proven in both Finland and Russia, high-ranking officers were rarely sympathetic or aligned with the labour parties, the Soldiers' Councils would therefore focus on recruiting lower-ranking officers and conscripts to their cause.⁶⁷ Because of the varying disagreements within the leadership of the Labour Party, the Soldiers' Councils did not become the militaristic organ many of the revolutionaries hoped for. The Councils upheld a strictly defensive role within the armed forces, namely agitating for socialism among the other recruits and preventing the military from interfering with the Labour Movement.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Fure 1983: 37

⁶⁶ Ibid: 233

⁶⁷ Ibid: 233

⁶⁸ Ibid: 240

Chapter 3: How did Russian Revolution influence the media

As a neutral and democratic nation, Norway was not subjected to the same form of censorship and propaganda as the warring nations of Europe. This meant that the flow of information passed relatively freely during the first years of the war, and most Norwegians followed the affairs of the continent closely with daily updates on how the war progressed. This would later change as the government saw many of the socialist newspapers becoming increasingly revolutionary, and many papers were subjected to censorship because of their political symbolism.⁶⁹ As with any conflict there was a gap between those who were more inclined to support the German Empire and those who were inclined to support the Allied Powers. This gap is also reflected in the media, where political bias to a certain extent would filter the content of what was reported. When the Bolshevik Revolution erupted in Petrograd however, both the conservative and socialist media had to contend with something completely new. To define that which was a revolution based on the ideals of Marxism within the political context of a country already disposed to riots and protests by disgruntled workers, gave the media considerable influence on the initial public perception. Since news from the Russian Revolution trickled slowly, coverage and perceptions could easily change over time. When the impact of the Revolution became more apparent in Norwegian society, so did the political polarisation and battle for public opinion.

3.1 Initial reports to the Russian Revolution

The day after the Bolshevik Revolution erupted in Petrograd it was reported in *Aftenposten* that the 'maximalists' had taken control of the capital and that the previous government was dissolved along with many ministers arrested.⁷⁰ Also mentioned in the article was the Bolshevik government's three initial aims: an immediate end to the war, soil for the farmers and regulation of the economy. The article in *Aftenposten* presented a relatively positive perspective of the revolution, maybe because the Bolsheviks plan to end the war facilitated hope for an end to the current conflict. Comparing the former article to the one written in *Social-Demokraten* four days later, there is an immediate difference in presentation and diction. The latter introduces the article with the headline "Dissolution of Russia", and refers to the ordeal as a Bolshevik coup.⁷¹ Because *Social-Demokraten* is a paper published by the Norwegian Labour Party, it is peculiar that a labour party would be so sceptic towards what appeared to be a socialist revolution. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the old leadership of the Norwegian Labour Party was replaced by one with more radical tendencies by the spring of 1918; the editor of *Social-Demokraten*, Jacob Vidnes, was a part of the old guard within the Labour Party. As with most social-democratic labour parties in Europe, the old leadership within the labour movement in Norway was generally more negatively disposed to the Bolshevik Revolution.⁷² This 'negativity' is further reflected by the fact that the article

⁶⁹ Ottoesen 2017: 31

⁷⁰ Aftenposten 08.11.1917: 1

⁷¹ Social-Demokraten 12.11.1917: 1

⁷² Goldin: 43

by *Social-Demokraten* regarding the February Revolution earlier the same year had a much more optimistic tone, "The event that was announced today from the capital of the Russian Empire is by far the largest and most significant since the outbreak of the war", followed later with:

The struggle between the lower classes who wants political freedom and improve their economic circumstances against the privileged few from the upper-classes with the Tsar and his government at the top, whom have all the power and no desire to relinquish.⁷³

As stated above, *Social-Demokraten* was clearly favourable to the February Revolution, along with most media-outlets in Norway.⁷⁴ The scepticism reflected in their article regarding the October Revolution most likely ties to the fact that the provisional government was regarded as a Constitutional Assembly, and that most of the leadership within the Labour Party was opposed to this militant radicalisation of the labour movements. This scepticism was however not reflected in the paper published by the youth-organization of the Labour Party, *Klassekampen*, which was more inclined to portray the revolution in a positive light.⁷⁵

One matter that concerned most Norwegians was the question of peace, and how the new Bolshevik regime in Russia would conduct its foreign policy concerning the war in Europe. On the 30th November, *Aftenposten* reported that Russia urged the Allied war belligerents to join peace talks on the 1st December with the Central Powers.⁷⁶ The article emphasises further that the Bolshevik government wanted peace talks on the foundation of "Zero annexations, no war-reparations, nations' right for self-determination".⁷⁷ The Bolshevik request for an immediate armistice enjoyed support from the Norwegian people, especially when they stated that they would sign a separate peace if their 'allies' refused to join. In addition to reporting that peace was coming to the Eastern front, *Social-Demokraten* also reported that the Allies would hold the Bolshevik government accountable to the treaty the Tsarist government signed on 3rd August 1914, which stated that none of the allied nations would sign a separate peace treaty, and that breaking this treaty would "necessitate serious consequences".⁷⁸ As anti-militarism was an important part of the party platform of the Norwegian Labour Party, it does not surprise that *Social-Demokraten* would choose to portray the Allies badly by emphasising that they both protested the peace negotiations and threatened the Bolshevik government. Contrary to *Social-Demokraten*, *Aftenposten* did not mention the Allies' statement to the Bolshevik regime, but instead reported a speech by the new German chancellor, Count von Hertling, which stated that the German Empire desired peace, and that their false portrayal as warmongering is disproven with the peace agreement currently being made with Russia.⁷⁹ *Aftenposten's* positive portrayal of the German Empire is rooted in the fact that many Norwegians were more favourable toward Germany than they were to Great Britain or France.

⁷³ *Social-Demokraten* 15.03.1917: 1

⁷⁴ Holtsmark, Kasijan and Repnevskij 2015: 29

⁷⁵ Goldin: 43

⁷⁶ *Aftenposten* 30.11.1917: 4

⁷⁷ *Ibid*: 4

⁷⁸ *Social-Demokraten* 30.11.1917: 1

⁷⁹ *Aftenposten* 30.11.1917: 4

Although public opinion did shift in the favour of the Allies after the German submarine-attacks on the Norwegian merchant fleet became more severe.⁸⁰

The Bolshevik dissolution of the constitutional assembly in Petrograd on 20th January 1918 further cemented the negative perspective which would define the conservative newspapers' reports on the Bolshevik government. "Bloody unrests in Petrograd" and "Members driven away with force of arms" was reported by *Aftenposten* on the 21st January.⁸¹ The same report from *Social-Demokraten* however did not paint quite as negative picture as their counterpart. Even though the current editor of the paper was not particularly enthusiastic towards the Bolshevik government, another more important matter most likely influenced his decision in restraining the affairs in Petrograd; namely a rally being held among the workers of the capital in protest of the high food-prices, military service and the agricultural productivity.⁸² The cost-push inflation and antimilitaristic protests from the labour movement was not new within the context of Norway during World War 1, the fear of an oncoming famine was however something that made many anxious. Because the high food prices already disproportionately affected workers, and the prospect of peace on the continent did not appear to be coming soon, it would be in the best interests of the labour movement that they stayed unified in order to consolidate political power. Even though there were scepticism towards the Bolshevik government among both socialists and conservatives, they were still the only government that had actively sought out peace. Since the Norwegian Labour Party was above all antimilitaristic, they had to use the Bolshevik Revolution as an example to urge the workers among the warring nations to rise against their governments "for peace and socialism".⁸³

It was no secret that the Norwegian Labour Party and their newspaper *Social-Demokraten* did not fully endorse the Bolshevik or their 'authoritarian measures', when the old party leadership was outed by one which was more radical and revolutionary during the party conference in April of 1918, this perception would change.⁸⁴ With the new leadership, Olav Scheflo became the editor of *Social-Demokraten* and it would from now on fully support the Bolshevik Party.⁸⁵ Egge also argues that the importance of the press within the Labour Party is reflected in the fact that many within the new leadership had backgrounds working for socialist newspapers, which is further emphasised by the general belief that the editorial position in the party press was the most important position within the party.⁸⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2 however, the Norwegian Labour Party was not a unified party and the radical leadership can not be regarded as representative for most within the labour movement. Their ability to unify the party must be seen in the context of both the old leadership's inability to address the growing challenges and the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution after the October Revolution. The fact that the Labour Party was internally divided became apparent when the world revolution never transpired and that it would by 1923 be split into three different parties.

⁸⁰ Goldin 1996: 42

⁸¹ *Aftenposten* 21.01.1918: 2

⁸² *Social-Demokraten* 21.01.1918: 1-2

⁸³ *Ibid*: 1

⁸⁴ Egge 2017: 17

⁸⁵ *Ibid*: 17

⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 21

3.2 Revolutionary impact on the media

The Russian Revolution became a frame of reference in which the press could debate social and economic conditions affecting Norway.⁸⁷ Periods of social and economic unrest also tends to spark unfavourable rhetoric directed towards the current governmental administration; for Norway, this rhetoric intensified in conjunction with the Bolshevik Revolution. Antimilitaristic articles and articles inciting revolution among the workers were in 1917 and onwards interpreted differently than what they would have been the year before, and the state took measures to limit the spread of newspapers that were reminiscent of revolutionary rhetoric.⁸⁸ As revolutionary fear became more apparent in Norwegian society, journalists and editors from socialist newspapers who were advocating for antimilitarism were arrested by the government.⁸⁹ Censorship and distribution bans on socialist newspapers were becoming more common as revolutionary rhetoric grew, and this infringement on the freedom of speech was not generally not something the conservative newspapers protested.⁹⁰ Not surprisingly, the conservative newspapers became more negative towards the Bolshevik Revolution as time progressed and the nature of the Bolshevik government revealed itself. This meant that both the socialist and the conservative newspapers to a higher degree cherry picked the instances when they would protest government censorship, and it was rarely on behalf of the opposing side.⁹¹ An example of this was when the workers of Sulitjelma protested their poor working-conditions in quickly became a conflict reported by *Aftenposten* and *Social-Demokraten*. *Aftenposten* reported that the actors involved were "Violent offenders" and that ordeal was sorted out without any "disturbance of the peace".⁹² The same story reported in *Social-Demokraten* had a very different tone, reporting that the protesters had acted in peaceful manners and that any use of military force against them would lead to "capricious consequences" from the labour movement.

Political polarisation and bias within the press defines the period after the Bolshevik Revolution. The rhetoric which before could only be heard by the select few, was now heard in parliament and in major news outlets. One of the biggest issues concerning the political landscape was the military and how it was used by the current government. The arrestation of Martin Tranmæl and the events that transpired in Sulitjelma sparked strong opposition from the Labour Party, especially because soldiers had been used to suppress potential demonstrations. *Social-Demokraten* attacks the compulsory military service by arguing that the soldiers sent to Trondheim during the arrestation of Tranmæl were "exclusively boys from the upper- and middleclass" and that they did not dare use boys from the working class.⁹³ Furthermore they state

By proceeding this way, the military authorities can create a small but even more homogenous and capable army. And when it fights against unarmed worker – armed with mortars, machine guns, cannons etc. - it will have the best chances of winning, despite its inferiority.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Ottoesen 2017: 30

⁸⁸ Ottoesen 2017: 30

⁸⁹ Ibid: 31

⁹⁰ Ibid: 33

⁹¹ Ibid: 33

⁹² *Aftenposten* 17.04.1918: 1

⁹³ *Social-Demokraten* 17.04.1918: 4

⁹⁴ Ibid: 4

The article arguments further that by refusing to deploy soldiers from the working class, it admits that the military service presupposes a willingness to defend the privileges of the upper classes.⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, the article concerning the arrestation of Tranmæl is not given nearly as much space in *Aftenposten*, and there is no mention of soldiers or protests in Trondheim.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid: 4

⁹⁶ Aftenposten 15.04.1918: 1

Conclusion:

There is no doubt that the Norwegian society which existed in 1914 was fundamentally different from the one who entered the 1920s. From being a subject nation of Sweden and then experiencing a global conflict along with a Marxist revolution in its neighbouring country in a period of fifteen years left permanent marks on Norwegian society. The impacts of the Russian Revolution, whether implicit or explicit, would define Norwegian policy throughout the Interwar period. It is important to consider that even though the thesis differentiated between the three parts of Norwegian society, the government, the labour movement, and the media had a continuous impact on each other. From a political perspective, the Bolshevik Revolution would reignite the old fear of Russia in the form of an ideology which now was not only a perceived threat to Northern Norway, but to the whole political system. Norway and Russia also lost their shared border with the independence of Finland, which along with an end to the traditional pomor trade further separated the interconnectedness of the two nations. The revolutionary impact on the labour movement made itself evident in many different areas; perhaps most notably was the direct influence it had on the creation of Workers' Councils and Soldiers' Councils. The revolution also legitimised the views of the radical socialists within the labour movement and facilitated their rise to the leadership of the Norwegian Labour Party. With a new leadership inspired by the ideals of the Russian Revolution, the labour movement grew and became more active in challenging the current political system. Even though the labour movement that arose alongside the Russian Revolution did not survive, they managed to create one of the most revolutionary party platforms in Western Europe and successfully gained governmental support for labour issues which had been a part of the party platform for years. It can therefore be argued that even though the Russian Revolution and the Labour Party's relationship with the Communist International would fragment the Labour Party, it had an overall positive impact on the Norwegian labour movement. The press had an important role in influencing public perception of the war and its participants, and considering many of those who would become the core of the leadership within the Norwegian Labour Party had backgrounds in journalism, further accentuate how important their work was for mobilising the labour movement. Because of the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, the socialist newspapers could also legitimise their ideas by referencing the Bolshevik government in Petrograd. The Russian Revolution can be defined as an event with an immense impact on Norwegian society, not only in its explicit influence on the government and labour movement but becoming a socialist monument that evoke both fear and awe. A monument that would become one of the most influential of its kind in the history of humankind.

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