

THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH



A Deeper Look

A study guide prepared by



COMMONWEAL THEATRE COMPANY

{ For use with **Jeffrey Hatcher**'s adaptation of the original play by Henrik Ibsen, having its world premiere at the Commonwealth Theatre, April, 2016. }

The League of Youth is a play by Henrik Ibsen, finished in early May, 1869. It was Ibsen's first play in colloquial prose and marks a turning point in his style towards realism and away from verse. It was widely considered Ibsen's most popular play in nineteenth-century Norway. Though rooted in serious events of the time, the play was lauded for its natural and witty dialogue, cynical humor and farcical intrigue.

SUMMARY

Taking a different tack than Ibsen's earlier political play *The Pretenders*, *The League of Youth* features a protagonist, **Stensgaard**, who poses as a political idealist and gathers a new party around him, the titular League of Youth, and aims to eliminate corruption among the "old" guard and bring his new "young" group to power. In scheming to be elected, he immerses himself in social and sexual intrigue, culminating in such complexity that at the end of the play all the women whom he has at one time planned to marry reject him, his plans for election fail, and he is run out of town.

The initial evening's stage production saw loud applause and glowing reviews by critics in the papers. However, by the second performance Conservatives were saying it was an attack on their party, and Liberals were saying it was an attack on their party. When both sides showed up for the second performance, a loud ruckus forced the manager to plead for calm and there were continual interruptions. At the play's end, the gas lights were turned off to force the unruly mob out of the theater, with fighting continuing into the streets.

Though popular and often produced in Scandinavia, it has rarely been staged elsewhere. There have been two known productions in the UK: on a Sunday evening in 1900, a single performance by the Stage Society with Granville Barker as Erik, Robert Farquharson as Bastian and Edward Knoblock as a waiter. The first ever professional production of the play, adapted by Andy Barrett, premiered on May 13, 2011, at Nottingham Playhouse.

CRITICISM

Ibsen biographer Robert Ferguson argues that the play is funny because it is liberated from Ibsen's later famous preoccupation with the power of symbol and making every line relevant to the main issue. As Ferguson says, "This is Ibsen's most Holbergian play, a comedy on human weakness which does not, like some of his later plays on weakness, end in the punishment of the weak." It's been described as "*Peer Gynt* in politics."

REAL PERSONS AND PLACES

It was thought at the time Ibsen may have modeled his character Stensgaard on the rival dramatist and Liberal party leader Bjornstjerne Bjornson, however Ibsen denied any such connection and

wrote a letter of apology to Bjornson, but it would be eleven years before their former friendship would be healed.

The central character, Stensgaard, was in fact based on the real-life figure of Herman Bagger, an outsider who arrived in the town of Skien in the 1830s, dabbled in journalism, was elected to political office and was even involved with a scandal involving an IOU note. Other real-life caricatures include that of **Daniel Hejre** which was an affectionate portrait of Ibsen's father. **Aslaksen** the printer was based on a friend of Ibsen's from youth named N.F. Axelsen who printed the paper, *The Man*, which Ibsen had edited for nine months.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE TODAY



Young Liberals of Norway

(Norwegian: *Unge Venstre*, NUV) is the youth league of the Norwegian political party Venstre. Young Liberals was founded on 27 January, 1909, with Anders Kirkhusmo as the first leader. The current president is Tord Hustveit, since 2013.

NAME

The Norwegian name *Unge Venstre* has historical reasons, and although it literally translates to “Young Left” in English, Young Liberals of Norway are not socialists, but in fact liberals. To avoid confusion, the official English-language name of the party is “Young Liberals of Norway.” Proposals to change the name of *Unge Venstre* to “Liberal *Ungdom*” (“Liberal Youth”) have been defeated in successive congresses.

POLICIES OF YOUNG LIBERALS OF NORWAY

The Young Liberals are strongly in favour of fighting climate change, calling it “the greatest threat of our time” on their website. As a result, the Young Liberals are in favour of helping renewable energy become competitive through subsidies, but believe that the market, rather than politicians, should determine which technology is best. The Young Liberals oppose the construction gas power stations without carbon capture and storage, and oppose subsidies for polluting industries. They are also in favor of other types of environmental protection, such as hindering oil exploration off the coast of Lofoten due to the fragility of the environment.

The Young Liberals are in favor of free trade, especially the removal of tariffs on the products of developing nations. This is seen as an integral part of achieving global economic justice rather than a threat to it.

The Young Liberals are arguably the most pro-immigration political group in Norway, and advocate free labor immigration. They supports compulsory classes in Norwegian as a prerequisite for gaining citizenship.

The party is in favor of Norwegian membership in the European Union and criticizes the European Economic Area agreement as undemocratic because Norway is not represented when decisions regarding it are taken.

The Young Liberals party has recently become especially prominent in the debate on drug policy, and is advocating harm-reduction policies. It is calling for decriminalizing the use of all drugs, as well as marijuana legalization and regulation. The party also advocates administration of clean heroin to drug addicts who have not succeeded in other means of rehabilitation. Furthermore, the party stresses that more resources must be spent on rehabilitation, health care and follow-ups for both previous and existing drug addicts.

RELATIONSHIP WITH VENSTRE

Young Liberals of Norway are independent of Venstre but cooperate closely with them, for example the leader of Young Liberals is automatically a member of the central governing body (*Sentralstyret*) of Venstre. Venstre and Young Liberals have different opinions on some matters, most prominently in that Young Liberals supports Norwegian entry into the European Union while Venstre opposes this. The Young Liberals failed to make Venstre pro-EU during Venstre's party congress in April 2009.

The Young Liberals are generally more liberal in their views than the mother party, both on social and economic issues. They aim to influence Venstre views so that they accord more with those of the Young Liberals. Notable recent victories include convincing Venstre to support heroin prescription in the treatment of addiction, to consider drug decriminalization and to support intellectual property reform.



Norwegian Young Conservatives

(Norwegian: *Unge Høyres Landsforbund*, UHL, normally referred to as *Unge Høyre*) is also a Norwegian youth party. Its ideology is liberal conservatism. Kristian Tonning Riise succeeded Paul

Joakim Sandøy as leader in 2014.



The Young Greens of Norway were founded in 1996, and is the youth wing of the Norwegian Green Party, *Miljøpartiet de Grønne*. There are about 1,000 members with active local teams in 16 of 19 of Norway's counties. Young Greens of Norway are led by a national board consisting of representatives from each county and the two co-spokespersons. An Executive Committee, consisting of 11 members, is

responsible for the daily work. The Young Greens of Norway is the only youth party in Norway that shares political programs with its mother party.

THE GREEN MOVEMENT GLOBALLY

The Green movement can be traced far back, but at first glance it's natural to include the party is about protecting the planet. These are ideas and thoughts we know, for example, from European philosophy with Rousseau and literature with Thoreau, who wrote in his novel *Walden, Or Life in the Woods*, about living in harmony with nature. He was also known for encouraging civil disobedience against an unjust government. These are values we are familiar with today.

The green movement has collected ethical principles from non-violent thinkers such as Ghandi, but also from the long-term thinking that characterizes indigenous cultures worldwide.

The first organized forms are found in connection to the industrial revolution. Green groups were often willing to go to great lengths to preserve and urge moderation. Nevertheless, we have to go far forward in time before we can see that these ideas found a home in the political landscape.

Many green historians and theorists consider the student rebellion in France, 1968, as a starting point for the diversity of the social movement. Among prominent figures in the rebellion we find Daniel Cohn-Bendit (under the nickname “*Dany le Rouge*” in 1968), who is currently the spokesperson for the European Greens in European parliament. These social movements, the environmental movement, the peace movement, the women’s movement and more, expressed themselves in several places in the representative democracy. It is difficult to trace any definite breakthrough, but a number of parties saw their origin in the 1970’s and onwards.

«*L’homme n’est ni le bon sauvage de Rousseau, ni le pervers de l’église et de La Rochefoucauld. Il est violent quand on l’opprime, il est doux quand il est libre.*»
(From the student rebellion in France.)

“Man is not Rousseau’s savage nor the church and Rouchefoucauld’s perverse being. He is violent when oppressed, gentle when free.”



Traditionally, the German Green Party is considered as the first Green party. Many other parties, such as the Dutch *Kabouter*, represented the same anti-authoritarian, green predilections, but failed to consolidate their position. “Values Party” in New Zealand should also be noted, and the British Ecology Party. In Germany, the Green party had its big breakthrough during the elections in 1982, where the party got in 27 representatives. Among these characters are recognizable names like Petra Kelly, Gert Bastian and Joschka Fischer. The party summoned a conference where they presented

their ideology, the four “pillars” that carried the party: Ecological wisdom, social justice, nonviolence and democracy.

Several parties followed, also in Norway there were similar party movements that started to spread.



The Workers’ Youth League (Norwegian: *Arbeidaranes Ungdomsfylking*, or AUF) is Norway’s largest political youth organization and is affiliated with the Norwegian Labor Party.

HISTORY

In 1903, the **Norwegian Social-Democratic Youth League** was formed, which the organization and historians consider to be the foundation of the organization.

As an organizational entity, AUF took its current form in April, 1927, following the merger of the Left Communist Youth League and the Socialist Youth League of Norway, corresponding with the merger of its parent parties after the conclusion of disputes over the “Twenty-one Conditions.” Its ideology is social democracy and democratic socialism.

In 1958, the local chapter of Berge Furre and Kåre Sollund. Sosialistisk Studentlag was closed down. A conflict arose after the USA had been offering its NATO allies American nuclear weapons as a defense against the Eastern Bloc. *Sosialistisk Studenlag* opposed this development

and, as an attempt to prevent West Germany from getting access to nuclear weapons, it contacted MPs during the Easter break to sign a petition. More than half of Labour's MPs signed what is now known as the Easter Rebellion of the Labor Party. The rebellion was badly received by the party leadership when the Easter break ended. Several people were excluded from the Labor Party, including the members of *Sosialistisk Studentlag*. All the MPs who signed the petition were later offered a chance by the party to retract their signatures, which all but one of them did.

Three years later, Furre was one of the founders of *Sosialistisk Folkeparti*, which got two seats in the parliament after the 1961 election. Labor, which had been winning the majority of the seats in every election after World War II, got just 74 out of 150 votes. No party since has won the majority of the seats.