Norway at the Time of Ibsen

**POLITICS**

Norway was part of a union with Sweden from 1814 until 1905, encompassing the lifetime of Ibsen. Despite the fact that Norway had its own constitution and government, they resented the fact the monarch and minister of Foreign Affairs were Swedish and based in Stockholm. The political leaders of Norway struggled to gain more power for their Parliamentary body from the Swedish monarchy.

The monarchs of during this time were:
- Karl III Johan - 1818-1844
- Oscar I - 1844-1859
- Karl IV - 1859-1872
- Oscar II - 1872-1905

**INDUSTRY & SHIPPING**

Fish, timber, and shipping services made up approximately ninety percent of Norwegian exports in the first half of the 1800s. Norway depended on foreign trade in order to import food. Norwegian shipping industries came on to the world stage after the British repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849, which restricted shipping in Great Britain and her colonies to British companies only. International trade led to a substantial demand for Norwegian shipping services in the second half of the 19th century, and by 1880 (just four years after Ibsen wrote *The Pillars of the Community*) Norway was the third largest merchant fleet in the world, after only Great Britain and the United States. The economy and well being of the country rested on the shipping industry, which is how owners of a shipyard like *Karsten Bernick* held such influence in their towns. In *Pillars of the Community*, there are often references to ‘coffin ships.’ These were ships that were not fit for sailing, but were sent anyway with a full crew aboard so that their owners could claim insurance on them when they sank.

**RAILWAYS**

Railroads were perhaps the most transforming invention of the 19th century. The majority of the Norwegian railroads were built in the 1870’s, the same time that Ibsen was writing *The Pillars of the Community*. For business owners like *Karsten Bernick*, railways would reduce the cost of shipping goods. Railways also made travel more convenient, therefore people traveled more frequently and ideas were circulated. To towns like the ones in *Pillars of the Community*, this posed a threat, as they had been very isolated to the “corruption” of outside influences.
RELIGION-

The King of the Norwegian/Swedish Union was also the head of the Church. Pietism was the dominant religion in Norway during the time that Ibsen was writing *Pillars of the Community*. Pietism is a movement within Lutheranism that strove to renew the devotional ideal in Protestant religion. In *Pillars of the Community*, the self-righteous religious characters like Rorlund, portray Ibsen’s highly critical view of pietism. In towns like the one where *Pillars* is set, the wave of pietism often replaced such activities such as music and drama with religious gatherings.

Religious revival swept through Norway in the 1800s, when un-ordained evangelists began to preach the Bible without permission and approval of the church. When the lay preaching ban was lifted in 1842, strong lay preaching movements were established in the Lutheran Church. Three years later, the Dissenter Law came into effect, which allowed other Christian congregations to settle in Norway. Atheism was also allowed in Norway at this point, where before only the Lutheran Church had been allowed. Judaism was also allowed in 1851, and monasticism was introduced at the end of the century.

IMMIGRATION-

The first group of organized immigration from Norway to North America began in 1825 with a few dozen pilgrims fleeing religious persecution. More than 800,000 Norwegians followed, emigrating to North America between 1825 and 1925, the majority of them to the United States. That was more than one third of the population. Norway was suffering with poor crops and unemployment. Meanwhile, news of the free land being offered in the United States and the California Gold Rush brought hope to many Norwegians, many of whom settled on the Fertile Plain in the Midwest of the United States. Today, many Americans in the Dakotas, Wisconsin and Minnesota are Norwegian in ancestry.