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”Between loyalty and opposition: the Norwegian Labour Youth Organization and the Labour Party”

The Norwegian Labour Youth Organization was founded on 20 June 1903. The organization has had various titles, but since 1927 the name has been Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking, in English; Norwegian Labour Youth Organization.

A Youth Organization has various specific features; the members are constantly replaced, and enthusiasm among young people are often easiest to trigger if the political issues that are presented are as clear and consistent as possible. Secondly, a Youth Organization does not participate in elections, and therefore it may take the liberty to be more “radical” than the Mother Party. In various political issues the youngsters tries to influence the Mother Party to change their views towards that of the Youth Organization.

But generally the Norwegian Labour Youth Organization worked in solidarity with the Mother Party to collect support and votes from the younger part of the population.

In this paper I would like to focus on four periods of conflict and opposition between the Norwegian Labour Party and its Youth Organization. Three of the periods are at the beginning of the Organization’s history:

1909: from the very beginning the Youth Organization placed itself on the left wing of the Party, attacking both the nationalistic view of the Party around the question of Norwegian independence from Sweden in 1905, and what the youngsters saw as reformist positions in several other political questions. There was a real threat of split in the organization. But the more Marxist influenced part pushed out the extreme leftist fraction and sided with the loyal youth and made peace with the Party leadership.

1918: The Youth Organization was colliding with the Party on several questions like how to respond to the outbreak of the First World War. Inspired by the Russian revolution the Youth sided with the radical opposition of the Party and chose a more revolutionary platform highlighting the work outside the Parliament. These radical trends conquered the congress and the so called “new direction” took over as Party leaders, with comprehensive support from the Youth Organization.

1922-1923: what we may call a revolutionary phase – both in the Mother Party and in the Youth Organization – set in from 1918. As a result of this the Norwegian Labour Party decided to become a member of the Communist International – The Comintern - from 1919. This lead to disunity when a Social Democratic fraction in 1921 broke out and formed their own Party. Soon however the discussions awakened within the remaining members of both

Party and Youth Organization about whether to obey the rules for membership in The Comintern. One rule that made comprehensive discussions is the one that stated individual membership in all member Parties. The Norwegian Labour Party was founded on collective membership and The Comintern demanded this to change. After a fierce struggle the Party again split into two. This time the majority of the Youth Organization, which had already taken the name Communist Youth in 1921, sided with those who supported The Comintern. This fraction broke out and founded the Norwegian Communist Party (1923). At this time there were three "Labour" Parties on the left side of Norwegian politics: The Norwegian Social Democratic Party, The Norwegian Labour Party and The Norwegian Communist Party. And the Youth Organization of the Norwegian Labour Party was now named "Left Communist Youth Organization".

However, many attempts followed to reunite the left wing Parties in the following years. In 1927 The Norwegian Social Democratic Party dissolved itself and joined the Norwegian Labour Party. The two Youth Organizations joined forced and united under the new and still existing designation Arbeidernes ungdomsfylking, short term; AUF. The Norwegian Communist Party and the Norwegian Communist Youth Organization continued their existence in Norwegian politics and as members of The Comintern.

After this came a long period of collaboration and support between the Norwegian Labour Party and the Norwegian Labour Youth Organization. Both in the pre-WW2 era and in the post-WW2 era the Youth Organization was loyal supporters to the official line of politics made out by the Norwegian Labour Party.

1969-1973: a new era for conflict and opposition came along with the war in Vietnam and the general youth protests of 1968. The Norwegian Labour Youth Organization challenged the positions of the Mother Party on issues like the view on Norwegian membership in the NATO and the European Common Market (EF). The Youth Organization sided with the no-campaign and was partly responsible for the Mother Party's defeat in the referendum on membership in EF in 1972. All this led to an almost "cold-war" between the Party and the Youth Organization, with many youngsters leaving the Labour Party Organizations in favor of more radical trends at the time.

At the conference I will also pursue some other aspects of the relationship between the Norwegian Labour Party and the Norwegian Labour Youth Organization.

Sources:

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