



An Enemy of the People

**A Dramaturgical Report
by Kat Duffner and Ellis McGinley**

Despite the fact that *Enemy* was written over a hundred years ago, the play remains hauntingly familiar to a modern audience. From a corrupt government with a totalitarian head, to people in media being too easily swayed, to a disbelief in science, to a society that places capital gain above the health of unknowing victims, we have to wonder how we have allowed this to continue.



Henrik Ibsen

Early Life

Henrik Ibsen was a Norwegian playwright who has had a lasting influence on the world of theatre. He wrote several plays that would become very well known, such as *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *An Enemy of the People*, all of which sparked controversy upon production.

Ibsen was the oldest of five, born to a merchant father and an artistic mother in 1828. Growing up, he took after his mother, reading and painting. When Ibsen was eight, his father's business failed and the family became impoverished. They had to move to a farm after selling their belongings and assets. When Ibsen reached fifteen, he quit attending school and started as an apothecary apprentice. After six years of working in Grimstad, he finished his first play, *Catalina*. The next year, in 1850, he moved to Oslo, then called Christiania, to attend the university. In 1858, he married Suzannah Daae Thoresen. Their son, Sigurd, was born the next year. After a friend published his play for him, he began managing a theater in Bergen. After traveling abroad and running another theater, he wrote another play, *Love's Comedy*, in 1862.

Self Imposed Exile

In 1862, Ibsen left Norway for Italy, where he wrote *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. Six years later, he moved to Germany. In 1879, his most famous play, *A Doll's House*, was completed and published. In 1881, Ibsen wrote *Ghosts*, a play that received wild criticism for discussing adultery and sexually transmitted diseases so freely. In response to this public outcry, he wrote *An Enemy of the People*, which centers around a man who is outcast for valuing the truth above public opinion. After *Enemy*, he continued to write seven more plays in his lifetime.

Return to Norway

Ibsen's 1891 return to Norway sparked cultural celebration, including a series of events honoring him for his seventieth birthday in 1898. In 1900, he had several strokes that prevented him from writing. He died six years later on May 23. On his death date, his nurse reportedly told a visitor that Ibsen was doing a bit better, to which Ibsen responded "on the contrary" before passing away. He received a state funeral for being such a large influence on the literary scene at the time and is now hailed as the father of modern drama.

Ibsen's Works

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Catalina (1849)
The Burial Mound, or, The Warrior's Barrow (1850)
Norma (1851)
St. John's Eve (1852)
Lady Inger of Oestraat (1854)
The Feast at Solhaug (1855)
Olaf Liljekrans (1856)
The Vikings at Helgeland (1857)
Digte (1862)
Love's Comedy (1862)
The Pretenders (1863)
Brand (1866)
Peer Gynt (1867)
The League of Youth (1869)
Emperor and Galilean (1873)
Pillars of Society (1877)
A Doll's House (1879)
Ghosts (1881)
An Enemy of the People (1882)
The Wild Duck (1884)
Rosmersholm (1886)
The Lady from the Sea (1888)
Hedda Gabler (1890)
The Master Builder (1892)
John Gabriel Borkman (1896)
When We Dead Awaken (1899)

Additionally, hundreds of poems over the course of Ibsen's lifetime

Eleanor Marx-Aveling

"In a free society the press is a power."

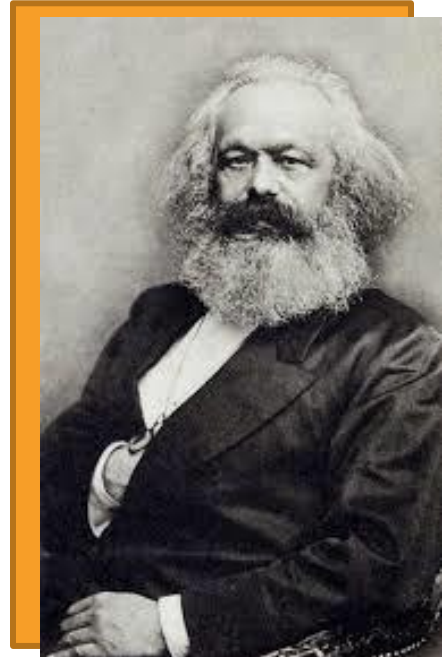
-Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*



This particular translation of Ibsen's work (originally *An Enemy of Society*,) was done in 1887 by Eleanor Marx-Aveling (1855-1898), an influential Socialist activist, writer, translator, and daughter of Karl Marx. In her lifetime, she translated between ten and fifteen works of literature and dramas, three of which were written by Ibsen. Many of her other translations are of her father's work, completed when she was his secretary beginning at age sixteen. In addition, she is credited with numerous original writings about sociopolitical issues and literary critiques.

Karl Marx (1818-1883), author of *The Communist Manifesto* and father of Communism and Marxism, was Marx-Aveling's largest political influence. The political theory of Communism centers around the idea that everything is publicly owned; therefore the community supports the individual and everybody has what they need. While the theory of Communism works on

paper, dictators throughout recent history have exploited it in practice, causing nations to suffer. Among the most common methods used by dictators to maintain authoritarian rule is censorship. Marx himself contributed to and became editor of multiple newspapers, believing that censorship is an evil and that freedom of the press should be highly valued.

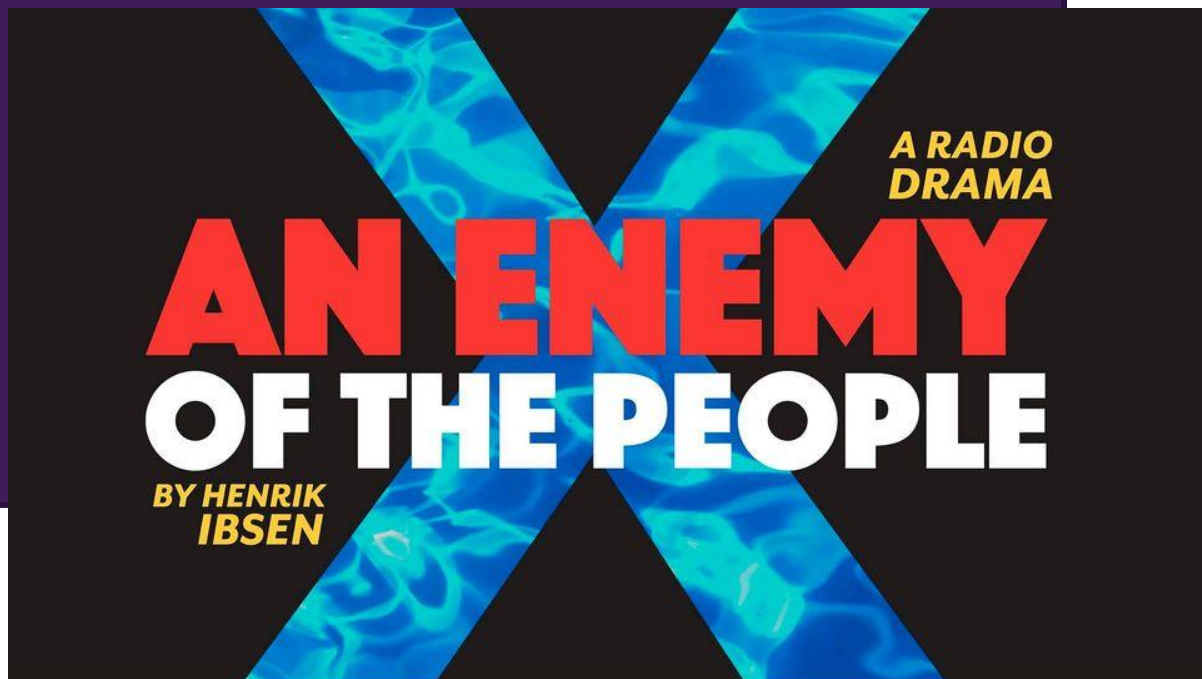


"I think a journalist assumes an immense responsibility when he neglects an opportunity of aiding the masses, the poor, the oppressed."

-Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*

Production History

Ibsen published *An Enemy of the People* (originally titled in Ibsen's native tongue *En Folkefiende*) in 1882. It was first performed in 1883 in Christiania, Norway (now Oslo, Norway). Since Ibsen was a well known playwright at this point, other large European cities soon began producing *Enemy* and continued performances through the end of the century. In North America, *Enemy* came to Broadway for the first time in 1895. Revivals were produced on Broadway from 1950-1951 (adaptation written by Arthur Miller) and again in 2012. A 1978 movie starring Steve McQueen was released based on Miller's 1950 adaptation. More recently, Yale Repertory Theatre produced the show in 2017, and in 2019, Nottingham Playhouse produced a modern adaptation starring Alex Kingston as Teresa Stockmann.

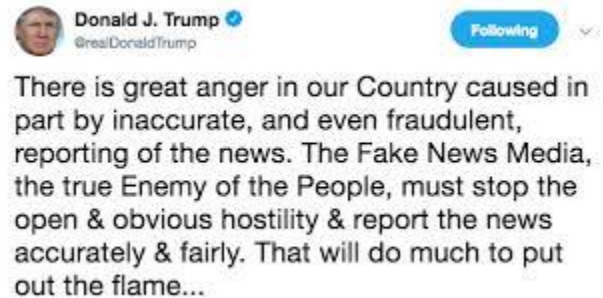


Background of Enemy

Enemy of the People

The first recorded use of the phrase “enemy of the people” is from the late Roman Republic. A member of society who had committed (or allegedly committed) an act of treason would be branded “hostis publicus” and would lose their Roman citizenship. The punishment was often death. Originally, the word “hostis” meant “foreigner,” implying that a hostis publicus is a foreigner to the people.

The phrase pops up again in history during the French Revolution. The ruling class was labeled as the “ennemi du peuple” by those they oppressed. Later, Joseph Stalin used the phrase to refer to his political opponents and their affiliates. Most recently, Donald Trump has used the phrase repeatedly to refer to media sources that do not lean right.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

There is great anger in our Country caused in part by inaccurate, and even fraudulent, reporting of the news. The Fake News Media, the true Enemy of the People, must stop the open & obvious hostility & report the news accurately & fairly. That will do much to put out the flame...

Newspaper Wars

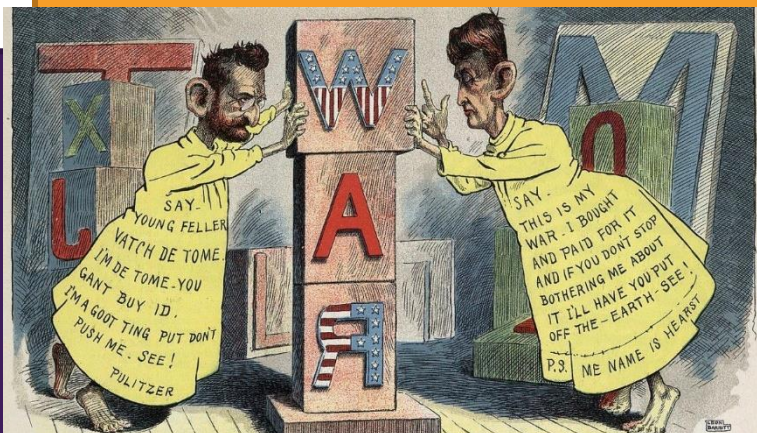
At the time of Dr. Stockmann's discovery, newspapers were revitalized by the invention of the printing press and higher literacy rates. The modern American newspaper, the New York Post, was founded by Alexander Hamilton in the late eighteenth century. Their focus was largely partisan until the 1830s.

The 1836 murder of Helen Jewett refocused newspapers on information and alerted them to the value of shock value headlines. Jewett was a prominent socialite and courtesan who was found in a burned brothel room. Papers like the New York Herald, the Sun, and the Enquirer picked up the story and ran with it.

Fifty years later, Joseph Pulitzer and William Hearst would obtain the New York World and New York Journal, respectively. The two began a high-stakes rivalry, attempting to outdo each other

in sensationalized headlines, blurred truths, and whatever they thought might make the higher sales. The use of a popular comic featuring the Yellow Boy—the artist behind which would switch between the two printers—spawned a term for the new brand of reporting: yellow journalism.

In the 1890s, at the height of Pulitzer and Hearst, Cuba would begin its revolution against Spain. This would cultivate the Spanish-American war,



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which is often credited to the reporting of the World and Journal, who set out to capitalize on the conflict. William Hearst is frequently quoted as saying “you furnish the pictures; I’ll bring the war!”

Women

Henrik Ibsen is well known for writing complex and layered women in his plays. Typically in the plays that feature a female protagonist, they have a direct foil. Scholars have referred to the pair as the “demon” and the “darling.” The “demon” is the main character; she is strong, stubborn, and often uses manipulative tactics to obtain her objectives. The “darling” is a secondary character; she is passive, weak, and is easily manipulated by others in the play. While *An Enemy of the People* is not centered around a woman, Ibsen still makes a point of contrasting the two female characters in the show. Katherine Stockmann is written to represent a traditional woman; she is the protector of her family and caretaker of her home. When Thomas becomes consumed with the truth, she is concerned with the life of her family. Petra Stockmann represents modernity. She is a young working woman who is passionate about teaching her students about truth and science. Neither woman is painted as the villain in the story, but are representative of the state of feminism in Norway when Ibsen wrote the play.

In the decades leading up to 1882 in Norway, there were major strides made in the feminist movement that allowed women to become more self sufficient. By 1839, women over the age of forty who were unsupported by a man could be considered master craftsmen, and by 1842, unmarried, divorced, and widowed women could engage in trade. In 1854, they gained the same inheritance rights as men, whereas before, they would receive only half of what a brother would. In 1869, women gained full legal autonomy at age twenty one if they were unmarried. Married women would gain the same autonomy six years after the play was published in 1888.

Teachers

Educators have a long history of being censored in their classrooms, especially in the United States. One of the most widely used forms of this is loyalty oaths. During the mid 1900s when the American public was conditioned to fear Communism and all that came with it, teachers were unconstitutionally forced by state and local governments to swear loyalty to the United States. The language used in these oaths varied, but was often some version of disavowing and condemning “radical beliefs” or “subversive activities.” Many states, including California, required these oaths of educators by creating new acts, like the Levering Act. These oaths were found to be ineffective. They caused ill will toward the state from loyal educators and did not work in terms of eliminating Communism.

Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in the United States, was a champion of gay rights. He earned his seat on the San Francisco City- County Board in 1978. Among other important social justice related things, he is well known for opposing California Proposition 6, which would have mandated the firing of queer teachers in public schools. Less than eleven months after being elected to the Board, he and the mayor of San Francisco were assassinated in City Hall by Dan White, a conservative and bigoted former Board member.





The censorship of educators is not only limited to the West Coast; in 1925, John Scopes was put on trial for teaching the theory of evolution in his public classroom. Scopes was a physics and math teacher in Tennessee. He did not teach biology. He was approached by a representative from the American Civil Liberties Union asking him to admit to teaching evolution in the classroom for the purpose of a trial attempting to challenge the Butler Act, which classifies teaching evolution as a misdemeanor. Scopes agreed. William Jennings Bryan served as prosecution while Clarence Darrow served as defense. Scopes lost the trial that year, but the act would later be repealed in 1967.

Bacteria

Bacteria as we know them were discovered by Antonie von Leeuwenhoek, a Dutch scientist, in 1677. The clarity of his results was difficult to replicate, and the scientists of his era doubted, ridiculed, and dismissed him well into the twentieth century. More modern understandings were published into 1870 and closely followed by the development of pasteurization in 1881.

It would be fair to say that those who were not paying close regard to scientific news or willing to parse through medical reports would not have a deep understanding of bacteria, or even know what they were. In *Enemy*, Stockmann himself even states the town has dismissed much of his work as “myths and crack-brained fancies.” Kiiil's attempts to understand Stockmann's research finds him interpreting bacteria as some animal getting into the water pipes.

Interestingly, Stockmann also assures his friends and family that the townspeople will be happy to relay the pipes. One has to wonder if Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha thought something similar when she first blew the whistle on Flint, Michigan's lead pipes. Pipe replacement in Flint, despite evidence of lasting brain damage in children and other health crises due to the levels of lead, didn't begin until two years after the initial crisis. Efforts were still ongoing as of 2018.

It's also still the case that our understanding of science is chiefly reliant on what is broken down and shared with us. Norway was said to have high literacy rates and values of education at the time the play was written; however, adults in the modern United States can answer, on average, 6.7 out of 11 questions about fundamental science. Vaccines have been long-since debunked as a cause of autism and over 25 studies prove it; but a 2015 Gallup found that 10% of Americans don't believe vaccinating children is important.

Economics

In the mid- to late-1800s, Norway was seeing an unprecedented economic boom following the establishment of its constitution and transition to Swedish rule. From 1843 to 1875, the middle class benefited so much, Norwegian historian Willima Kielhau would say they established a new middle class entirely. Societal expectations would also shift to the class that had been primarily farmers, and with it brought “bourgeois respectability” (Carter). *An Enemy of the People* would be published in the period shortly after this, when many had become comfortable in a more prosperous age and memory of previous hardship would have begun to fade for most.

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Dr. Stockmann takes note of this when describing his new home to his brother, indicating the fine cloths and lamps that he and his wife have invested in.

The historic economic disparity that some in Norway might have still remembered, however, is not alien to the modern American. We have seen the wealth increases experienced by billionaires such as Jeff Bezos, and America's own economic gap has begun to widen. Since 1970, the median wage of the impoverished class has increased by \$8,700. The upper class's median income has increased by \$80,000.

Miscellaneous

White Washed Sepulcher

When exposing the danger of the baths, Stockmann refers to them as a white washed sepulcher, which may be a biblical reference. Matthew 23:27 reads "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean."

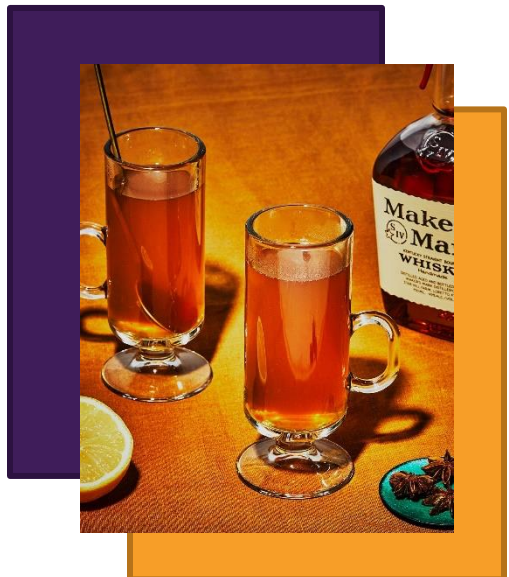
Typhoid

Typhoid is a bacterial infection caused by salmonella typhi. It commonly spreads through contaminated drinking water and food. Symptoms can include fever, diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, weakness, headaches, and stomach pains. In order to be treated, it must be addressed early, or it can be fatal. Patients are prescribed antibiotics, and doctors recommend being vaccinated before traveling to high risk areas. The first effective versions of the vaccine were introduced in 1896 for military use and have since become available in oral and injection methods.

Alcohol

Arrack, as mentioned by Katherine Stockmann in the first act, likely refers to a Southeast Asian wine usually spelt as "arrak." Fermented and distilled from sugarcane or date palms, the drink was known as "batavia-arrack" and was common in Swedish and Finnish mixed drinks or as a celebratory beverage. Given Thomas Stockmann's enthusiasm with he and his wife's new, comfortable surroundings, this wouldn't be out of the question.

The hot toddy, as made "too strong" by Billings and refused by Peter Stockmann, is a hot drink of whiskey, honey, and lemon juice, thought to be good for health and spirit.



Dramaturgs' Statement

When Henrik Ibsen published his play *Ghosts* in 1881, there was outrage at how overtly he addressed adultery and sexually transmitted diseases. He was berated by critics for writing this controversial play, which spurred him to write *An Enemy of the People*. *Enemy* centers around a respected man at the top of his scientific field. In a time when most places had a single doctor, he is well known by everyone in the town. When he discovers that a preventable public health crisis is being overlooked, he is censored and discredited by those who wish to save their fortunes over the lives being put in danger. Having only a small number of supporters, he and his family suffer consequences at the hands of a self interested government and a town that has only one source of information.

Our version of the play was translated by Eleanor Marx-Aveling. Daughter of Karl Marx and Socialist activist in her own right, she translated between ten and fifteen dramas and other works of literature before her death in 1898. The play as it is translated is distinctly relevant to a plethora of social issues, including classism, overbearing government, and the government-sanctioned censorship of scientists, educators, and citizens.

One of many present parallels to the show is Flint, Michigan's ongoing water crisis. In spring of 2014, it came to the public's attention that the water in Flint had been contaminated by lead pipes. The push for change and attention was led by Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, who would soon find herself under intense pressure from local government to handle the situation quietly. Four years later, Dr. Hanna-Attisha has published a book about her experiences—*What the Eyes Don't See*—and the replacement process for Flint's pipes is still ongoing. Brain damage and other lasting effects of lead poisoning will haunt the city for generations to come.

And a century and a half prior, newspaper offices like the one seen in *An Enemy of the People* would also have the ear of the public—in the midst of the so-called Newspaper War, with Joseph Pulitzer of the *New York World* and William Hearst's *New York Journal*. The fierce rivalry between the two would produce yellow journalism (ever heard of clickbait?), an era in journalism marked by sensationalist headlines, flagrant twisting of truth, and a constant manipulation of the middle class' public opinion. It is this middle class that we see displayed in the midst of Ibsen's play now; fresh off the economic boom Norway experienced after establishing its own constitution and merging with the kingdom of Sweden, his workers are quick to shed their blue collars but haven't yet forgotten the injustices of a tight-fisted upper class.

Despite the fact that *Enemy* was written over a hundred years ago, the play remains hauntingly familiar to a modern audience. From a corrupt government with a totalitarian head, to people in media being too easily swayed, to a disbelief in science, to a society that places capital gain above the health of unknowing victims, we have to wonder how we have allowed this to continue.



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