

ACT III

*(The editor's room of the People's Messenger. Day. Within the printing room upstage are seen a few compositors and a hand press at work. Downstage, Hovstad, the editor, is seated at the writing desk. Presently Billing enters from the right with the Doctor's report in hand.)*

BILLING: Well, I must say! —

HOVSTAD: *(writing)* Have you read it through?

BILLING: *(laying the report on the desk)* Yes, I have.

HOVSTAD: Don't you think the doctor's tone is very strong?

BILLING: Strong! God! He's crushing. Every word lands like a...a...sledge-hammer.

HOVSTAD: Yes. These men are to be crushed by one blow.

BILLING: True, but we'll keep on pounding until the whole propertied, power class comes down. As I sat in there reading the document, I seemed to hear a revolution coming along this way.

HOVSTAD: *(turning around)* Shh! Don't let Aslaksen hear any of this.

BILLING: *(in a lower voice)* Aslaksen is a chicken-hearted, little coward. There's nothing in the man. But this time I hope you'll stand firm? You'll print the doctor's report?

HOVSTAD: Yes, as long as the mayor holds to his position and doesn't give in without a fight.

BILLING: If the mayor gave up, it would be dull.

HOVSTAD: Whatever happens, we can turn the situation to our account. If the mayor won't agree to the doctor's recommendations, he'll have all the middle class against him—all those members of the Property Owner's Association, and the rest of that lot. And if he does agree to the doctor's proposals, he'll fall out with the whole group of large shareholders in the Baths—the men who, up till now, have been his main supporters.

BILLING: Yes—yes; they'll have to fork over a huge sum—

HOVSTAD: You can count on that. And then, that pack of people will be broken up, and day by day, we'll show the public that the mayor is entirely unfit and that positions of trust in the town, the whole municipal government must be placed in the hands of people with liberal ideals.

BILLING: By God, that's true. I see it, I see it. We are on the eve of a revolution!

HOVSTAD: Shh! — *(calls)* Come in! *(Stockmann enters from up left door; Hovstad goes toward him)* Ah! Here's the doctor. Well?

STOCKMANN: Print it, Mr. Hovstad! Print it!

HOVSTAD: Is it to go in just as it is?

BILLING: Hurrah!

STOCKMANN: Print it. Of course, it's to go in just as it is. They're going to get their just deserts! Now, there'll be a war in this town, Mr. Billing!

BILLING: War up to the knife, I hope! To the death, Doctor, to the death!

STOCKMANN: This article is only the beginning. I have plans for four or five others. But where do you hide Aslaksen?

BILLING: (*calling into the printing room*) Aslaksen! Just come in here for a moment.

HOVSTAD: Did you say four or five more articles? On the same subject?

STOCKMANN: God no! No; those articles' ll deal with quite different matters. But these matters all arise from the problems with the water. One thing leads to another, as you well know, once a rattling old house is shaken in one place, another place begins to collapse.

BILLING: Of course! And the whole house must be pulled down.

ASLAKSEN: (*enters from printing room*) Pulled down! Surely the doctor is not thinking of pulling down the Baths?

HOVSTAD: Not at all! Don't be alarmed.

STOCKMANN: No, Mr. Aslaksen, we were talking about other things. Mr. Hovstad, what do you think of my article?

HOVSTAD: I think it's simply a masterpiece.

STOCKMANN: I agree...I'm very pleased.

HOVSTAD: It's clear and to the point. One doesn't have to be a specialist to understand it. I'm positive every intelligent, honest person will be on our side.

ASLAKSEN: Let's hope all the prudent ones will be too.

BILLING: Both the prudent and imprudent—indeed, the whole town.

ASLAKSEN: If that's so, we may venture to print it.

STOCKMANN: I should think so!

HOVSTAD: It shall appear tomorrow.

STOCKMANN: Good—not one day may be lost. Look here Mr. Aslaksen, this is what I wanted to see you about. You, personally, must take charge of my report.

ASLAKSEN: I certainly shall.

STOCKMANN: Take care of it, as if it were gold. No printing errors, every single word is important. I'll drop by again to make any small corrections. Ah, you don't know how I want to see these words in print—to send those words forth—

BILLING: To send them forth—yes, like thunderbolts!

STOCKMANN: And to offer them up to the judgement of every intelligent citizen in this

town. Ah! You've no idea of what I've had to put up with today. I've been threatened with all sorts of things. And I was to be stripped of my inalienable rights as a human being.

BILLING: What! Your rights as a human being!

STOCKMANN: I was to be humiliated, made a coward, forced to put a salary before my deepest convictions.

BILLING: By God—that's a shame!

HOVSTAD: What else could you expect from those people.

STOCKMANN: But I promise you they'll get the worst of it. Everyday I'll go to war in the Messenger; I'll fire one article after another at them.

ASLAKSEN: Yes, but look here—

BILLING: Good! There'll be a war! —a war!

STOCKMANN: I'll bring them down. I'll crush them—level their defenses before the eyes of all sensible people. Yes, I'll do just that.

ASLAKSEN: Be reasonable, Doctor; proceed with care and restraint—

BILLING: No—No! Don't spare the dynamite.

STOCKMANN: (*calmly going on*) Henceforth it's not just a question of water and sewers—no, the whole of society must be cleansed and purified.

BILLING: There soundeth the words of salvation!

STOCKMANN: All these old incompetent men must be gotten rid of. And in every area! Such possibilities have revealed themselves to me today. Until just now, it wasn't clear to me, but now I shall set things right. It's the young, vital enthusiasts we must seek out; we must have new captains for all the outposts.

BILLING: Yes! Of course!

STOCKMANN: All will go smoothly if we all stay together. This whole revolution will be like launching a ship. Don't you agree?

HOVSTAD: I think we have every chance of placing our municipal government into the hands of those to whom it rightly belongs.

ASLAKSEN: And if we proceed with moderation, I don't think there'll be any danger.

STOCKMANN: Who the devil cares about danger? What I do I do for the sake of the truth and for the sake of my conscience.

HOVSTAD: Doctor, you deserve our support.

ASLAKSEN: That's certain. The doctor is a true friend of the townspeople—a genuine friend of society.

BILLING: By God, Aslaksen, Dr. Stockmann is a friend of the people.

