



The Coming of the Oxford Group

In Frank Buchman's view humanity was, after World War I, engaged in a race against time to save a crumbling civilisation. Already in 1921 he defined his aim as "a programme of life issuing in personal, social, racial, national and supranational change". By the end of the 1920s he had raised a group of people committed to the same aim. And he had tested its capacity for being an agent of change in South Africa as well as and in Canada. The Prime Minister of Canada concluded that the work done by the group "has made the task of government easier. Your influence has been felt in every village and city."

But the threat of totalitarian powers was increasingly felt everywhere, making the reconciling work of the League of Nations more and more difficult. In 1933 C.J. Hambro, the great Norwegian statesman and president of the Norwegian parliament, evaluated what he had heard of the Oxford Group calling it more important than

most things on the agenda of the League in Geneva. The following year Hambro invited 30 members of the Oxford Group to come to Norway and invited 120 leading Norwegians to meet Frank Buchman and his team in Høsbjør near Oslo. That was in November 1934. More than 1,200 Norwegians responded to the invitation.

The daily paper *Tidens Tegn* wrote: "A handful of foreigners who neither knew our language nor understood our ways and customs, came to this country... A few days later the whole country was talking about God, and two months after the thirty foreigners arrived, the mental outlook of the whole country had definitely changed."

In March 1935, before going for a three month campaign in Copenhagen, Frank Buchman spoke at the Oslo City Hall at a crowded meeting. Rumours preceded the group in Denmark.

Top photo: On Whit Sunday 1935 Frank N. D. Buchman addressed a national demonstration, ten thousand strong, in the Castle of Elsinore: "There must come a spiritual dynamic which will change human nature and remake men and nations."

Within 8 days 35,000 people participated in crowded meetings in the cathedral and in other churches and halls often overflowing into the streets and squares. The campaign started in Odd Fellow Palæet and culminated on Whitsunday with about 10,000 people gathered in the court of Kronborg Castle at Elsinore and even bigger crowds following the meeting through loudspeakers on the bastions of the castle.

In the meantime big yearly gatherings continued to be held in Oxford, with people participating from many countries. A team of six hundred, half of them Danes, went to Jutland to carry through a campaign right through the whole peninsular with big assemblies being held on Fanø and in many other places.

In November 1935 Carl Hambro spoke together with Frank Buchman in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Hambro told about hundreds and thousands of lives having been changed in Norway. Buchman told about one person who had experienced that kind

of personal transformation, namely Fredrik Ramm, the Norwegian editor who resented Denmark having won the case of sovereignty over Greenland and therefore, until then, had done his best to poison the relationship between Norway and Denmark. At a meeting in Odense, transmitted to the whole of Denmark by radio, he told of his change and apologized publicly for having been, as he expressed it himself, a Dane-hater.

During Easter 1936 – a year after the arrival of the Oxford Group in Denmark – around 15,000 people gathered for a rally at Ollerup Folk High School of Gymnastics in its large newly built hall.

The coming of the Oxford Group released tremendous spiritual dynamics in the whole of Denmark issuing in many initiatives that in a unique way prepared the country to stand united during the Nazi occupation.

In 1936 Frank Buchman met the Danish editor Jacob Kronika in Berlin. Here Buchman said that "Germany has come under the mastery of terrible demonic powers. Countermeasures are urgent.



During the German occupation of Denmark, Colonel H.A.V. Hansen (left) helped to start the Folk og Værn (People and Defence) movement and arranged secret meetings between top army leadership and Social Democratic leaders.

High Court advocate Valdemar Hvidt (second from left) showed the way to combat unemployment. Dean of Copenhagen Cathedral Paul Brodersen (right) sounded an apostolic note as he saw a revolutionary Christian spirit in a community of people from all over the world who work unitedly to right what is wrong and to bring the will of God to bear on human relations. In 1946 these Danish men went to London to meet Frank Buchman (second from right) to discuss ways to heal the wounds of a war-torn Europe.

We must ask the Lord for guidance and strength in the democratic countries bordering to Germany, the small neighbouring countries in particular, to initiate anti-demonic countermeasures under the sign of the cross of Christ."

In 1938 Frank Buchman gathered his co-workers and team from many countries in Visby on the Swedish island of Gotland. Here he challenged the participants to forge a united battlefront. He appealed to the Nordic countries to invest their Christian heritage in the service of their fellow beings and society.

One of the Danes taking part in the meetings was Alfred Nielsen, a leading lumber industrialist from Silkeborg. Frank Buchman asked the Danes what they thought was the biggest problem in Denmark. When Nielsen said: "Unemployment", Buchman replied: "If you are willing to do anything that God may reveal to you, then you may be able to find an answer to the biggest problems in your country."

From Visby, Frank Buchman went to Copenhagen where he spoke to several hundred people in the Phønix Hotel and asked them what they were doing about Denmark's 200,000 unemployed. That sparked some of them to action.

What to do in many cases turned out to be very simple things. Somebody just had to get the idea. Around a hundred thousand of the larger farms were visited in order to map the needs of repair or construction work. That alone created some 30,000 jobs. When the campaign was finished, work for 375 million Danish kroner had been projected.

Kitchen waste was collected to eventually feed some 30,000 pigs. The old practice that home-refurbishment could only be done in summertime was successfully challenged with the effect of reducing painters' winter redundancy considerably. These initiatives and many others gave employment as well as hope to many people who might otherwise have been forced to seek employment in Germany.



Alfred Nielsen

A national movement was created to combat unemployment by urging individuals to start minor and major repair jobs. This poster says: "Initiate work. Repair all that can be repaired. Provide work."

The most important thing was maybe that a large part of the population had begun to feel that the question of employment was not only the government's concern, but their own responsibility.

The change of outlook was maybe more important than anything else. It made it possible for opposing groups to cooperate. Already one month after the occupation, 27 national youth leaders and four young people connected with the Oxford Group met to discuss the possibility of forming a joint youth council. Together with leaders from the Folk High School Movement they created Dansk Ungdomssamvirke (the Danish Association for Youth Cooperation) with Professor Hal Koch as chair. Previous to the occupation on the 9th of April there was a gap between military officers and the leaders of the Social Democratic Party.

After an epoch-making meeting in Officersforeningen (The Officers' Association) on 6th January 1941, a three day conference was held with 70 participants from the labour movement and 70 from the armed forces. This was to create the basis for understanding and cooperation between the military and the different resistance groups, making it possible to avoid a clash or even open fighting between different factions at the end of the war. It may ultimately have played a part in Denmark not slipping behind the Iron Curtain, as was certainly the aim of some European powers.

What happened all those years back was that common people were given hope – and proof – even the ordinary person could play a part in changing the world for the better. How can we let ourselves be inspired by those events to make a difference in our world of today?

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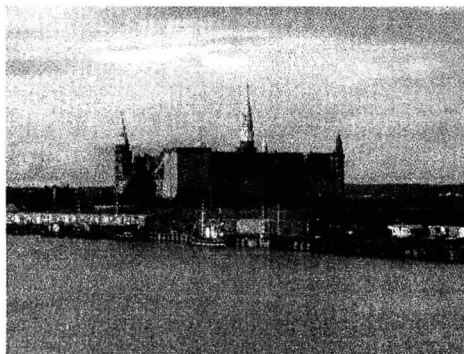
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Kronborg Castle as seen from the ferry between Helsingør in Denmark and Helsingborg in Sweden.