

## The Thranite Movement in Norway 1849 – 1851<sup>1</sup>

*Workers! God be with you! God be with us all; a strife will begin; a strife must begin [...] Wake up then workers! Unite and agree to act yourselves for your own best future, for you have experienced long enough that you wait in vain for others to do something for you when you yourselves keep quiet.*<sup>2</sup>

From 1849 to 1851, for the first time in Norwegian history, an extensive political movement existed, with its basis in the lower social strata in the cities and in the rural areas. At its peak, the Thranite Movement, so named after its founder Marcus Thrane, had approximately 30,000 members in about 400 local organizations. This corresponded to roughly 7-8 % of the male population over the age of 20 years. Geographically, in addition to Trøndelag, the movement was centered in the Eastern and Southern parts of Norway. There was also some activity in the western part of the country.

*Thranittforeningene*, or the Workers' Associations [arbeiderforeninger] as they were called, emerged among the working class in the cities and towns of Eastern and Southern Norway. The first one was founded in the city of Drammen on 27 December 1848. In March 1849 the next local organization was founded in the capital, Kristiania (Oslo). From then on, and especially from the spring of 1850 onwards, the political activity became strong in the rural areas of central eastern Norway and, from autumn of 1850, in Trøndelag. The sharp increase in the number of members and organizations from now on partly resulted from the fact that the political programme of the movement became known in this period. This followed the circulation of a *petition* to be signed by as many as possible and sent to the King.

The main demand being raised in the petition was a decrease of customs, especially on grain, in order to lower the price of necessities. Furthermore, the Thranites demanded that the rural areas be granted extended trading rights, an improvement of the standard of living for the cotters,<sup>3</sup> the introduction of measures to counter the abuse of liquor, an improvement of public schools, reforms in legal practice – among them the introduction of a jury,

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1 This article is primarily based on my own research into the Thranite Movement, which is published in various books and articles, as Pryser 1977a, Pryser 1977b, Pryser 1980, Pryser 1981a, Pryser 1981b, Pryser 1982. The last book also contains other articles relevant to the study of the Thranite Movement. See also the only recent article on the movement written in English: Tønnesson 1985.

2 Marcus Thrane, in *Arbeiderforeningernes blad* (5.5.1849).

3 The term cotter is used synonymously to the term householder („husmann“).

the introduction of conscription as laid down in the Norwegian constitution of 1814 in principle – and, finally, general male suffrage.

With the exception of the last-mentioned, these demands were not particularly radical in Norway in 1850. The demands for extended trading rights in the rural areas, cheaper necessities etc. were in the line with the goals of the farmers' representatives (in opposition at the time) in the *Storting* [the Parliament], even though the grain farmers were opposed to abolishing grain tariffs. Demands for the improvement of public schools and the reforms to make the legal system more democratic by, for example, introduction of a jury, had also been made by the farmers' group in Parliament. They also agreed that something had to be done about the cotters' poor standard of living, above all the abuse of alcohol, even though they may have disagreed on how to achieve this goal. Only the demand of universal male suffrage was radical, but it could not have come as a surprise. In fact, at an earlier stage the government press had been in favour of an extension of the right to vote.

In sum, the demands contained in the Thranites' petition to the King may be characterized as relatively *moderate*. They were in no way particularly socialistic, but rather of a more tactical nature. The intention was not to provoke the authorities – especially the King whom the Thranites trusted the most – with too radical demands.

The programme of the Thranites acquired a more socialistic profile in November 1850, when it became clear that the King would turn down the demands. This frightened quite a few members, and the decline in membership can be explained by the movement's more socialist attitude. The fact that the perspective of the class struggle became more prominent explains why independent farmers in particular left the movement, as the new perspective implied a conflict of interests between landowners and unpropertied people. The movement now claimed, for example, that the property rights were not sacred and that, on the contrary, owning property was similar to theft, that a redistribution of land-ownership was necessary, that the state should provide economic support to the cotters so that they could establish themselves on a permanent basis, that banks had to be funded by the government in order to provide the workers with cheap loans, etc. The government chose to interpret an ambiguous resolution passed at the second annual national meeting in the summer of 1851 (the so-called *Lilleting*) as a call for a revolution, and the movement was banned.

Before this, at several places around the country, the government had forcefully stopped riots and demonstrations incited by the Thranites. It all started with the arrest of a few local Thranite leaders. The arrest followed an event where the Thranites had stopped the foreclosure of a watchmaker called Mons in the Hedemark area in November 1850. Large demonstrations in Kristiania in the spring of 1851 also upset the authorities. The most serious incident was the *Levanger war* [the war of Levanger, a town in Trøndelag] in the course of which the Thranites freed an agitator from prison, and the 'Hatter's war' in Ringerike led by the hatter Halsten Knudsen, the most revolutionary agitator in the movement. Military forces were used on both of these occasions.



The Thranite Movement – the first socialist movement in Norway – was shortlived. It was defeated during the autumn of 1851. At this point the local sheriffs were ordered to register all members and submit lists of names to the Ministry of Justice and to report on local activity in general. The main leaders – most prominently Marcus Thrane himself – and local activists were imprisoned and charged. In the end approximately 200 persons were convicted. Thrane and the other leaders had their case tried by the Supreme Court in 1854. After his release from prison in 1858, Thrane emigrated to the USA where he died in 1890.<sup>4</sup> Several others from the movement also emigrated to the USA following the banning of the movement.

No important continuity has been established from what has been regarded the first workers' movement in Norway to the modern and far more moderate labour movement that emerged in the 1880s (*Det Norske Arbeiderparti* [The Norwegian Labour Party] was founded in 1887). Thus, the rise and fall of the Thranite Movement may be seen as an isolated episode. Its fate probably delayed, rather than encouraged any idea of organization among the lower social groups at that time. The severe punishment meted out to the main leaders of the Thranites, was not forgotten easily.

The conditions for the emergence of the Thranite Movement can be found in both, Norway and the rest of Europe. It is fruitful to see these conditions in both a long- and a short-term perspective. A fundamental long-term factor is the strong population growth in Norway in the period from 1815 to 1850. In the 30-year-period from 1815 to 1845 the population increased by 50%, from 885,000 to 1,328,000. The population growth, which has no parallel in Norwegian history, was a result of diminished mortality. The decline, in turn, was caused by several factors. It is sufficient to mention the introduction of the potato in combination with proteinrich herring, the new vaccine for smallpox and a favourable proportion of the genders and age groups of the population. The last-mentioned was manifest in a large proportion of youth in the reproductive years.<sup>5</sup>

The large number of people who were born after 1815 became adults around the year 1850, and unemployment became a problem. This problem was most critical in the rural areas of eastern Norway where there were only a few possibilities for employment outside farming and forestry. Several farms were split because of these problems, thereby creating a greater number of small-scale farms. A parallel development was the increase of the number of cotters at increasingly poorer farms. The *husmannsvesen* [the cotta system] was at its peak in the 1850s, and it is likely that a large proportion of the cotters were the de-classed sons of farmers. Still, people who could claim a small piece of land were better off than the *innerster* [lodgers with separate households, in farmers' or cotters' houses]

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4 On Thrane's life in the USA, see T.I.Leiren, Marcus Thrane. A Norwegian Radical in America, Minnesota 1987.

5 See T. Pryser, Norsk historie 1800-1870, Oslo 1885, on the conditions in Norway in the 19th century in general.

and day-labourers, totally dependent on wage-labour, not to mention the increasingly numerous servants on the farms – both male and female. The lower social strata of the rural areas grew in this way. Because of poor demand of labour, farmers could, to a greater extent, exploit those who were dependent on selling labour.

This is the long-term perspective usually given as a background for the Thranite Movement. Among the short-term factors we have the international economic crisis which started around 1847 and the February Revolution of 1848 which started in France following the economic crisis. The international recession, which reached Norway in 1848, hit the export sector and this, in turn, led to a setback in the shipping sector and in the export of timber to England, with corresponding cuts in the workforce. In rural eastern Norway, this meant that several farmers, cotters and others lost an important additional income from forestry, transport, work at the sawmills, etc. In the cities along the coast, shipping and export of timber halted and finding employment became difficult. This had side-effects on artisans selling their service, producers and small-scale tradesmen who sold foods, and so on. On top of this, there was a crop failure in the years 1849 and 1850, largely due to poor potato harvests.

These troubles created considerable financial problems. In general, the owners of the larger farms had access to public credit institutions, but several small-scale farmers and cotters had to resort to private money-lenders who charged very high rates of interest. A great many of these people became unable to provide the downpayments in due time and were forced to sell off their farms and belongings. Civil servants profited from the recession, in the sense that they became busier as a result of the increasing number of people in difficulties. The civil servants were paid with so-called *sportler* – a fixed price for each single activity. The Thranite Movement largely became an accumulator of, and an outlet for, public displeasure in both rural and urban areas.

The situation briefly described above is seen as the basis for the political agitation of Marcus Thrane, which, as we have seen, in a short time resulted into a mass movement. However, Thrane himself planted the seed. Without his capacity as an agitator, editor and organizer, it is unlikely that Norway would have seen the extensive movement that later came to carry his name.

Marcus Thrane, a de-classed son of a rich man, was born in 1817. His grandfather was one of the greatest merchants in Kristiania. Thrane's father also attempted a career as a businessman, and was also one of the directors at Norges Bank [the central bank]. The same year that Marcus was born, his father was arrested for embezzlement, following heavy losses in his own companies. Marcus grew up with the support of relatives and wealthy friends. They also helped him through secondary school and to start on his unfinished theology studies. During the 1840s he worked as a private tutor in the small town of Lillehammer and at *Modum Blaafargeverk*, the largest manufacturing employer in Norway. The company ran into trouble because of the economic crisis that began in



1848. From the summer of that year, Thrane worked as the editor of a newspaper in Drammen, but he was dismissed because of his radical opinions. It was also in Drammen that he started his first workers' association at the turn of the year 1848/1849.

We can only briefly comment on Thrane's political agitation and his writings in the newspaper that he founded in Kristiania, *Arbeiderforeningernes Blad*. First of all, Thrane was a reform socialist, even though he was familiar with the idea of an armed revolution in certain situations. He probably had no fixed theoretical understanding of socialism; his abilities were of a more practical nature. When it came to ideology, he chose whatever was most useful. He had gathered such knowledge while 'bumming around' in Germany, France and England in 1838. Thrane was greatly influenced by the utopian socialists. He called Proudhon „without doubt the greatest genius of our time“. Although his ideas on the class struggle were close to Marxism, the usual assumption has been that he was unfamiliar with the writings of Marx. Even so, Thrane may have read a Swedish translation of the Communist Manifesto, entitled *The Voice of Communism*, published in December 1848 by a bookseller named Götrek in Stockholm. This was the only translation to be published in the same year as the original.

Like Proudhon, Thrane was a cooperative socialist and through that all production in a society should be taken over by co-ops that would exchange goods with one another, and where people would be paid according to how much they worked. Furthermore, Thrane was an agrarian socialist who saw common utilization of the land as a future goal.

Marcus Thrane was also influenced by English Chartism which is clearly reflected in the petition to the King. But contrary to the Chartists, he addressed the King and not the Parliament. This implies that old ideas from the time of autocracy of a paternalistic King as a 'father' of his people remained with Thrane. All in all, it is impossible to label Thrane with a specific ideology, since he created his own socialism from his own experience and from a Norwegian reality. In spite of this, he did not advocate any kind of nationalistic socialism. This is most obvious in relation to the question of war. Thrane thought that during war it was of no importance to the soldiers whether they lost or won, because the class struggle was prominent even on the battlefield. In his opinion (as in Marx's) class struggles rarely followed national boundaries.<sup>6</sup>

The socialist Marcus Thrane is virtually unknown outside Norway. His biographer, Oddvar Bjørklund, claims that this is due to Norway being such a small country. According to Bjørklund, his efforts are „so sensational that he should be a towering figure among the pioneers of the international labour movement.“<sup>7</sup> In any case, Thrane and the Thranite Movement belong to the movements that were created as the February Revolution in France spread throughout Europe. Thrane himself saw his movement in this perspective.

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6 On the ideology of Thrane, see especially B. Steiro, *Marcus Thranes politiske agitasjon 1849-1955*, Melhus 1974.

7 O. Bjørklund, *Marcus Thrane. Sosialistleder i et u-land*, Oslo 1970.

He wrote euphorically on the events in France where „the Gaul rooster has crowed for the third time and throughout Europe a new day dawns.

„There were socialist ideas presented in Norway in addition to the ones brought home by Marcus Thrane. Foreign revolutionaries visited the country. Two of them, the German journeyman typographer Heinrich Anders, and the Swedish journeyman tailor Carl Daniel Forssell, were both emissaries of the *Bund der Gerechten*, an organization that took the name *Bund der Kommunisten* in 1847. Anders and Forssell were also connected to the Göttek circle in Stockholm, a group characterized by a non-violent and Christian type of communism inspired by the ideas of Étienne Cabet, the ideas of whom Thrane was also familiar with. Traces of Heinrich Anders can be found in various towns along the Norwegian coast, from Tromsø in the north to Kristiania in the south. Everywhere he seems to have sailed under a false flag, telling people that he represented the philanthropic organization of the Fraternal Democrats in London. In several local newspapers, he published political poems written in German, e.g. *Triumph-Lied der errungenen französischen Republik am 25sten Februar 1848*. Investigations have identified Forssell only in Kristiania. There he was in March 1848, at the time when violent demonstrations inspired by the French Revolution took place there. Anders was in Bergen at the time of violent agitation calling for strikes there. However, it has not been possible to link the two travellers either to the disturbances at the time or to Marcus Thrane.

The German journeyman tailor Wilhelm Weitling's brand of communism was known to Thrane through Weitling's book *Garantien der Harmonie und Freiheit*, published in Norwegian in 1847. Friedrich Engels' analysis of the state of the working class in England was printed in articles in a Kristiania newspaper. Another journeyman, tailor Christopher Reffling, who became member of the Thranite Central Board, had personally participated in demonstrations in Paris in February 1848, together with other journeymen from Norway and Ole Bull, a famous Norwegian violinist with radical ideas.

Last but not least, the international revolutionaries Georg Fein and Harro Haring paid a visit to Kristiania in 1849. Fein was a German newspaperman, a poet and political agitator who had been forced to leave Germany because of his activities. The authorities in Norway were particularly aware of him, because a letter discussing plans to assassinate the Dukes of Baden and Hessen, believed to have come from Fein, was by chance discovered in Kristiania. Fein, however, was not captured by the police.

On the other hand, Harro Haring, the Frisian artist, did not pass unnoticed but was expelled from Norway in 1850. Both Fein and Haring were associated with the Young Europe Movement and with the Italian Mazzini. Haring had meetings with Marcus Thrane and in a letter of April 1851 he offered Thrane the chance to represent the Thranite Movement at the International Workers' Congress in London in May of the same year. It is not known what Thrane's response was.



Viewed in the aftermath, the Thranite Movement is remarkable for three particular reasons. First, it was the first large-scale organization in Norway that could pass as a modern political popular party, woven together in a network of local associations, the party newspaper *Arbeiderforeningernes Blad*, a central board and a national meeting which was the highest authority of the movement. Secondly, during a very short time the movement gained massive support at a scale unparalleled in Norwegian pre-1850 history and maybe even later. And thirdly, the movement was unique in a European perspective. In Europe after the February revolution, all more or less revolutionary movements found most of their support among the urban masses. The most of the Thranite Movement's members, however, came from the rural areas.

Various social-historical aspects of the rural membership basis were at the centre of historical research in the later decades. On the other hand, early research on the Thranite Movement concentrated on the political aspects. The central focus of the important publications includes: Marcus Thrane himself and his political thinking; the decision processes within the central leadership and the national meetings; the political programme; the reactions of the government, etc. Investigations of local Thranite associations were concentrated in the areas of larger political significance. Not until the 1970s did historians express interests in local associations in areas where there had not been any direct confrontations with the authorities. Such areas predominated, however.

There have been two main options as to what kind of people the several thousand members were. An older tradition, originating from Professor Halvdan Koht, adhered to what is called the proletarian hypothesis. Koht claimed that Thrane's main effort was to „have organized the rural proletariat“ and to „have roused the urban proletariat into political struggle“, a struggle against civil servants as well as farmers. According to Koht, the „ruling class of the rural areas consisted of [...] the autonomous farmers“ who dominated over a large servant class, especially in eastern Norway. „The farm-owners had for a long time been able to speak on behalf of the rural areas because the lower class had not been aware of their specific rights.“<sup>8</sup> Thus, this was a conflict between the farmers who owned their means of production and the lower classes without any property, who were forced to sell their labour power.

Most writers of the Thranite Movement up until the 1970s have followed Koht in general, even though some have modified his view. Professor Edvard Bull, among others, in his earlier works widened the span between the classes by focusing on the conflicts between the cotters and the rich farmers. In addition, Oddvar Bjørklund has pointed out that the smaller farmers who were dependent on additional incomes from forestry, transport and other activities were people who „partly came to feel like workers.

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8 Koht 1917.

„This author was the first to raise the revisionist question of whether the Thranite Movement really was an expression of class conflict between the owners of the means of production and the people who were forced to sell their labour power. Even the results of early research show that this is a complicated question.

A study from Hedemarken, one of the most proletarian districts in eastern Norway, reveals that approximately 65% of the Thranites were cotters, day-labourers and the like, and that the proportion of land-owners and their sons was more than 18%. Even though the latter came from small farms, this means that in Hedemarken one in every five Thranites came from land-owning families.<sup>9</sup> In a similar study from South-Trøndelag the proportion is increased to one in three.<sup>10</sup> These figures were taken from the police records after the movement had been made illegal. The fact that many farmers had left the movement at the time makes these figures even more remarkable.

Early research of the Thranites based on aggregate statistics established that there was a large surplus population and generally poor social and economic conditions. This is insufficient evidence to conclude that the persons who became Thranites were the same people who had problems in finding employment and who thus fell into poverty and hardship. In analyses of political participation, we often find the claim that it is those who are relatively well off, socially and economically, who are most likely to have means, the time and the interest that is required for a minimum of activity in political organization. People living in poverty are not able to do this, as they are mainly occupied to avoid starvation. It has almost become an axiom of modern research into political participation that the level of activity increases with income, spare time, social status, experience and education.

On such backgrounds, I claimed that possibly the Thranites emerged rather from the middle classes than from the proletariat or the bottom of the social strata. Such a view resulted in the so-called middle-rank hypothesis.<sup>11</sup>

There are many sources supporting the claim that the Thranite Movement comprised a large number of people from the middle classes. As early as 1958, Professor Sverre Steen referred to the Thranites as „the higher part of the autonomous working class“, and also mentioned the existence of „several academics“ at the local level. Subsequent investigations added to this. In the small town of Lillehammer in central eastern Norway, more than half of the Thranites were bourgeois and enjoyed special rights, most of them master artisans. In larger cities like Kristiania and Trondheim several artisans were members. Most of these were journeymen, however, but even these may be included into the middle stratum. In any case, that was how they regarded themselves. Thrane had also experienced that „several journeymen regarded themselves as better [...] and were huffy about being members of an association that included day-workers, *kanthuggere* and the likes.“

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9 Gaustad 1934.

10 Grankvist 1966.

11 Pryser 177. Originally, this was a history thesis, completed in 1974.



In and around the small towns of southern Norway there were also a large number of artisans, especially ship carpenters. Among the Thranites there were also several master mates, particularly in Kragerø and Mandal, some skippers, and even a few claimed to be ship-owners. Even local mayors in southern Norway have been identified as Thranites. Some substantial farmers of the rural south and other areas had experience from local councils and other public positions. Curiously the Thranites were also represented in the Norwegian Parliament by two persons, premier lieutenant Rosenquist from Kristiansand and master-baker Wrenskjold from Holmestrand.

The middle classes become even more visible when the focus is put on the local Thranite leaders. Teachers, with their ability to read and write, comprised an important group of leaders at the local level. At the Thranite national meeting of 1850, at the time when the movement was about to reach its peak, the farmers, the artisans and the cotters each had one-quarter of the delegates. 'Pure' workers had about one-eighth, while the rest were teachers, a student, an editor, a surveyor and a mate. At the national meeting in 1851 the number of farmers and educated people was even greater.

Also in 1974, Professor Jens Arup Seip concluded that the Thranite associations included „several more or less independent 'movements'“. There was „a farmers' movement, an artisan movement, a cotters' movement and a labourers' movement.“ According to Seip, the Thranite Movement consisted of several groups that had „no more in common than their discontent.“<sup>12</sup> Thus, there is a lot to be said for both the proletariat and the middle-class hypothesis.

Most recent investigations of the Thranite Movement in various local areas in Eastern Norway – on the bases approximately 1000 members – confirm that there was a substantial element of middle-class groups, even though the picture varies. In rural areas like Ullensaker and Vler, Thranites with a background as farmers comprise 46 and 58%, respectively. In Hurdal, Romedal and Bø, the corresponding figures were 35, 33 and 24. Most of these owned middle-sized or small farms. With the exception of Vler, however, cotters and other proletarian groups were in the majority, but to a far less extent than claimed by the proletariat hypothesis. It is more correct to talk about a popular movement, rather than a class movement of proletarians.

Despite of differences between the rural areas, the majority of both farmers and cotters enjoyed a relatively fair economic situation. This was the case for 60% in Ullensaker, while 20 % were in a good situation and 20% in a poor one. In Romedal, between three fifths and four fifths were also living under reasonable conditions. In Bø, a third of the people were in serious economic difficulties, while two thirds were not. In Vler, 70% were in a fair situation, whereas a little less than 15% were well-off and a little more than 15% were poor. In Hurdal, 31% were poor, 12% well-off and the rest covered the middle

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12 Seip 1974b.

ground. The results are more than sufficient to conclude that the Thranites were not pitiful proletarians.<sup>13</sup>

The Thranites in the areas of Eastern Norway under investigation did not as a rule differ from the rest of the local population with respect to the aspects that have been surveyed. In one sense, however, they did seem to be special. A relatively large number were socially mobile, both upwardly and downwardly in society. Most of those who were socially on the move, so to speak, were cotters who had become small-scale farmers. These were people who had advanced with the help of additional incomes from the growing money-based companies connected to crafts, forestry, sawmills, transport, etc. These were companies that had been very profitable up until the economic crisis that hit Norway in 1848.

Thus, the investigations have shown that many Thranites were socially mobile, both upwardly and downwardly in society, and that most of them were relatively well-off. Both socially and economically, quite a few of them were in the middle stratum. Those who were de-classed or living in poverty expected the Thranite Movement to improve their condition. They were joined by people whose living conditions were reasonably good. Several of these had worked their way up from being cotters to owning their own farm. The boom in the lumber business up until 1848 had enabled some cotters to achieve this. The fear of a return to their old status as 'unpropertied' was probably the main reason why they became Thranites. For these people, the fear of losing what they had achieved was at least as important as any current economic suffering. These Thranites also had the little surplus needed for political action.

Occupational records of the police had been the sole source of information of earlier research on the Thranites. Such records dated from August 1851, a time when the movement had been outlawed and was disintegrating. At this point several farmers had left the movement because of its increasingly socialist profile. More recent research additionally used the signatures on the petition that was sent to the King in 1850, when the Thranite Movement was still advancing, was politically moderate and had the greatest number of members. The results taken from Ullensaker, Hurdal, Bø, Romedal, and Vler, have come from micro-investigations at the individual level, or prosopography, a method introduced by Lawrence Stone. Following this way, the life of the Thranites, and especially their situation around 1850, has been reconstructed from a number of sources in addition to the petition and the police records, e.g. church registers, censuses, land registers, mortgage registers, protocols from auctions and from settlements, poverty registers, and so on.

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13 In addition to Pryser 1977a, the exposition is based on theses on the Thranites in Romedal, Bø in Telemark, Våler in Soloør and in Hurdal, submitted by T. Moshaug (1976), O. Lunde (1978), P.A. Mellembakken (1978), W. Wessel (1978), respectively. The results are summed up in Pryser 1980.



This method has given us more accurate information on the members of the Thranite Movement, such as their occupations, age, number of dependents, education, indebtedness, political experience, landownership, etc. In addition to these variables, information has been obtained on the network of social and economic relationships that tied the Thranites together and encouraged collective action. Factors such as kinship and neighbour relations have also proved important for recruitment to the movement. There were several kinship relations between the Thranites. In Vler, 62% of the members were related to at least one other Thranite. Corresponding figures in other areas were 67% in Hurdal, 70-71% in Romedal and Ullensaker and 78% in Bø. Such relationships were mostly between brothers, brothers-in-law, and between fathers and sons.

In addition to the prosopographic method, recent research on the Thranites has employed concepts from academic fields such as sociology and anthropology, but in this article we cannot go into this in detail. However, Ferdinand Tönnies' dual concept of *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* has been central in discovering the relations that tied the Thranites together. English historians like Harold Perkin and E.P. Thompson have also been a source of inspiration for analyses.<sup>14</sup>

The old Thranite research built on Koht's simple 'Marxist' class blueprint. The analyses were generally restricted to quantifying the number of people of the same occupation or status – e.g. cotters and others who were unpropertied – in order to establish the conditions for the growth of solidarity among the Thranites and their subsequent class-based actions. It is a premise for such a view that indicators such as occupation and status are sufficient in order to develop a class consciousness.

However, there are reasons to doubt such a premise. E.P. Thompson claimed that Marx never meant „that class is a thing [with] a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production.“ According to Thompson, class has a much wider definition and is something that individuals feel as a result of a common experience and interest in relation to other individuals with different and often conflicting experience and interests. „Class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms; embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms.“ In this way, class is not seen „as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.“<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the pattern of relationship between the members of society becomes central. Norwegian historians tend to claim that in the years around 1850, Norway was in a stage

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14 F. Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1877); H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*, Lancaster 1967, and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Halifax 1963.

15 Thompson, *ibid.*

of transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial society or in a stage of transition from a society based on the old estates (stender) to a class society. It is a primary characteristic of the old society that different social groups were sharply distinguished and that people in fact (even though this was not true in a legal sense) throughout their lives belonged to the group they had been born to. This contrasted to the emerging class society, where divisions became blurred and the possibilities for social mobility increased. The reason for this is that from that point on, social status primarily stemmed from money. In the old society, status was inherited and aspects like manners, education, language and other cultural traits were at least as important.

Paternalism was another important characteristic of the old society, largely to vanish in class society. Vertical paternalistic ties of solidarity and dependency between high and low – cutting through to social layers – were decisive for most interaction. The recent Thranite research has been occupied with vertical paternalistic ties between farmers and their cotters and servants, between craftsmen and their journeymen and apprentices, and between fathers and sons. Highly asymmetric ties like these were dependent on physical proximity, often under the same roof, and largely by mutual dependency. Paternalism became less important in class society, where the distance between workers and employers became larger, kinship became less important and the ties of solidarity to a larger extent stemmed from horizontal equality in relation to the means of production and an awareness of mutual interests on this basis.

Recent examinations of the Thranites show the presence of both paternalism, vertical ties, horizontal identification and class consciousness. Vertical ties were strongest in Ullensaker and especially in Vler. In these areas, 56 and 95% of the Thranite cotters, respectively, belonged to farmers where the farmers were also Thranites. In the other regions where the Thranites have been examined at an individual level – Romedal, Hurdal and Bø – horizontal solidarity between people of the same social status was more important.

Let us try to sum up the conditions and reasons of the Thranite Movement in a four-stage model with the following four levels: (1) the international level, (2) the national level, (3) the local level, and (4) the individual level.

At the *international level*, conditions were set by the European economic crisis from 1847 onwards, and the Paris February Revolution that followed the year after. At the national level, the economic crisis hit the shipping industries and the export of lumber. At the same time it spurred imports of political ideologies, primarily via Marcus Thrane who created a kind of Norwegian socialism. At the *local rural level*, the lumber crisis resulted in stagnation of forestry, transport, and of similar companies that had provided farmers and workers with important additional incomes. This was taking place in local communities that at the outset were facing employment problems resulting from the strong population-growth since 1815. At the same time the conditions were worsened by crop failures.



All these factors contributed to the evrention of the Thranites' political agitation. All of these factors were *necessary* conditions. On this point, earlier and more recent Thranite surveys agree. Except for some additional empirical documentation, recent research has not provided fresh knowledge within this area. Yet micro-historical research has shown how these factors affected political activity at the *individual* level, and has led to a new understanding of the Thranites as a social group with respect to class status and cohegi-veness. A fair amount of new ground has been covered. It is one of the main findings that, as a group, the Thranites were *very heterogenous*, showing great variations both within single rural communities and different regions. This holds true for a number of characteristics such as occupation and status, social origin, economic wealth, political or organizational, experience, etc. Even so, the Thranites were just as much members of an economic middle stratum as a poor and unpropertied proletariat.

Quite a few of the Thranites were socially mobile on their way upwards or downwards in society. In economic terms most were comparatively well-off, but neither wealthy nor outright poor. Several were small-scale farmers who, aided by incomes from the booming economy of the 1940s, had managed to work their way out of their previous existence as cotters. The 1840s probably also provided the economic basis for many unpropertied Thranites who were reasonably well off in the 1850s.

Thus, most of the Thranites were not in a critical situation. On the other hand, it seems clear that they expected a crisis. We can see this from the measures and activities that were initiated at the time. The action that was taken in Ullensaker against a planned railroad that threatened to ruin the traditional equine-transportation of lumber and planks was among there most important such initiatives. The fact that most members of the Thranite Movement were well-off economically rendered sufficient ressources that were necessary for a minimum of political activity.

The support in the rural areas must be regarded assimilarly significant, even though it varied from 10 to 40% of all male adults. Several people who, when judged by their economic condition, had many reasons to join the movement, did not become members. Local conditions of political agitation semm to have been influential so far. The efficiency of agitation depended on several factors in addition to actual content: topographic conditions, the role of key persons as leaders, not to mention the network of social and economic relations in the area.

The Thranite Movement had greatest impact in central areas along the main roads. These were often places with an inn, where the local population met and news from outside was passed on. In a time of widespread illiteracy and lack of mass media, these local centres played a major role. In addition, we frequently find the local leaders to own such pubs. In general, Thranite leaders frequently were people of a certain local prestige, ranging from former members of the local councils and school teachers to the 'strong man' of the village

and bear-hunters. Often, the leaders were well-connected and resourceful men. The fact that such people joined the movement increased support.

The neighbourhood also appears to have played a role for recruitment. At least in some places, the Thranite associations seem to have coincided with traditional communities apparent in weddings, baptismal celebrations, funerals and other important events in people's life cycle [*bedalagsomr"dene*]. Major workplaces, e.g. large farms and the more industrial centres such as sawmills and glassworks were also important. In these places the horizontal bonds of solidarity between unpropertied people, sharing the relation to the means of production, rendered a proletarian attitude to the Thranites. However, there were also vertical, paternalistic bonds between farmers and their employees, related to the community of the farm. Furthermore, horizontal bonds between farmers influenced the movement to a certain degree.

The fact that Norwegian society in the years around 1850 was undergoing a transition to class society counts for the co-existence of both vertical and horizontal relations. This would also mean that the Thranite Movement cannot be called a pure proletarian or class movement. The term popular movement is far more fitting. Even Edvard Bull, in his last work, did not regard the Thranites as a proletarian movement any longer, but rather as „a movement of large groups of the working population.“<sup>16</sup>

The Thranite associations were the first political organizations in Norway and were, as such, what Tönnies called 'Gesellschaftsgruppen', or what modern sociologists call secondary groups. This is indisputable. People joined groups like these voluntarily and knowingly in order to achieve clearly specified goals, usually of an economic nature. But this kind of understanding is not sufficient. It is more rewarding to analyse the Thranite Movement as a 'Gesellschaftsgruppe', i.e. as a superstructure of existing 'Gemeinschaftsgruppen' or primary groups in rural areas. That is to say, groups that are more or less randomly recruited, and the goals of whom are much more vague and marked by emotional aspects, comprehensiveness, etc. At the individual level there was efficient interaction between the primary and secondary groups, which explains why some people became Thranites and what tied them together, in other words, the essence of recruitment and solidarity.

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16 Bull, 1985, provides the most recent summary of the history of the Thranite Movement.