

HOVSTAD BILLING ASLAKSEN

Hovstad He could be very useful to us.

Aslaksen As long as he keeps to the Baths. You can't let him go too far . . .

Billing You're always so damned afraid . . .

Aslaksen When it involves the local authorities, yes, I am. I've seen what can happen. If this was the national government it would be different, I'd fight them all the way.

Billing You're a walking contradiction.

Aslaksen If you attack the government no harm's done. National politicians don't care. But overthrow the local authorities and you get idiots - anyone with half an opinion - suddenly taking control

Hovstad We're fighting for the right of the people to govern themselves.

Aslaksen Let me tell you, when a man has interests of his own to protect that's all he thinks about.

Hovstad So we strip those men of their interests. **Billing** Leave them with nothing.

Aslaksen I'd watch what you're saying, Mr. Billing. Be very careful.

Billing What are you talking about?

Aslaksen I happen to know you've applied for an administrative position with the Council.

Hovstad Have you?

Billing Yes. But only to irritate them. Get up their noses.

Aslaksen It's not for me to judge. I've always endeavored to be completely open about my views. I admit I am more of a moderate than I was, but that is the only charge anyone could level at me. My heart is still with the people but I also understand the difficult job the authorities have. The local ones, anyway. I do not believe that is cowardly or contradictory.

(He walks through to the printing room.)

Billing Can't we fire him?

Hovstad **Who** else do you know would give us credit on printing costs, paper . . .

Billing Stockmann?

Hovstad Stockmann has no money.

Billing But Morten Kiil's his father-in-law. And the money he rakes in . . .

Hovstad But we don't know if Stockmann sees any of it. We don't know anything . . .

Billing I was going to tell you.

Hovstad You know you won't get the job.

Billing Of course I won't. I don't have a chance. They'll have one of their own already lined up for it. I applied to remind myself how corrupt they really are, how nothing ever changes here.

Hovstad Yes, I'm sure you did.