

COMMUNIST AREA

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ICELAND: PARTY

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MAOIST MOVEMENT LAUNCHED IN ICELAND

Summary: In early August, a new communist organization was established in Iceland, dedicated to studying Stalin's and Mao Tse-tung's works and aimed at establishing an "official" communist party of the same ideological persuasion.

The Icelandic People's Alliance is one of the more fortunate Western communist parties: it participates in the country's coalition government, has polled around 17 per cent in recent elections, and enjoys traditionally strong, if sporadic support from Iceland's trade-union movement. If fractional dissent can be considered characteristic of an established Western CP, then the People's Alliance has also outdone many of its foreign counterparts. Inner-party struggles have left their mark both on its development (by repeated name changes and "re-organizations") and on its national political participation (its parliamentary strength has vascillated more often because of dissident drop-outs than electoral returns). (1) The Icelandic People's Alliance has also differed from its counterparts on the European continent in several more basic respects. In the first place, it has avoided international contacts, maintaining an aloof disinterest in international communist parlays and limiting its recent inter-party contacts to talks with the Rumanian CP and a few messages to Western European CP gatherings. (2) Secondly, it has generally placed national considerations above Marxist-Leninist

ideology and not only at election time. Thirdly, the People's Alliance, for all its competition from dissident socialists on the "right," has been unchallenged from the "left," as the Sino-Soviet rift had little effect on organized communism in Iceland.

As of early August, however, this latter "advantage" was apparently nullified. According to reports in various Icelandic publications, formally organized Maoist activity is about to become a reality on the Icelandic political spectrum.

The "founding congress" of a new Marxist-Leninist movement was held from August 5 to 7, presumably in Reykjavik. In an interview with the Independence Party newspaper, Visir, Sigurdur Jon Olafsson, the movement's spokesman, cited his group's intentions:

We intend to strengthen and expand this communist organization with the revolution as a subject for study and work; then we intend to establish a communist party. The soil for this movement is excellent in this country. (3)

According to Sigurdur, the party's policies and aims will be oriented to the teachings of Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Chairman Mao. The spokesman traces his movement's heritage back to the beginnings of communism in Iceland, before the established party "converted into a half-breed social democrat party and (gave) itself the name of Socialist Party--United Party of the People" (the nominal predecessor to the present "People's Alliance," baptized as such in 1969). He announced the publication of the party organ Stettabarattan (The Class Struggle), which, he claimed, has been "well received" among Iceland's laborers since its recent inception. As to the prospects for armed revolution in Iceland (!), Sigurdur stated:

We can't say at this stage and least of all in advance. We will have to make the decision when the time comes. The intention is to accommodate the theories I have mentioned to Icelandic society.

The "leading personnel" of the new movement has also been publicized. The aforementioned Sigurdur Jon Olafsson is the only figure whose prior connections to the People's Alliance could be documented here. In May 1968, Sigurdur penned a lead editorial for the youth page of Thjodviljinn, the PA daily organ, on the topic "Iceland Out of NATO." (4) In it, he claimed, interestingly enough, that he "in no manner (intended) to justify the actions of Joseph Stalin for the advance of communism in Eastern Europe, on the contrary." Apparently, he has revised his opinion in the meantime.

The other leaders (or, one suspects, the other members) of the new communist organization of Marxist-Leninists come, like Sigurdur (an Icelandic film maker), from the arts and academe. It is worth noting that several of them study in Gothenburg, Sweden, a more likely environment for young Marxist-Leninist agitators than Reykjavik, Iceland. For the record, the individuals involved are:

Central Committee:

Gunnar Andresson (Chairman), a technical school student; Hjalmtyr Heiddal, a designer; and Einar Andresson, a junior college student.

Other members:

Kristjan Gudlaugsson, (editor of Stettabarattan), student at Gothenburg;

Rosmunda Sigurdsson, student at Gothenburg; and

Sigurdur Skulason, actor. (5)

Their ages are given as "relatively young, in their twenties."

Not unexpectedly, the Chinese have yet to mention even one word about this "striking" development. Nor does the People's Alliance appear to have begun fretting about competition among the nation's thousand or so registered communists. But with this latter-day reflection of the Sino-Soviet ideological rift in Iceland, the PA may be in for some unaccustomed irritation from the Maoist Left. If so, it would be proper to speak of the "end of an era" in Icelandic communism.

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(1) See lg, "The CP is Dead--Long Live the CP!--Icelandic Revisionism in Action," RFER, CAA Research Report, 22 January 1969, and "Iceland's Communists and Factional Struggle," 12 January 1970.

(2) On 3 June 1972, Thjodviljinn, the party organ, announced that a four-man delegation from the Communist Party of Rumania had recently visited Iceland, at the PA's invitation. Little mention was made of inter-party ties, with stress being placed instead of sovereign relation between independent nations.

(3) Visir, 9 August 1972.

(4) Thjodviljinn, 19 May 1968.

(5) Timinn (Progressive Party paper), 22 August 1972.