Fierce Culture Wars

Communism was one of the most controversial matters in Icelandic politics from the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Communists and Left Socialists were powerful, but they also had determined opponents.

Victims, Executioners – and Actors



The audience in the show trial over Bukharin and others in Moscow, March 1938. Halldor K. Laxness can be seen, sitting to the right, listening to an interpreter.

According to the Black Book of Communism, in the 20th Century, about 100 million people perished because of communism. Some of the victims had connections with Iceland, and some of the executioners too.

Photo on cover: Under the portrait of Lenin. Young communists in Siglufjordur in September 1930. Four of them later underwent revolutionary training in Moscow, Asgeir Bl. Magnusson, Thoroddur Gudmundsson, Steingrimur Adalsteinsson and Kristjan Juliusson.

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International Communism and Iceland



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Much Information from the Beginning

Even if there was much controversy in Iceland on the communist system, the Icelanders received much information about the poverty and oppression there, from the very beginning.

Comintern and the Icelanders



Young delegates at the 1920 Comintern congress in Moscow. Hendrik Ottosson and Brynjolfur Bjarnason standing farthest right.

Icelandic communists and Left Socialists had ties with Comintern, the international association of communist parties, from 1920 until it was abolished in 1943. Comintern's stated aim was world revolution.

Funds for Travel and Study



The Icelandic delegation at the 1951 World Youth Festival in East Berlin.

The communist states frequently invited guests from Iceland on guided tours and to conferences, and also students to attend universities. The guests were lavishly entertained. Even if many of them saw the oppression and poverty, most of them kept silent about this at home.

Russian Gold, Revolutionary Training and Spying



In Moscow in 1931, Einar Olgeirsson met five Icelanders who were undergoing revolutionary training. From left: Eyjolfur Arnason, Jens Figved, Einar Olgeirsson, Andres Straumland, Thoroddur Gudmundsson and Jafet Ottosson.

Icelandic communists, and later Left Socialists, received money from the communist states from 1920 and to at least 1972. About twenty Icelanders were trained as revolutionaries in Moscow. The Soviet Union also conducted espionage in Iceland, as did some other countries.

Icelandic Dissidents

The history of the Icelandic communist movement was one of high hope and bitter disappointment. Many left the movement and even fought against it.

Riots in Streets



Street riot in Akureyri 14 March 1933 (Nova battle). Communists won the battle, as the police force was tiny.

The communists split from the Social Democratic Party in 1930, because they did not want to reject political violence completely, like the Social Democrats. Here, as elsewhere, the communists instigated street riots.