

## **The narrative of anti-Communism in the historical representation of Communism: A case study of the social unrest called Gúttóslagurinn in 1932**

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The mainstream writing of the history of Communism today emulates the discourse of anti-Communism in the past. How we perceive Communism is to a large extent predetermined by the forces that fought against it. Communism is embodied as the Soviet Union, as the atrocities of Joseph Stalin and as the repressiveness of the state. But this does not constitute the lived experiences of many involved in the popular struggle of the working class elsewhere, people who either identified with Communism or who got labelled as Communists. The traditional history of Communism does not make this distinction and merely sees different movements as extensions of Soviet foreign policy. A Cold War logic is applied to a century of Communism, to where even experiences of the interwar years are set in this context. Communist movements are seen as subordinate to the will of the Soviet Union, sleeping fifth columns waiting to disturb the social peace.

This traditionalist narrative has held a dominating role in the public discourse concerning Icelandic historical understanding of Communism and its movement in Iceland. Nevertheless, many Icelandic scholars have challenged this narrative. A narrative that at times has far reaching consequences in limiting the understanding of labour conflict and social unrest up to a point where they are interpreted as machinations of the Soviet Union. Such is the case with the historical representation of a famous social unrest called Gúttóslagurinn that took place the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1932 at the height of the Great Depression. The unrest took place at a city council meeting where wage cuts in a job creation program were to be implemented, it resulted in a large scale street fight between the workers and the police, where the workers got the upper hand and the planned wage cuts were discontinued. It was later named Gúttóslagurinn, after the house where the meeting took place, the Góðtemplarar (IOGT) house. Although the level of violence and disobedience to authority was unprecedented in modern Icelandic history it was not the first nor the last instance of social unrest connected to labour conflict during the Interwar period. Its significance lies in the total defeat of the police that shocked the state and historians thereafter. Both contemporary commentators and some historians have pinned the blame on communists for the incident, seeing it as an attempt to overthrow the state. However, the workers fighting against the police that day were far from being homogenously communist, but rather represented a diverse group of the disenfranchised working class.

In this paper I will explore the historical representation of Gúttóslagurinn, how it can be connected to the problematic historiography of Communism, and its consequences both internationally and in Iceland. Anti-Communism is discussed as an ideology with its roots in the interwar period, especially Germany and USA, the discourse it created and its influence on history writing is analysed.

One of my findings is that the triumphalism of the traditional historical narrative of Communism leads to an extremely polarised understanding of history. It leads to a denial of a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the history of social unrest and of Communism. The open-ended process of producing and reproducing history is thereby closed off. We are to be content with the version of the victors, because might makes right.