

SUPPORT THE  
**REYKJAVÍK NINE**  
AGAINST STATE REPRESSION IN ICELAND



*The most absurd court case in Iceland's recent history is currently taking place in Reykjavik district court: The first public prosecution related to the 2008 economic collapse is not against any of the numerous bankers, financiers or government officials accused of corruption or criminal negligence and incompetence, self dealing, market manipulation, and other financial chicanery detailed in the 3000 plus page thick report of the Althing Special Investigation Commission, published this spring. No, the first people to face criminal charges following the collapse of the Icelandic economy are nine demonstrators – including anarchists and radical leftists – who in December 2008 entered the public House of Parliament to read a declaration, concisely summarized in haste as 'Get the fuck out! This house no longer serves its purpose!'*

*Even those who might have disagreed at the time, have since been forced to concede that this analysis was quite correct. Forty days later, in January 2009, mass protests succeeded in ousting the right-wing Social Democratic-Conservative government and forcing a new election. That was the first time in Icelandic history that public protests actually achieving something as dramatic. For their part in the dramatic events of this winter the nine protesters, who have since been termed the Reykjavik Nine, are facing a minimum sentence of one year in prison. The maximum sentence is life in prison (in practice 16 years).*

OCTOBER 2010

## WHAT HAPPENED DECEMBER 8TH 2008?

The start of the parliamentary session, December 8th 2008, did not look any different from any other day. But only couple of minutes into the session it was interrupted. A group of thirty people had entered the House of parliament through the visitor entrance – but had been stopped by the parliamentary guards and a policeman who was on duty in the building. The people were thus denied their constitutional right to observe the legislative process from the visitor benches above the chamber. The policeman threatened the people with pepper spray, the guards grabbed the people physically denying them access to the stairs up to the benches. However, two from the group did make their way to the benches where they managed to shout the harmless, but true, statement over the utterly incompetent assembly, 'Get the fuck out! This house no longer serves its purpose!' To make a short story even shorter, the 30 people were held hostage in the stairway until police had arrested those they wanted. In the process there were some minor scuffles between police and protesters. Outside the building – where a jungle of media, people and cameras had gathered – a few more, who had already made their way out of the building, were arrested. All in all the parliamentary session was delayed by less than two hours. A year later a court case was filed against nine of the 30 protesters.

## POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Iceland's financial system was probably one of the most heavily leveraged parts of the global financial casino which came crashing down in the fall of 2008. In October 2008 the three major banks of Iceland went bankrupt. The financial system, which had mostly been state owned, had been privatized around the turn of the century, and like other state owned firms privatized by the neo-liberal government, were handed over to speculators who had the correct political connections. After privatization the banks embarked on an expansion strategy, making use of the global debt bubble and flow of cheap funds in international markets the banks inflated their balance sheets, ultimately dwarfing that of the entire economy of Iceland.

In the fall of 2008 this leveraged house of cards came tumbling down. But of course, as the privately owned banks went bankrupt, they and their private debts were taken over by the state, which then quickly privatized them again. The state, however, promised to pay off many of their debts - most importantly the deposits on the high risk, high interest Icesave accounts.

While the parliament was busy worrying about the interests of foreign depositors ordinary Icelanders were already feeling the financial consequences of the collapse. The public was frightened, angered and disgusted with the complete cluelessness of the political elite. What can only be described as a revolutionary atmosphere was developing. However, this anger was not anger only caused by the economic collapse. This was clearly on display at the numerous mass protest meetings that took place during the fall. At these meetings the political, economical and social development of Icelandic society over the last 20 years, was analyzed and criticized – and those responsible identified. The government that was in power during the collapse had not only privatized the banks and then nationalized their debts when they failed, but was responsible for some of the most shameful political decisions in Icelandic history.

To name a few examples: Despite mass protests in Iceland and widespread opposition the government supported the US invasion in Iraq and entered Iceland into Bush's "coalition of the willing". The same government was responsible for inviting the aluminum industry – one of the world's most polluting, destructive and violent industries – to turn Iceland into a heavy industry paradise. Iceland is falsely known for its so-called "green energy", which is nothing more than a PR stunt by the aluminum companies. In fact, in order to produce huge amounts of hydro electric energy for the aluminum industry Iceland has destroyed irreplaceable untouched wilderness. All in order to produce electric energy so cheap that Iceland can compete with third world totalitarian regimes that do the bidding of multinational corporations.

One can honestly say that the uprising of 2008-2009 was a payoff for the last 20 years in Icelandic history – an era of an almighty capitalization of society, active silencing of any opposition and the creation of an utterly individualized mass consumer society. In interviews and other coverage of the court case, the Reykjavik Nine have shown that their participation in that winter's uprising was rooted in their opposition towards the whole system – not only the economic collapse and "the crisis".

## 1-16 YEARS IN PRISON

There are minor and major charges in the case against the nine. Some of the minor charges have been proven patently false, such as a supposed attack causing one guard's back injuries: a recording from security cameras in the Parliamentary building, broadcasted on the evening news of the National

Broadcasting Company, showed that the injury was actually caused by the guard's colleague who was clumsily shoving people around. Other minor charges will no doubt prove as insubstantial – the video recordings show no violent intent – not a single raised fist. The major charges are a different matter. The Reykjavik nine are charged with violation of section 100 of the penal code which stipulates that anyone found guilty of "attacking the sovereignty of Parliament" shall be sentenced to a minimum of year in prison. Admittedly, the only weapon involved was a single piece of paper, the printed declaration. And sure, the aforementioned video shows how the defendants who first entered the building calmly hang up their overcoats before proceeding to the stairs to the benches. In short, there is no evidence of violent intent, nor any intentional harm to have been done to people or property. No matter, the state has decided to interpret the event as an 'attack' dangerous enough to warrant up to sixteen years in prison.

Just to put things in perspective: Recently parliament voted to press charges against Geir H. Haarde, Iceland's prime minister before and during the collapse, for incompetence and negligence in public office in the lead up to the collapse, the only public official to be charged with breach of public trust and failure in public office based on the Special Investigative Commission report. Haarde will be tried by a special 15 person high court, specifically designed to deal with this particular type of crime and which has never before been convened. If found guilty, the maximum sentence Haarde faces is two years jail.

## HISTORICAL REFERENCE

The trial against the Reykjavik nine is historical.

Section 100 of the penal code has been used only once before, half a century ago, when several people were sentenced to prison and stripped of their citizen rights, including the right to vote, for participating in mass protests on March 30th 1949 against Iceland entering NATO. Opponents of the treaty had gathered in front of the House of parliament – on the same square as the recent mass protests have mostly taken place – pelting the building with stones and other objects, fiercely showing their wholehearted opposition towards Iceland participating in a military coalition. The government had called on young conservatives and right wing goons to come and "protect" the House of parliament. The police proceeded to disperse the protesters with teargas, while this right wing mob, which had been armed with batons and equipped with gas masks, assisted by beating up anyone they could.

The 1949 demonstration, only five years after Iceland gained full independence, was directed against US military occupation. The 2008 demonstration followed not only the republic's moral and economic bankruptcy, but also took place two years after the last US troops left their bases in Iceland. Public protest on this scale did not take place during the sixty years in between and tear gas was used in January 2009 – for the first time since 1949. Making these two cases even more connected, one of the Reykjavik Nine is the daughter of one of the sentenced anti-NATO protesters.

There are other historical parallels to the Reykjavik Nine case. In 1976, a group of angry University students entered the House of parliament, through the same "back-door" entrance as the Reykjavik Nine, stormed the public benches, creating a human shield around one student who read a sternly worded

## THE ACCUSATIONS

**100. article, 1. paragraph.** Anyone who attacks the parliament, so that it or its autonomy is in danger, calls for an attack, or obeys such an order, shall be subject to imprisonment for no less than 1 year, and the penalty may be prison for life if the charges are very serious.

**106. Article, 1. paragraph.** Anyone who attacks a civil servant with violence or threats of violence, when he is on duty or because of his work, and everyone who similarly seeks to prevent the carrying out of such work or to compel an employee to perform any act in office or at work, shall be imprisoned for up to 6 years.

**107. Article.** If an act of the 106th Article has been performed by an assembly, the promoters and leaders of the riot shall be punished with more severe penalty, and up to 8 years imprisonment may be applied.

**122. Article, 1. and 2. paragraph.** Anyone who prevents the occurrence of a lawful meeting, shall be subject to fines or imprisonment for up to 1 year, or imprisonment for up to 2 years, if the offense is major, particularly if violence or threats in conduct have been carried out. Anyone who disrupts the order of a statutory legal gathering of public affairs by noise or rowdiness will be subject to fines or imprisonment for up to 3 months.

**231. Article.** If a person storms without permission into a house or to a ship of another person or another place unauthorized to him, or refuses to go from there, when challenged to do so, should be subject to fines or prison for up to 6 months. Up to 1 year imprisonment may be applied if the offense is major, such as if he who committed the offense, was armed and violent or threats of violence or violation is committed by a group of people.

speech to the assembled MPs. The students, who were protesting changes in legislation concerning student loans that were being discussed by the parliament at that time. According to newspaper accounts the students refused to obey either the guards of parliament or the police, resulting in minor scuffles. The student who read out the speech later became the head of the Social Democratic Alliance that is now in power. He was actually the minister of industry in December 2008, and currently he is the minister for foreign affairs. Charges were never pressed against him or any of his colleagues from Iceland's University Association of Students, including Lára V. Júlíusdóttir, who happens to be the state prosecutor in the case against the Reykjavík Nine.

Then in January 1993, seven members of a youth association of a different left-wing political party protesting Icelandic entry into the European Economic Area stormed the public benches dressed up as soldiers and carrying toy guns dropping a banner down from the benches. Again, according to newspaper accounts there were minor scuffles between protesters and the police and parliament guards. But, even if several people were arrested no charges were pressed.

Despite these examples, the biggest media outlets in Iceland as well as parliament officials have all repeatedly claimed that the action of the Reykjavík Nine has no historical parallels, thereby justifying the harsh reaction and arguing for the alleged importance of the court case.



December 8th 2008: One of the nine defendants arrested and carried out of the parliament.

## COMPLETE POLICE CONTROL IN COURT

What makes the case truly unique in the history of Icelandic courts and law is the way in which it has been prosecuted. From the first hearing, which took place in January 2010, the case has been conducted in the presence of a large number of police officers. At the request of the judge in the case a large number of policemen have been ever present at the hearings – both in front of the courthouse and inside, lining the corridors, ready for action. After three or four hearings, when the public support of the Reykjavík Nine had become obvious, manifesting itself in a constantly growing number of people showing up in court, the judge in effect handed all authority over to the police, which responded to the public show of support for the accused by increasing their own numbers and threatening presence. To begin with, they tried to control people's entrance into the court room, allowing only 30 people to enter, including the defendants. This created even more anger towards the case as a whole, and prompted acts of civil disobedience inside the court house, which the police predictably responded to by arresting people. During one of the hearings the police even prevented two of the defendants from entering the court room – a serious violation of the fundamental rights of a defendant, and on several other occasions the police has attempted to bar the defendants entry.

Though it might sound absurd to be surprised by a large police presence in a court house, this really is a first in Iceland. One of defence lawyers of the

Reykjavík Nine's, Ragnar Aðalsteinsson, a dedicated human rights lawyer for more than half a century, detested by the right wing powers – has said that he has never during his career witnessed a similar police presence during a criminal case, let alone the police having such a visible authority in the courthouse. Until now the police has not been present in any force during trials, except in cases where the defendant is already in custody, and then usually in cases where the defendant was accused of dangerous violent crimes. Aðalsteinsson argued that looking at the process of the court case so far, including the police presence and control, it is obvious that the defendants can not expect a fair and just hearing. Even if the judge has yet to rule in the case Aðalsteinsson has already begun preparation for an appeal to courts outside Iceland.

## POLITICAL ROOTS

The pure political roots of the case have been exposed by the Reykjavík Nine, their supporters and others involved. For instance, Aðalsteinsson has asked for the dismissal of the case based on conflicts of interest and the connections between the prosecutor and parliament – the prosecutor is a former substitute Member of Parliament for a left-wing party that later merged with others to form the Social Democratic Alliance. And today she serves on the board of governors of the Central Bank – as a representative of Parliament. She is also a substitute member on the special high court in the case against ex-prime minister Haarde. She will most likely not take a seat on the court, due to her conflicts of interest.

Aðalsteinsson has also pointed that the judge can not be considered impartial – by handing all authority in the case to the police, by not attempting to keep the police in line, by not reacting to incidents where the police stopped defendants from entering the courtroom and by not taking any measure to keeping it from happening again the judge has shown that he considers the defendants dangerous and violent criminals who do not deserve a fair hearing in an open court of law. Aðalsteinsson has made repeated formal complaints which the judge has refused to hear – he has also appealed these to the supreme court,



March 30th 1949: Police beat up NATO opponents.

which has similarly dismissed them. A particularly flagrant example of the courts prejudice against the defendants could be seen when dates for the main proceedings were being decided. The judge proposed that the case be heard at the end of November and beginning of December, exactly the same time as one of the defendants is supposed to give birth. The judge dismissed out of hand her complaints and rejected the request of her lawyer that the case be pushed forward, arguing that arrangements could be made for her to give a statement. Presumably at the hospital while she was giving birth!

Due to public outcry the judge had to reverse this outrageous decision and at the moment, nobody knows when the actual court procedure will take place, though it is rumored that the case might not be heard until January or February. The prosecutor will call at least 20 people, mostly police and parliament guards, as witnesses, and one of the defence lawyers has proposed that all 63 MPs who were in the building when the alleged "attack" took place be called to testify whether they felt they were under attack or felt threatened. Obviously the trial will take a long time and the proceedings are guaranteed to be of great interest to a lot of people. If the judge and police maintain the ridiculous policy of allowing only 30 people in the courtroom further clashes between police and the public are unavoidable. Suggestions on how to solve this problem range from moving the trial to another building to broadcasting it live on the internet. Similar discussion has taken place around the case of Prime Minister Haarde, as well as possible trials of bankers who are likely to be charged with crimes relating to the financial collapse.

## HEED THE TALKING POINTS!

On May 17, Jón Ólafsson, philosopher and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Bifröst University, was on the morning programme of the state owned Radio One to discuss the various ethical angles of the court case. As he is wont to, Jón was very circumscribed and cautious in his analysis. He sided neither with the protesters nor the state, but pointed out that it was strange that out of all those who ‘attacked’ Alþingi during the winter of 2008-9, only the nine had been singled out and charged with violating the 100th paragraph. Shortly after the programme, Jón received a phone call from Ásta Ragnheiður (speaker of parliament), who informed him that while she hadn’t actually heard him on the radio, she had been contacted by “numerous people,” who had been very unhappy about how he had talked about the case – and that these people had told her that Jón had gotten critical aspects of the case wrong. She could not identify what exactly he had gotten wrong, but offered to e-mail him a document just to make sure that he wouldn’t get anything wrong in the future. He later received an e-mail from her official Alþingi account. The Grapevine has acquired a copy of her letter, which reads like simple talking points. These talking points summarize the statements Ásta Ragnheiður had previously made in parliament, complete with the reference to the protesters having entered through the “back door” (again, where every non-official visitor to Alþingi enters the building). The talking points contained nothing new, and corrected nothing Jón had said. This correspondence should give us pause. Ásta Ragnheiður admitted she had not heard what Jón said, and could therefore not evaluate his arguments, but nevertheless believed she needed to make sure that he was on the same page as The State, sending him governmental talking points on the case. Just to make sure.

*From an article by Magnús Sveinn Helgason, Attacks On Alþingi Are Of No Concern To Alþingi, originally published in The Reykjavik Grapevine and can be found on [www.rvk9.org/in-english](http://www.rvk9.org/in-english).*

## CORRUPTION AS USUAL

The case against the Reykjavik Nine has served to raise opposition and awareness of the central problems with the of the so-called democratic society, its hierarchy, hypocrisy and reliance on brute force. This can be seen in the fact that last spring more than 700 people signed a letter to parliament, declaring that they too had “attacked” parliament during the protests in the winter of 2008-9, demanding that the case against the Reykjavik Nine either be dismissed or that all of them be charged with the same crimes as the Reykjavik Nine.

The petition was ignored both by Parliament and the main stream media, both of which have until now been happy to condemn and assume the guilt of the Reykjavik Nine. Even if the list of 700 signatories includes numerous celebrities and well known Icelanders, including musicians and actors as well as artists, authors and poets. The Speaker of Parliament repeatedly refused to accept the signatures, claiming that the case, and therefore any petitions relating to the case, had nothing to do with her – even if the request that charges be pressed had originally come from the office of the Speaker. In the end, however, she had to back down and accept the signatures. She did not back down off her view that the Reykjavik Nine were guilty, going so far as to phoning up a respected university professor of philosophy who had voiced his opinion about the court case in a radio interview in order to complain that he had somehow been too critical of the prosecution in the

case, accusing him of “getting things wrong”. When the media asked about this interference of hers, she declined to comment. Which has been the tactic of all spokespeople of parliament and the prosecution, when they have been asked critical questions.

However, several MPs have taken up the case during parliament sessions. A member of the ruling Social Democratic Alliance even demanded that parliament request that the case be dropped. Members of two other parties, the small Citizens Party and the Left Greens, who form the government with the Social Democrats, have also discussed the case publicly and in parliament, but without making any concrete demands for action. While this has helped keep the case in the public discourse it has not done anything to focus it or move it to the next level. Of course the right-wing parties as a whole and the majority within the other parties are deeply rooted in Iceland’s long lasting culture of good-old-boys corruption and nepotism and will never take decisions that favor people over power.

## INCREASED SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

In addition to the 700 signatures, several acts of solidarity and support have taken place since the case was originally filed. In May, a number of very well known and even quite mainstream musicians played at a big outdoor concert on the square in front of the parliament. Thousands of people showed up on this sunny spring day and listened to the musicians perform between speeches on the case by some of the

Reykjavik Nine, authors and others. Then in July, the Living Art Museum of Reykjavik hosted a solidarity event where more progressive and aggressive set of major artists – musicians, filmmakers, poets and visual artists – dedicated their art to the opposition towards the case. This resulted in an exhibition that stood for weeks in the museum and could be, according to some of Iceland’s most progressive artists, somewhat of a comeback of radical political attitude into the country’s art environment.

Solidarity has also been shown beyond Iceland’s borders, for example in a big demonstration in Barcelona in July. People gathered by Iceland’s consulate, met with an army of the Spanish “Mossos” riot-police, and were refused entry to the building that hosts the consulate. In October, Iceland’s consulate in Bern, Switzerland, was attacked. The

locks of the doors were glued back and “Free the Reykjavik 9” was spray-painted on the main door. These kinds of actions are very important, since any attack on Iceland, and any criticism of Iceland, outside of the borders of the country is taken very seriously by the national media and authorities. Similar attacks have happened in Denmark, UK, USA and Italy for the last years, directed against Iceland’s heavy-industrialization drive.

## WHAT NEXT?

Even though the principal proceedings will most likely be moved to the beginning of 2011 due to the pregnancy of one of the defendants, they are still officially set to begin at the end of November. Until then it is extremely important that the case not be forgotten and that it continues to gain international attention. The lives of nine people are at stake!

## CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION:

The country is currently led by a coalition government of the Left-Green and Social Democrat parties. Under strict International Monetary Fund (IMF) surveillance of ‘fiscal consolidation’ and severe cuts in health, education and welfare, for the first time for as long as anyone can recall thousands of people are already dependent on charity food donations. This has, for many, become the criteria of whether the government has the will and is powerful enough to combat the right wing regime which remains within the country’s bureaucracy and whose unofficial policies seem coherent with the international institutions involved in ‘solving’ the economic crisis.

The government is facing increased opposition from within and outside its boundaries, especially because of its lack of will to help the homes of the country. This anger could be seen in several big protests in the beginning of October where politicians and the House of parliament were attacked with all sorts of objects. Those particular protests had quite a scary right wing rhetoric resonance though, especially when it comes to nationalism. On top of that several neo-nazis have been showing up on protests, waving their flags. Fortunately they have been attacked and their flags burned by anarchists.

Concerning heavy industry, there is an ever increasing propaganda from the right wing and the industrial sector, for more aluminium smelters, one in the North and another in the South-West. Both projects have been on the table for many years – construction of the latter one started already some years ago – but have been stuck in limbo due to financial and bureaucratic reasons. At the same time, the utility rights of almost all geothermal energy in the South-West are being privatized and sold to a Canadian firm, Magma Energy, a company rooted in metal mining in South America. Opposition to these projects is however strong within most spectrums of society.



# “WE, WHO ALSO ATTACKED...”

## *A solidarity statement signed by more than 700 people in spring 2010*

To the Icelandic State:

Iceland is so far the only State in the West where the response of the people in the streets to the economic crisis has had direct consequences in the field of public politics: On 20 January 2009 performance, we initiated, together with thousands of others, an attack on the parliament (The Althing at Austurvöllur Square). This was an unarmed attack and not made in order to cause harm to any humans – the clear and noisy deprecation towards the acting parliament, however, involved a large number of deliberate violations of laws and regulations. Thousands disobeyed the requests of the police, after the yellow ribbon that was stretched around the house was broken.

Many disobeyed repeatedly and many got into some minor fights with police officers who emptied their weapons stores in order to suppress the potentially revolutionary situation. Some of us were arrested. The aim of the attack was to achieve changes in Icelandic society, which is in deep trouble, not just because of the capital crisis that began in October 2008, but also because of what could be called earlier attacks on the parliament, attacks that were committed against the public interest for private interests of the few.

On 1 February 2009 the parliamentary majority collapsed and the government was overthrown. Our attacks played a key role in making this happen.

The State and its instruments, particularly the judicial system and the police, know that they are helpless against such a mass movement. Holders of State power know quite well that its insecure existence is built only on temporary and amendable agreement with the people from time to time.

The State, however, can not mask its fury against the people who thus forced the government to step down. The judicial system now tries to apply the well known strategy called divide and rule: On 2 March a charge was issued against a group of nine persons who are alleged to have, on 8th of December 2008, violated the first paragraph of article 100 of the Criminal Code which reads: “Anyone, who attacks the parliament, so that its autonomy is endangered, sends out messages with that same purpose, or obeys such a message, shall be subject to imprisonment for not less than 1 year, and the penalty can be imprisonment for life, if the guilt is very severe.”

The State Prosecutor tries to disguise the actual charges and facilitates the media to distract the debate, among other things by spicing the charge with other, unrelated, allegations – bitten ear and strained thumb. By applying article 100 of the Penal Code, for the first time since the public protested against Icelandic membership in NATO in 1949, the Prosecutor does not seek compensation for strained thumbs. The Prosecutor’s real intention is to send this message: The people’s intervention in State affairs is criminal activity.

By directing charges to nine relatively unknown individuals, the Prosecutor chooses an opponent that he considers himself able to deal with, and hopes at the same time to get the thousands of people from all sectors of society, who were involved in similar actions of protest, to participate in a silent accessory. This is how political persecution takes place.

We want the State to be aware that we, who participated in the opposition against the government in the winter of 2008-2009, among other things by violating the law, regard the government’s attack on the group of nine as an attack on ourselves and the thousands who protested that winter. The nine persons are our partners and allies in the struggle against the rightly labeled Masters of the police: Violent government and the oppressive capital to which the State provides its services. Our solidarity will not be broken by selecting nine from the group, or four, or one.

We insist that the State should waive the charges against the group of nine. If the Prosecutor thinks he lacks a reason to change policy in this case, it may, for example, be taken into consideration that at the time of the attack a serious threat the autonomy of the Parliament was not possible, due to the fact how holders of wealth and power had already undermined this very autonomy by successful attacks from within. The Prosecutor could also look to a long standing tradition of not pressing charges for individual incidents in trade conflicts.

Otherwise, we expect the Prosecutor to show the consistency to release charges against anyone who attacked the parliament during the winter 2008-2009, including us who sign this Statement.

## SOME OF THE PROTESTS AND ACTIONS FROM 2008 TO 2010

**26th October 2008.** Flags of the Icelandic banks were burned in a big demonstration.

**8th November.** During a protest an anarchist climbed on top of the parliament where he hung the flag of Bónus, Iceland’s cheapest supermarket (see photo on front page). The message was clear since the flag has a pink pig on it: “The government is a cheap pig!” Hundreds of people helped the anarchist to escape, but 6 days later he was arrested illegally.

**15th November.** 500 people attacked a police station in Reykjavik to protest the imprisonment of the flag-man. They broke up the main door and entered but after breaking down the next one as well they got heavily pepper sprayed by the police. The riot ended when the flag-man was payed out of the prison by an unknown person that same night.

**1st December.** The anniversary of Iceland’s sovereignty. After that day’s demonstrations were over a big group of people marched to the central bank and got into the lobby but behind a bullet proof glass door the Special Forces were waiting fully armed. The demonstrators demanded that the chairman of the Central Bank board, a former prime minister, would resign. After a while the demonstrators got the information that he had left the building and that the Special Forces were preparing to attack the people. Everyone left, but this illustrated what protesters had coming.

**8th December.** Around 30 people went into the Parliament. Only two of them got to the public balconies and announced to the MP’s that they should get the fuck out. The rest of the group was trapped in the staircase. In the end some of them got arrested and one and a half year later got heavily charged.

**9th and 16th December.** A big group of people tried to stop the government’s meetings from taking place.

**31th December.** A live annual TV show, where the ministers of the government and the heads of the political parties come together to drink themselves tipsy and talk about the political year that is about to end, was about to take place when demonstrators cut the cables and stopped the broadcast. “We have listened to them for too long, we do not need to hear any more shit” was the only message that got through that year, this time from the mouths of a masked mob.

**20th and 21st January 2009.** Thousands of people attacked the parliament to throw the government out of the house. Windows were broken, food, paint and stones thrown at the house and at the police, drums banged and fire ignited. After two days of riots the police force was about to collapse but then the government collapsed and a left-wing minority government was formed.

**8th April.** A house was squatted in the center of Reykjavik and turned into a anarchist social center, the first of that kind in the history of Iceland. The squat gained a lot of support as well as media attention, resulting in an eviction a week later, where the squatters fought heavily against the special riot-police force for several hours.

**20th April.** Election offices of three major political parties that are all responsible for the plan to heavy-industrialize Iceland’s wilderness were attacked. Big quantities of green colored skyr (a traditional dairy product often used in protests) was thrown in the offices, destroying a whole day of PR work and sending a clear message about further industrialization, couple of days before elections. An action of the same kind also happened March 4th, where the targets were green-washing PR agents from different energy companies, presenting their lies in the University of Iceland.

**25th April.** Elections took place. The Left Green party and the Social Democrats formed a new government. This was the first time for almost two decades that a right wing party is not in charge.

**6th March 2010.** At least thousand people protested the so-called IceSave debts in Holland and UK, originally owed by one of Iceland’s big banks but nationalized like other private debts during the collapse. The protest was the climax of a series of similar smaller protests during the winter – all very nationalistic.

**1st and 4th October.** Thousands of people demonstrated in front of the parliament. Eggs and stones were thrown at the church where the starting ceremony of the parliament took place. On the way from the church to the parliament the MP’s, the president and his wife and the bishop got eggs thrown at them. Both of those days fire was lit on the square in front of the parliament and barrels banged all night long. The biggest difference from these demonstrations and the ones in 2009 is that now there was a more desperate atmosphere. Many people who had hoped that the left government would save people from a serious crisis had now realized that it is no solution to demand elections, there is something else that needs to be done. At the same time nationalism is rising and the right wing parties seem to be getting stronger again.

# A SPADE IS A SPADE, REPRESSION IS REPRESSION!

## *A Solidarity Statement from Saving Iceland – July 2010*

Environmental network Saving Iceland declares full solidarity with the Reykjavik Nine defendants (RVK9), who face between one and sixteen years in prison for exercising their democratic right to peacefully protest against a disgraced parliament, on 8 December 2008.

These nine people have been picked out of the thousands whose protests brought down the previous government, whose corruption and ineptitude was responsible for the historical crisis Icelandic society is still being torn up by. This same government has now been confirmed by the Special Investigation Committee report (SIC – an apt acronym) as instrumental in the abuse that led to the complete crash of the Icelandic economy; and as a major force in the severe corruption, democracy deficit and ethical crisis which have since emerged as the underlying reasons for the total failure of Icelandic democracy.

Criminalizing political opponents, even those who use non-violent civil disobedience, is an old diversion tactic used by states worldwide. This act of political repression is in glaring contradiction to the sanctimonious declarations of 'shouldering responsibility' and 'taking heed of lessons' paid by the parties responsible for the crisis. Icelanders should take seriously the systematic abuse of power which has been uncovered in the Icelandic establishment.

So far not one individual from the political or financial community, many of whom have been identified from all sides as the culprits of the crisis, has been tried in Icelandic courts. That the young people of the RVK9 are to be the first individuals to be tried as a result of the crisis speaks clearly for the climate of denial that now pervades the atmosphere in Icelandic society, and for the scandalous reluctance of the Icelandic state and its political class to take responsibility or draw lessons from the crisis.

The case against the RVK9 is a blatant diversion tactic executed by an utterly irresponsible power community in complete denial of the disgraceful scenario that Icelandic democracy has found itself in. We are witnessing a discredited establishment attempting to scapegoat people for protesting against a parliament that has been universally condemned as corrupt, inept and disqualified. Saving Iceland questions whether the Icelandic State will reclaim any respect for its institutions, particularly by destroying the lives of these nine individuals and their families?

The severe irregularities in Icelandic society are no news to the Saving Iceland network. When Icelandic society was in the grip of the greed frenzy that led to the collapse, we were among the very few who stepped forward to expose and challenge these developments. As a result we experienced both vilification by the Icelandic corporate media and political persecution by the Icelandic courts and police.

The present 'left wing' government is not only continuing the culture of political repression, but is actually significantly increasing it. Now the state intends to take revenge with hefty prison sentences. This is in retaliation for what really only amounts to a benign act of non-violent civil disobedience. The underlying justification of this repression is that of a deterrent against further civil disobedience.

Saving Iceland would like to call the urgent attention of international human rights and civil liberties NGOs to the attack on the legislated rights of protestors in Iceland. These rights are both constitutionally and internationally legislated.

Even though the offices of parliament were recently discovered responsible for pursuing and pressing charges against the RVK9, the president of the parliament has claimed that the RVK9 case is out of the hands of the executive power and now in the 'safe' hands of the legislative power. What irony! Every Icelander knows that in Iceland there is still no clear division between the executive and legislative power. This is in keeping with the frequent accusations that Iceland is but a 'banana republic'. It is still the case that the Icelandic courts (municipal and high) have been rigged systematically by cronies of the Conservative party. The legislative system in Iceland is just as discredited as the political establishment and financial sectors.

One must deduce that the chaos that has so far followed each RVK9 hearing, including even a riot scenario, has been allowed to escalate to such an extent as part of a deliberate and cynical attempt by the establishment to provide a politically destabilizing and unfavorable presentation of the defendants. The extensive errors of judgement displayed by the judge have simply increased tensions and further contributed to the farcical nature of the proceedings.

This is evident in the way that the still neoliberal media has persistently presented the case. The



*In front of the Reykjavik District Court: Support the Reykjavik Nine, they are nine of us!*

Icelandic media has repeatedly called for heavy sentences of the defendants and consistently declared their guilt as self evident. This has gone so far that one lawyer, Ragnar Adalsteinsson, has declared that the RVK9 have no chance of receiving a fair trial.

When the national broadcasting agency finally gained access to and televised CCTV footage of the defendants entering parliament, it became clear that the charges of violence and bodily harm to parliament staff were entirely unfounded.

One of the main arguments that the Icelandic media has pursued against the defendants was that they had introduced a culture of violence into Icelandic protests and therefore had to be dealt with in a severe manner. In spite of the case's high prominence, the presentation on national TV of irrefutable evidence which exposes the charges of violence as base lies, was met with stony silence by the rest of the Icelandic media. This is a glaring example of the reluctance of Iceland's media (itself severely reprimanded by the SIC as willing servants of those responsible for the crisis) to learn its lessons and shoulder responsibility for years of negating the democratic ethos of journalism.

We would also call to attention the vindictive motivation of the charges against the RVK9. It is reinforced by the fact that the supposedly centre-left Peoples Alliance party, which leads the present government, shared power with the Conservative party in the government which was overthrown by the protest movement. Within the present 'left wing' government, the vindictiveness of the previous two parties is catered for by the persistence of charges against the RVK9.

Clearly the Left-Green party, which attained power as a consequence of the protest movement and now shares leadership with PA, will not seriously pressurize their coalition partner to withdraw the charges. It looks as if the protestors are being sacrificed in order to pacify those squirming in the

international spotlight for their responsibility in generating the crisis. This amounts to a total betrayal of the call for greater democracy and ethical politics whose demand swept the Left-Greens to power in 2009.

As stated, Saving Iceland are in complete solidarity with the RVK9, and also their families. Individuals in the Saving Iceland network are no strangers to the feelings of criminalization and being dragged through the courts, on trumped up charges, for acts of non-violent civil disobedience. We have learned that it is one of the underlying aims of the state to use such court cases to disrupt our lives and those of our loved ones by maintaining an extended shadow on our future. This is a deliberate and systematically employed tactic aimed at choking our voices and spirits. It is crucial that society identifies this state tactic of persecuting political opponents through criminalization as the cynical political repression that it truly is.

The act of the RVK9 against the parliament of Iceland on 8 December 2008 focused the public protests against the corrupt government and significantly contributed to its downfall. This fact alone should persuade the Icelandic people that they ought to be grateful for the courage displayed by the RVK9; that they should oppose the RVK9 being dragged through lengthy court cases and possible prison sentences. Thus we call on the people in Iceland to actively support the defendants and to stop the disgraceful violation of justice that this case constitutes.

Saving Iceland is also compelled to call for urgent scrutiny and intervention into Icelandic affairs by the international community and NGOs concerned with civil liberties and human rights.

Finally, Saving Iceland demands the immediate withdrawal of the charges against the RVK9 and, further, that the Icelandic parliament and State should issue an official apology to the defendants and their families for this act of sheer political repression.

### ***Reykjavík Nine – [www.rvk9.org/in-english](http://www.rvk9.org/in-english)***

An official solidarity and support website for the Reykjavík Nine, posting news, articles, videos and other material connected to the case. Since there is no real Iceland Indymedia this website plays a very important role in the struggle against current state repression in Iceland. New information is posted regularly, articles from outside collected and kept there, and mainstream media coverage analyzed and criticized.

### ***Saving Iceland – [www.savingiceland.org](http://www.savingiceland.org)***

Saving Iceland is a direct action campaign fighting the heavy industrialization of Iceland's wilderness, and an international network fighting industrialization around the globe. It started in 2005 with a direct action camp in the eastern highlands of Iceland, where a mega-dam was being built for Alcoa's new aluminium smelter in the east, followed by similar camps in various places around the country for the next five years. The website is one of the world's most detailed database on the aluminium industry, hydro-dams, geothermal energy and the green-washing industry, but has also served a role as a kind of Icelandic Indymedia, posting news about current activism and other political affairs, including the case against the Reykjavík Nine.

### ***Aftaka – [www.aftaka.org/tag/english](http://www.aftaka.org/tag/english)***

Aftaka (execution) was an anarchist attack on the fundamental values of Iceland's society. Bringing a completely new and unequivocal rhetoric into the so-called Icelandic discussion, Aftaka played a major role in exposing the fake state of peace, proving that the emperor's clothes were none. It can, without a doubt, also be said that Aftaka-ists brought a lot of heavyweight disobedience into the 2008-2009 revolt, which toppled a government that had ruled the society and silenced all opposition for 20 years. The English section of the site had quite a different goal: Bringing the world an independent anarchist voice from the revolt.

### ***Icelandic Embassies Around the World***

For solidarity actions of any kind, a list of Iceland's Embassies and Consulates around the world can be found on the website of Iceland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs: [www.mfa.is/diplomatic-missions/icelandic-missions](http://www.mfa.is/diplomatic-missions/icelandic-missions)

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*Reykjavík 2008-2009: Thousands of people took to the streets to protest and in the end, toppled a government. Nine of them are now facing serious charges that could result in a prison sentence between 1 and 16 years.*