

ICELAND

Dates of Elections: 2 and 3 December 1979

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament following the premature dissolution of this body in November 1979. General elections had previously been held in June 1978.

Characteristics of Parliament

The Parliament of Iceland, the *Althing*, is divided into two Houses: the *Eefri deild*, or Upper House, and the *Nedri deild*, or Lower House. When, as often happens, both Houses work together. Parliament is known as the United *Althing*.

The Upper House consists of one-third of the members whom the *Althing* chooses from amongst the newly-elected representatives, the remaining two-thirds forming the Lower House. Each House and the United *Althing* elects its own Speaker.

The *Althing* comprises 60 members, all elected for a 4-year term.

Electoral System

All Icelandic subjects who are at least 20 years of age and have been domiciled in the country for no less than five years prior to the elections have the right to vote. Electors must furthermore be of unblemished character and financially responsible.

Electoral registers are drawn up by municipal councils at the latest two months before the election date. Voting is not compulsory.

Every citizen qualified to vote is eligible for the *Althing*, with the exception of judges who do not hold administrative office. Civil servants do not require governmental permission to stand for election. However, once elected, they must ensure that, throughout their term of office, their duties are carried out in a satisfactory manner and at no additional cost to the Treasury.

Of the 60 popularly elected members of the *Althing*, 25 are elected according to the d'Hondt method of proportional representation in five constituencies of five members each; 12 are elected in two constituencies of six members each; 12 are elected in the city of Reykjavik; and 11 supplementary members—deemed nationally elected—are chosen for equalization between those parties which have obtained at least one constituency seat, so that each of them is represented in Parliament as nearly as possible in proportion to the number of votes obtained in the general election.

Candidates for Parliament appear on party or non-party lists in all constituencies. Each list generally contains twice the number of members to be elected in the constituency.

Deputy members elected at the same time as fully-fledged members fill parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections, in the order of their appearance on the list concerned.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

As reported in the XIIIth *Chronicle*, formation of a Government following the June 1978 general elections involved lengthy negotiations, with three parties—the Social Democrats, People's Alliance (Communists) and Progressives—ultimately agreeing to rule jointly. This Government broke down in October 1979, when the Social Democrats withdrew from the centre-left coalition in protest against what they regarded as the Government's failure to strengthen the economy, in particular to curb the country's high inflation rate. In view of the December elections, a caretaker administration was then formed by Mr. B. Grondal, the Social Democratic leader.

Election campaign debates once again focused primarily on the question of inflation; the conservative Independence Party, which held the most seats in the outgoing Parliament, promised tough measures to deal with the problem.

On polling day, the Independence and centre Progressive parties recorded gains. As in 1978, the elections were followed by protracted inter-party negotiations. Finally, in early February 1980, a coalition of the two above-mentioned gainers and the People's Alliance was decided upon. The new Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Gunnar Thoroddsen (Independence Party), took office on 8 February.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the Althing*

Number of registered electors.143,200 (approx.)
Voters.127,729 (89.2%)

Political Group	u. Votes r obtained	o/	Number of Seats
Independence Party.	43,841	35.4	21 (+1)
Progressive Party.	30,871	24.9	17 (+ 5)
People's Alliance.	24,390	19.7	H (- 3)
Social Democratic Party.	21,578	17.4	10 (-4)
Others.	2,341	2.6	1(+1)