



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

Office of the Ambassador

March 22, 1984

Dr. Thorsteinn Saemundsson
Bolstadarhlid 14
105 Reykjavik

Dear Thorsteinn:

Noting the 10th anniversary of the Defend Iceland petition in which you played so important a part, I wish to convey to you my own personal congratulations as we remember this significant day in the history of Iceland.

The longer I am in this country, the more I am convinced that the security interests of both the United States and Iceland are inextricably entwined and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Continued understanding and cooperation between Americans and Icelanders is essential. Your contributions over the years to this cause are well-known and greatly appreciated by all who value Icelandic-American friendship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Marshall Brement".

Marshall Brement
Ambassador

January 10, 1985

Mr. Marshall Bremont
Ambassador
United States Embassy
Reykjavik, Iceland.

Dear Mr. Bremont,

Last spring you wrote me a letter which came as a welcome surprise. The occasion was the 10th anniversary of the petition "Varið land" (Defended Country) which was given a certain amount of coverage in the newspapers.

Shortly after receiving your letter you were kind enough to invite me and my wife to dinner at the embassy and I had an opportunity to thank you in person. At that time I may have mentioned my intention of sending you a more detailed reply in writing. I have hesitated a long time before doing so because I realize that what I have to say may not be well received. However, that is a risk I feel I must take.

Your letter of March 22, 1984 was, from my point of view, a notable event. That letter marked the first and only recognition from the American side of the efforts of those individuals who organized the campaign of "Varið land" and carried it to its success. I am sure that if this fact became generally known, it would greatly surprise our opponents who so often claimed that the whole effort of "Varið land" was masterminded in Washington (by "Watergate experts", to use the term preferred at the time) and paid for by the C.I.A.

For me and my friends, to whom I showed your letter, the real surprise was that the letter should have come at all, for the U.S. seldom seems to recognize its allies. More often than not, the official U.S. position seems to be that allies may safely be ignored, whereas enemies are to be courted, sometimes lavishly, in the hope, perhaps, that they will be less vehement in their opposition or even see the error of their ways. Of course, this stratagem never works. Your enemies, so rewarded, feel nothing but contempt, while your friends become disgusted and alienated from you.

This curious policy of American officials became particularly clear to me during and after the "Varið land" campaign. As a member of Fulbright Board, I was often invited to gatherings at the U.S. Embassy and the Cultural Center. With one exception, I never met another member of the "Varið land" group at such a reception. On the contrary, I found myself again and again surrounded by people who had been particularly vicious in their attacks on me and my colleagues in "Varið land". There could be no question that a number of those present were truly anti-American in the sense that they despised American values and the American

"way of life".

My first thoughts were that my hosts could not be aware of the true views of these guests, that they were simply ill-informed. When I made enquiries, however, I was told that some of these guests were the preferred company of either the Ambassador or the Director of the Cultural Center and were counted among their closest friends. As time passed I came to realize that this state of affairs was not due to the aberration of any particular American official. Ambassadors came and went. So did Cultural Attaches. But the guests, with minor variations, remained the same.

Now, people have different tastes and it may well be that Americans feel some strange affinity for people who, politically speaking, are their worst enemies. But I wonder, did it never occur to my American hosts that I would feel uncomfortable in the company of people, some of whom I had even sued for libel because of their malicious attacks on me and my friends during and after the "Varið land" campaign? To be invited together with these people and on equal footing was, to me, a direct affront.

To give just one example I will mention the name of Sigurður A. Magnússon, the writer, whose abusive language and violent behaviour should long ago have resulted in his exclusion from the company of all decent people. Yet I have encountered him again and again at the U.S. embassy. He was present, together with other left-wing notables, at your 4th of July celebrations at the Árbær museum last summer. In spite of the wide open space at the museum I had a hard time avoiding these people.

I am not the only person to hold such views. Many others feel the same way and have said so to me. One did so at Árbær last year. But I am reminded in particular of a leading newspaperman some years ago. This man, a strong supporter of the Western Alliance, was being urged to explain the U.S. position in an episode which was embarrassing to American diplomats here. This person's reaction was: "Let those who drink their wine come to their aid".

I once brought this problem to the attention of Mr. Victor Olason who was then in charge of the Cultural Center. With me at the time were Professor Ragnar Ingimarsson and Mr. Þorvaldur Þúason, both active members of the "Varið land" group. Mr. Olason's response was that if so many of his guests at cultural events were communists, the reason must be that the majority of the "cultural elite" of Iceland were communists. Even if this were true (and I do not believe it is), it seems a poor excuse for not being more sensitive when making up a list of guests or more selective when choosing intimate friends.

On a later occasion Dr. Ingimarsson and myself brought

the same subject to the attention of your predecessor, Ambassador Ericson. He at least showed some concern and indicated that he would be in touch with us. Needless to say, we never heard from him again, nor did we really expect to. If American officials take advice from anyone in this country, it is certainly not from people that we know or trust.

It is often said nowadays that to be openly pro-American can be a risky business, while being anti-American carries no risks at all and can even be an asset. There is some truth in this. Those of us who worked for "Varið land" know very well how vindictive our enemies are. For more than a year afterwards, almost every issue of "Þjóðviljinn" carried one or more attacks on us, combining vile language with baseless accusations. Our opponents also made use of radio, television, the theatre, grammophone recordings and even took advantage of parliamentary immunity to spread their lies. Although the majority of Icelanders were probably on our side (I am speaking here of the libel action following "Varið land") few had the courage to speak out. Their attitude may be illustrated by the words of a lawyer who said to one of us: "I would very much like to write an article to support you, but I can't do it because I know my business would suffer". Our attackers, on the other hand, had no reason to worry. They would be hailed by their comrades and suffer no loss of opportunities in the future.

The picture I have drawn here may seem rather pessimistic to you. Some of the people I am talking about are known to you personally and you will be thinking: Surely, these are such nice people, what does it matter if their political views are a little different from my own? I may once have had similar thoughts myself, but "Varið land" changed all that. My personal experiences in 1974-78 proved to me quite conclusively that communists and fellow-travellers, even if they have been on friendly terms with you for years, have no compunction about stabbing you in the back if they feel that their holy cause is at stake. They will gladly sign their name to the most outrageous accusations, and if one of them is sued for libel, the others are ready to help with money and other means. For a list of such people see for instance "Þjóðviljinn", June 28, 1974 and "Morgunblaðið", November 16, 1977.

These lists are by no means exhaustive. They do not, for instance, include the name of Einar Karl Haraldsson, now editor of "Þjóðviljinn". Einar was one of the people who suggested publicly that I and my friends in "Varið land" had received money from the C.I.A. This was after the same allegation had been refuted in court by producing the full audited accounts of "Varið land". Imagine my surprise when I learned recently that Einar Karl Haraldsson had been cordially invited to Nato Headquarters in Brussels. If my information is correct as to the way Mr. Haraldsson got the

invitation, this should come as no surprise to you.

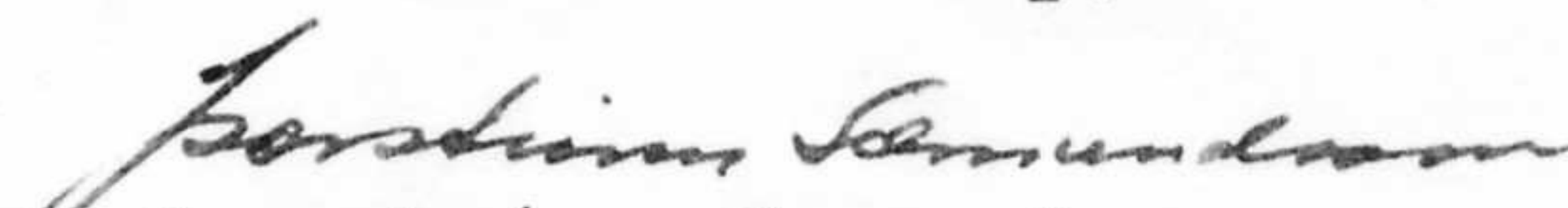
I realize, of course, that it may be considered politically expedient for you to fraternize with your country's enemies, invite them to your house, sing with them on television on New Year's Eve, or whatever. But it should not be forgotten that in doing so you are granting these people a status of respectability. When Icelanders see the American Ambassador singing with his Soviet counterpart on Icelandic television, some of them are going to wonder whether Americans are all that serious in their concern over the fate of Afghanistan, Poland, Czechoslovakia or the many other nations who are suffering under Soviet rule. I wonder what your reaction would have been if someone had asked you to appear on stage with an ambassador from South Africa or Chile, whose crimes are in no way comparable with those of the Soviets.

You must not take this to mean that I am against any dealings with people who hold political views opposite to my own. On the contrary, I have to deal with such people every day. I try my best to be polite to them, even if they have assaulted me publicly in the past. I have even helped some of them when they have come to me for assistance. But I draw the line at socializing with them if I can help it. And I have steadfastly refused to sit on committees or take part in cooperative research with such persons.

During your stay here as Ambassador you have clearly made it your concern to strengthen cultural ties between our two countries. This is entirely commendable, of course. What I am trying to say, however, is that first things should come first, and most important of all is our freedom to live in a democratic society. If that freedom is lost, all your cultural efforts will seem insignificant. Our opponents have not given up in their attempts to get rid of the American base in Iceland, as the first and most important step towards achieving their final goal. They have lost a battle but the war is still on. They are dedicated people who will use all available means and never lose sight of their goal. Every favour you bestow on these people will, figuratively speaking, be just another strand in the rope with which they hope to hang the supporters of the Western Alliance. I believe your President understands that. Mr. Reagan's deep distrust of our communist adversaries is well founded. I only wish that all his countrymen would share his clear understanding of the situation.

Please accept my best wishes for the New Year.

Yours sincerely,


Þorsteinn Sæmundsson



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

Office of the Ambassador

May 9, 1985

Dr. Thorsteinn Saemundsson
Bolstardarhlid 14
105 Reykjavik

Dear Thorsteinn:

Some personal problems delayed my answering your recent letter and I apologize for this tardy reply.

We disagree on a number of points and I doubt very sincerely whether our differences can be bridged. You obviously place a great deal more value on someone receiving an alcoholic beverage from the American Ambassador than I do. However, you should understand that in order for me to carry out my work properly I have to have a clear picture as to why opponents of American policy in this country feel the way they do, whether there are differences in view between such opponents, and whether anything I can do could affect such peoples' attitudes. This requires direct contact.

Where I strongly disagree with you is when you make the statement that our opponents in Iceland can "never" be persuaded to see the error of their ways. Halldor Laxness changed his mind. So did Hannibal Valdimarsson and scores of other Icelanders.

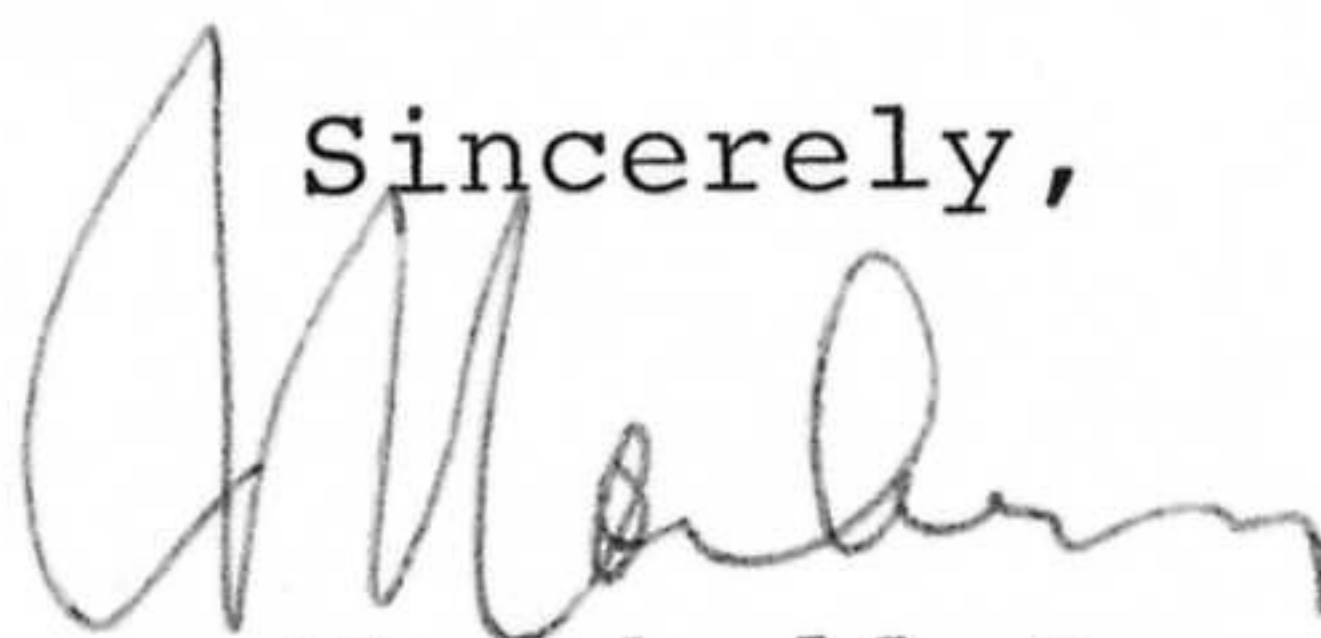
As a result of various press interviews and speeches that I have made in Iceland, I have been personally attacked on half a dozen occasions in Pravda, Izvestiya, Sovietskaya Rossiya and by the Novosti Press Agency. As you may be aware, Pamela and I were subjects of a series of articles in Thjodviljinn last July and August which accused recalcitrant leftists of succumbing to our blandishments and toning down their attacks on the United States in order not to offend the American Ambassador. Whatever one may think of Thjodviljinn and of that thesis, your letter was certainly an interesting counterpoint to it.

The fact of the matter is that when I arrived in Iceland, the Peoples' Alliance was a driving force in the Government here. A whole series of political/military problems remained to be resolved between our two countries. Some of them, such as the new Air Terminal, had been on the table for discussion for more than a decade. Our policies were subject to almost daily attack in the press -- and not only in the pages of Thjodviljinn. Demonstrations in front of the American Embassy occurred on a monthly basis.

At this point, on the other hand, even our enemies concede that the left has lost a great deal of strength in Iceland, that the anti-Base movement has markedly diminished, and that relations between our two countries have never been as problem-free as they are now. I would like to think that my own actions over the past three and a half years had at least something to do with bringing about this happy state of affairs.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely,



Marshall Brement
Ambassador

July 31, 1985

Mr. Marshall Brement
Ambassador
United States Embassy
Reykjavík, Iceland.

Dear Ambassador Brement,

I thank you for your letter of May 9 which was a reply to my letter of January 10. I was sorry to learn that personal problems had prevented you from replying sooner.

When I wrote my letter I was hoping that the attitudes of U.S. officials, of which I was complaining, might be due to simple oversight or lack of perception. Your reply makes it clear, however, that as far your own actions are concerned you are following a definite policy. This means that the situation is worse than I had imagined.

While it may be true, as you suggest, that our differences cannot be bridged, I do not want your letter to go unanswered. Regrettably, your letter is by no means a full reply to mine, as important points are left unanswered. However, I am not going to harp on these points. Instead, I shall confine myself to replying to your letter, paragraph by paragraph.

To begin with, I find it difficult to accept your claim that it has been necessary for you to invite your opponents to Embassy parties to get a clear picture of why they feel the way they do. The gatherings which we are talking about are not conducive to serious political discussions. As a matter of fact, I do not recall ever taking part in or overhearing such discussions on these occasions. And even if your explanation has a basis of truth, and you intended to use these social gatherings to learn your opponents' views, it was unnecessary, indeed tasteless, to invite someone like myself to suffer such company. You must bear in mind that I am talking about people who had been extremely abusive towards me and my friends solely because we exercised one of the basic rights of free citizens and organized a collection of signatures in support of the U.S.-Icelandic Defense Treaty. I am referring, of course, to the campaign "Varið land" (Defended Country) in 1974.

One of the dangers of associating too much with Communists and their fellow-travellers in this country is that one may in time come to believe that their opinions represent the typical Icelandic viewpoint. For an American Ambassador this could be dangerous, as he might then give the wrong impression in his reports to higher authorities who again might react in the wrong way. You may feel that this could never happen, but only twelve years ago, most Icelandic politicians had been convinced by the Communist

oratory that the majority of Icelanders wanted to get rid of the American Defence Force. Our Foreign Minister, Einar Ágústsson, expressed this belief in an interview with foreign journalists in 1973. If the "Varið land" campaign had not been organized at that time it is doubtful whether any American forces would be in Iceland today.

In the next paragraph you say that you strongly disagree with my statement that our opponents in Iceland can never be persuaded to see the error of their ways. You claim that scores of Icelanders have indeed changed their mind, and you quote Halldór Laxness, the writer, and Hannibal Valdimarsson, the politician, as examples. If you read my letter more carefully you will find that I did not say that Communists and fellow-travellers in Iceland could never be won over to a different viewpoint. What I did say was that the methods used by American officials in trying to win them over were futile. And I am sure that you will not find a single person who has changed his mind as a result of invitations to American cocktail parties or similar overtures.

Incidentally, I do not feel that Halldór Laxness is a very good example of a convert. What Halldór has admitted, in his book "Skáldatími" (1963), is that he did not tell the truth about things he witnessed in the Soviet Union under Stalin because (1) he did not wish to believe the evidence before him, (2) he did not want to harm the noble cause of Socialism by reporting what he had seen and (3) he hoped that things would improve. In plain language, Halldór admits to being not only naive but also dishonest. How much weight should be given to his words after such an admission I do not know. I would feel much happier about the answer if Halldór had made fuller use of his great talents as a writer to counter the powerful effect of his earlier works. That should have been his first duty to his countrymen, whom he so badly deceived.

Your next argument seems to run something like this: You have been criticized by the Soviet Press and by Þjóðviljinn and now you are being criticized from the opposite direction (by me). Does this not show that you have been following the right path between the extremists of both sides? I am familiar with this type of argument. It is frequently used by the news offices of our national radio and television when people complain about slanted news. The newspeople offer this argument as conclusive proof of good behaviour. Actually it is nothing of the kind. You will see the fallacy of the argument if you ask yourself the following question: Would the Soviet press ever praise you for anything you might do as American Ambassador to Iceland? The answer is certainly no. No matter what you might do, short of treason to your country, the Soviets and their friends would ascribe your actions to the basest of motives. As their attitude is always negative, it cannot be used as a measure of anything and can have no bearing on our discussion.

In your final paragraphs you paint a dark picture of the political situation in Iceland before your arrival here, and contrast this with an optimistic view of the present scene. You suggest that your own actions over the past three and a half years "had at least something to do with bringing about this happy state of affairs". I find it hard to believe that you can be serious about all of this. To take an example, when you arrived (to quote your letter) "the Peoples' Alliance was a driving force in the Government here". Are we to conclude that it is somehow due to your efforts that the Communists are no longer in government? "Demonstrations in front of the American Embassy occurred on a monthly basis", you say. When was this, I wonder? I have heard of demonstrations, certainly, but never on a monthly basis. At any rate, I think you will find that activity outside the Embassy tends to reflect events in the outside world which the American Ambassador to Iceland cannot control. The Vietnam war was case in point. Lately, the war in Afghanistan has made it difficult for the Communists to keep up their demonstrations against American imperialism. But when the Soviets have finally finished off the "rebels" in Afghanistan, as I fear they will, we shall probably witness a revival of anti-American demonstrations.

An important conclusion of your letter is that relations between our two countries have never been as problem-free as they are now. I wish that were so, but find it difficult to agree. Need I mention the "Rainbow Navigation" affair which is now very much in the news? It would seem that American officials, who are so serious about winning the hearts and minds of their opponents, had better give some thought to their allies too, including our somewhat unpredictable Minister of Finance, who is now threatening to stop the importation of meat to the American base. Recent statements by our Foreign Minister, Geir Hallgrímsson, sound strange to me and are without precedent, as far as I know. I am referring, among other things, to the Minister's statement about the desirability of introducing forces from other Nato nations at the base, to replace some of the Americans there, and to the Minister's critical comments on Nicaragua. In connection with the "Arkin" case, the Prime Minister, Steingrímur Hermannson, also made statements that indicated suspicion towards the United States and were anything but friendly. More recently, a parliamentary resolution on a nuclear-free zone in Northern Europe was interpreted by many as a shift in policy distinctly unhelpful to the U.S. position. Concern over this was voiced by Styrmir Gunnarsson, editor of Morgunblaðið, who wrote an article (on June 8, 1985) stating that, in his opinion, the Independence Party had gone much too far to accommodate the views of the left-wing parties in an important matter of foreign policy and that this was a new and potentially dangerous development. The debate over the new radar installations also shows that the fight to keep Iceland on the right side of the

defense line is far from over.

With that I conclude my letter and send you my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Borsteinn Sæmundsson
Borsteinn Sæmundsson