The Icelandic Power Structure 1800 — 2000

ÓLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON
University of Iceland

1. Introduction

This article constitutes an attempt to indicate some of the fundamental features of Icelandic politics in the past two centuries and provide a prediction of future developments. Such a broad approach is a more convenient basis for a comparative discussion than a detailed analysis of a particular aspect. It furthermore draws attention to one of the chief areas of political science research at the University of Iceland. Although the article allows scope for only a shortened version, it is hoped that the account is sufficiently comprehensive to provide a general picture of the research and its major findings. It should, however, be clearly noted that since the research is still going on, the conclusions presented here are still tentative. This is especially the case so far as the post-1920 era is concerned.

The research period covers the transition from a complete colonial status, when the Absolutist Administration and the Church, together with a few literary societies, constituted the only organised activity in the country, through the period of independence politics with the gradual internalisation of the political process, the emergence of political groups, and the increasing power of Icelandic institutions, to the present system of class parties, a firmly established parliament, pressure groups, regular elections, government coalitions, and an evergrowing civil service; in short, the entire period of modern political development.

It is the central hypothesis of this research that the political structure in Iceland has during this time been directed and co-ordinated by highly elitist personnel who simultaneously have held leading positions in a multitude of political, economic, and cultural institutions. The continuous presence of an elite has enabled fundamental structural changes to take place without simultaneously destroying the characteristic stability and continuity of Icelandic politics. Although the composition of the elite has changed, the essentially elitist features of the system have remained the same. Apart from recent developments, pluralist traits mainly

The Icelandic Power Structure 1800 — 2000

ÓLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON
University of Iceland

1. Introduction

This article constitutes an attempt to indicate some of the fundamental features of Icelandic politics in the past two centuries and provide a prediction of future developments. Such a broad approach is a more convenient basis for a comparative discussion than a detailed analysis of a particular aspect. It furthermore draws attention to one of the chief areas of political science research at the University of Iceland. Although the article allows scope for only a shortened version, it is hoped that the account is sufficiently comprehensive to provide a general picture of the research and its major findings. It should, however, be clearly noted that since the research is still going on, the conclusions presented here are still tentative. This is especially the case so far as the post-1920 era is concerned.

The research period covers the transition from a complete colonial status, when the Absolutist Administration and the Church, together with a few literary societies, constituted the only organised activity in the country, through the period of independence politics with the gradual internalisation of the political process, the emergence of political groups, and the increasing power of Icelandic institutions, to the present system of class parties, a firmly established parliament, pressure groups, regular elections, government coalitions, and an evergrowing civil service; in short, the entire period of modern political development.

It is the central hypothesis of this research that the political structure in Iceland has during this time been directed and co-ordinated by highly elitist personnel who simultaneously have held leading positions in a multitude of political, economic, and cultural institutions. The continuous presence of an elite has enabled fundamental structural changes to take place without simultaneously destroying the characteristic stability and continuity of Icelandic politics. Although the composition of the elite has changed, the essentially elitist features of the system have remained the same. Apart from recent developments, pluralist traits mainly

emerged in the second and third decade of this century when the content of Icelandic politics was transformed, the struggle for independence being replaced by class conflict. This almost unbroken tradition of elitism has, however, in the past 10–15 years been increasingly subjected to pluralist characteristics which seem to constitute strong indicators of a full-scale pluralism before the end of this century.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theories of elitism and pluralism have been employed as the main theoretical framework for research on the development of the Icelandic power structure. These theories have provided working hypotheses, contrasting perspectives, and highly operational concepts, as well as serving as a convenient bridge to the mainstream of political science research. The demonstration of operational utility, which the classical theories of power and the modern national and community power theories provide for Icelandic research, is yet another example of the general validity with which the theorising activity in political science is endowed. It is in many respects a fruitful undertaking to show how the theories, which were based on the observations of entirely different political systems, mainly the American system, can be used to explain the fundamental characteristics of the Icelandic polity from the days of Absolutism to modern class politics. It is therefore hoped that the research described in this article will simultaneously provide an understanding of Icelandic politics and strengthen the validity of a few of the main theories in political science. A brief account of the theoretical features which have been most significant in Icelandic research will have to suffice for a general orientation, as the scope of this article does not allow a lengthy theoretical discussion nor is such an undertaking its major purpose.

Hunter has described the policy-making structure as revolving clusterings of leaders who join together on matters of major policy concerns.[1] As the political system has acquired new sectors, each major sector being related directly or indirectly through its personnel to every other sector, various power groups have become interlocked by persons who can and do communicate core policy decisions of a particular sector to key persons of other sectors.[2] To paraphrase Loewenstein's description of the most distinguishing aspects of the political system, the elite can be viewed as an integrated group which attains, exercises, and controls political power in all sectors, and in the case of Iceland also extends this control into the economic and cultural spheres.[3] The integration of the elite consists of interlocking institutional bases – political, economic, cultural – and a network of family linkages and school bonds.

In the research, this conception of the elite is contrasted with the pluralist view of the power structure in order to establish a basis for discussing the developmental traits of the Icelandic system. The aim is to enquire whether instead of an integrated elite there exist many different sets of leaders, each being relatively independent and having different political resources. The pluralist conception of power serves as the alternative hypothesis: there is no single centre of sovereign

power but multiple centres of power, none of which are or can be wholly sovereign; politics depends more upon bargaining than upon hierarchy and it resolves conflict more by negotiation and compromise than by unilateral decision.[4] The development of the Icelandic power structure from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day is thus considered as (a) continuously elitist, or (b) alternatively elitist and pluralist, or (c) initially elitist but growing more pluralist with modern class politics.

The preceding account is a very brief outline of the theoretical framework. The purpose and the limitations of this article allow neither a discussion of the implications of these theoretical foundations nor an analysis of the complex criticism which has been levelled against both the elitist and the pluralist version of the power structure.[5] There is furthermore no room for a treatment of the power concept and the operational difficulties which accompany its usage. It must suffice to mention here that in research on the Icelandic power structure the definition of power as participation in the making of decisions has proved to be highly useful. It is consistent with the two main conflicting bodies of theory and has been employed by major exponents in both camps.[6] This definition provides both a wide scope and a productive foundation for analysis of the Icelandic system, partly because it encompasses in one way or another all its major functions, and partly because it makes possible the use of all the available and relevant data. The definition is also taken to mean the power to determine the non-making of decisions: what are and what are not the issues of politics.[7] It leads directly to the study of political institutions, counting among them both formal organs and informal structures and thus showing the nature of the major locations of legitimacy, the organisation of political authority. The bases of the respective kinds of power must be identified together with the ways in which political resources are distributed among the corresponding power holders whose nature and characteristics inevitably constitute some of the major strands in the research: who are the leaders, what are their positions, to what extent do they form a unified group, and within which spheres can they exercise their power.

Where it has been necessary to indicate the various amounts of power, a multidimensional scale has been employed. The type of power phenomena and the relevant data determine the actual dimensions used. The scale consists of the following main dimensions: (a) the number of people, (b) the magnitude of resources, and (c) the multitude of spheres over which power is exercised; (d) the zones of acceptance, (e) the means and (f) the lines of action which are available to the leaders to have their choices enforced ; (g) how often they have got their way in the face of opposition; and (h) how far-reaching have been the changes which they have introduced.

Icelandic research on power structures has in recent times been mainly characterised by the employment of three different methods: the reputational approach, the decision-making or issue approach, and the institutional or positional approach. When research covers a long period, in this case nearly two centuries, the reputational method obviously cannot serve as an overall approach, although it can be supplementary for the latest part of the period. The issue approach must

also be discounted as a general method because of the lack of sufficient data, especially so far as the 19th century and the early 20th century are concerned. What data exist are unrelated to the respective importance of the issues and their general significance for the chief purpose of the research. There is, however, some scope for individual case studies which could highlight some of the most interesting aspects of Icelandic politics as well as test the conclusions arrived at by the only remaining method, the institutional approach. By employing the positional method the available data become most extensively employed and the general purpose of the research is realised in the best possible way. This method, it has turned out, also suits well the special nature of the Icelandic political system: the interlocking of spheres through the multi-institutional positions of the top personnel. *When the same persons simultaneously hold leading positions in a multitude of political, economic and cultural institutions, the existence of an elite is consequently considered to be demonstrated, especially when this group of persons is also cemented by kinship ties and school bonds.*

As Dahl has pointed out, the institutional approach 'is particularly useful for detecting large-scale historical changes and gross differences among political systems.'[8] Through this approach the evolution, structures, and functions, as well as the leadership of the various institutions, have been studied: the *Althingi,* the Administration, the parties, the pressure groups, the mass media, and those parts of the economic and cultural structures which particularly reflect the scope of the elite's position, e.g. the chief financial institutions, the main firms, the educational system, publishing enterprises, and sport associations. The institutional approach is thus, as Dahl has also pointed out, helpful in discovering how much overlap there is among occupants of high positions in politics, high positions in business, and high positions in cultural institutions.[9] The smallness of the Icelandic system and the comprehensive coverage of all full-scale and semi-institutionalised bodies eliminate the greatest drawback of this approach, i.e. the danger of overlooking the influence of some *éminence grise.* The institutional method is furthermore consistent with the employed definition of power and the two schools of power theories which predominate the theoretical framework.

3. Data

The research has almost entirely been restricted to printed data: laws and official decrees, records of parliamentary proceedings, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, biographies, published correspondence, statistical records and a small number of books and articles by lawyers and historians. In addition, there exist in the Icelandic National Archives thousands of private and official letters and other types of correspondence which could illuminate in many ways the power relationships and the prevailing personal networks. This material has not yet been explored because the files are largely unsorted as regards content and it would take years to catalogue them for use in elite research. Some of the most valuable correspondence has, however, been published and has consequently been used. Interview data have only recently been collected on a limited scale, the most

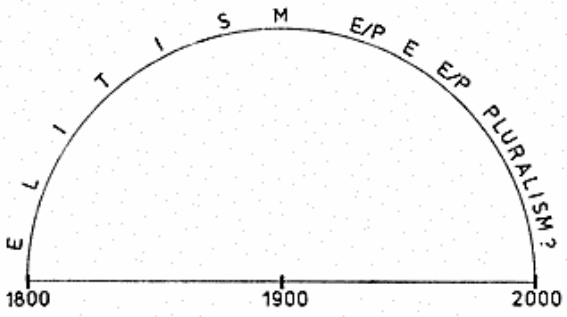
significant attempt being depth interviews conducted last year with all Icelandic M.P.s.

The complex nature of the data and the multitude of sources used in the Icelandic research make it impossible to provide extensive references for the major sections of this article. The precise listing of each source is too complicated and lengthy for an article of this nature. The above general description of the data, therefore, together with a small number of foot-noted references to Icelandic sources, has to suffice as an indication of the material on which the conclusions are based.

4. The Development of the Power Structure

Research on the development of the Icelandic power structure has covered extensively the period from the beginning of the 19th century to the first decades of the 20th century. This era includes the Absolutist Rule, the entire epoch of independence politics, and the initial stages of class politics. The treatment of this period has been so thorough that it is possible to claim with confidence that the conclusions which have been reached are endowed with reliability. Research on the post-1920 era is, however, still going on and the corresponding conclusions have to be treated as tentative. This is especially the case so far as the 1930–1950/60 period is concerned. Despite this difference in reliability, the article attempts to discuss all periods in the same way in order to provide a comprehensive perspective of Icelandic political development.

The description of the conclusions which the research has produced is divided into six sections or periods: 1800–1845, 1845–1910, 1910–1930, 1930–1950/60, 1950/60–1975, 1975–2000. The last of these periods is a prediction of future trends based on the indicators which have emerged in the previous period. The years that mark the sectional division are of course not definite breaks, but serve only to indicate an approximation on a time-scale. It is the central thesis of this article that the Icelandic power structure has evolved in the following way: 1800–1845 and 1845–1910, elitism; 1910–1930, elitism with strong pluralist features; 1930–1950/60, elitism with some but less pronounced pluralist features; 1950/60–1975, a combination of elitism and pluralism; 1975–2000, the pluralist features gaining predominance and consequently transforming the system.



In order to provide an overall picture of the most characteristic developments, the article is primarily restricted to a macroanalysis. Although such an approach eliminates the possibility of detailed accounts and the listing of the exact data, it is hoped that it serves better as a general introduction to the essential features of the Icelandic political system.

1800–1845

At the beginning of the 19th century, when the indicators of political modernisation were about to emerge, the ancient tradition of elitist rule was the strong fundamental basis of the Icelandic system. The two power hierarchies in the country, the Administration and the Church, had for decades been controlled by the same closely-knit kinship group, the Stephensen-Finsen family.[10] The governors, the bishops, the justices, and many other high ranking officials, either belonged to this family or were related to it. Apart from the administrative and clerical functions and the kinship ties, this elite was also cemented by the educational process and the activities of its members in other areas, e.g. in publishing. Pre-university education was carried out within the family and some of the members contributed considerably to the publications turned out by the monopolistic printing press which the family controlled. The Icelandic power structure at the beginning of the 19th century was thus characterised by three elitist features, which continued to be quite marked in subsequent periods: kinship ties, intermixing through the educational process, and ownership or control of the publishing enterprises, which had a great influence on literary and intellectual activity.

The internal power structure in Iceland was, however, only a part of the total Absolutist system, which was headed by the Danish King and the government departments in Copenhagen. The final authority was external to the Icelandic system proper. The Icelandic elite's zone of influence was limited to internal matters and restricted by boundaries and decisions imposed by the Danish authorities. The power of the elite was, however, enhanced by the prolonged state of apathy among the Icelandic population with regard to political affairs. This apathy had been created by centuries of Absolutism and was reinforced by the following generally unfavourable conditions: extreme proverty, the almost complete lack of any kind of communication system, the absence of any effective population centres, and the absence of an established press. The small and dispersed population consisted almost entirely of farmers who operated in similar, meagre economic conditions and who cultivated their respective acres individually, not as members of agricultural villages or groups. There were very few Icelandic merchants; trade remained largely in the hands of the Danes, and it continued to be so throughout most of the following period.

Although the population was mostly apathetic, it maintained certain traits which moulded the political culture that developed during the 19th century. The population was legalistically minded, non-violent, egalitarian, co-operative as well as individualistic. Armed forces had been absent from Iceland for centuries, the Administration and the Church had been predominately native in

personnel, and kinship ties had traditionally played a very influential role both in general social intercourse and in political relationships.[11]

This brief account outlines the nature of the Icelandic system as it was in 1845, when the Danish King called together an elected body of representatives, which was given the name of the ancient *Althingi* and endowed with consultative power in the legislative process. The *Althingi* joined the existing hierarchies, the Administration and the Church, and soon became yet another branch of the existing power structure. In the following period it obtained together with the Administration a central position in the Icelandic system, whereas the influence of the Church gradually declined. By the end of the 19th century the institutional position of the Church within the political structure had effectively disappeared.

When in the 1840s the Icelandic system was entering the first phase of modernisation, the Stephensen-Finsen elite had already passed the zenith of its power. The administrative and clerical positions had gradually begun to be filled with personnel outside its ranks and the closely knit kinship structure of the Icelandic system of power consequently became more dispersed. Some of the family members as well as their descendants continued, however, to be influential throughout the 19th century. The Icelandic elite, which during this first period had rested on a two-dimensional institutional basis only and had almost exclusively been restricted to a single family, was thus in the following period subjected to an increase in the institutional strands and a greater variety in kinship linkages. The continuously elitist nature of Icelandic politics during the 19th century has therefore been divided into two sections, the establishment of the *Althingi* being the line of demarcation between the two periods.

1845–1910

The Icelandic system was during this period subjected to fundamental structural changes. The *Althingi,* which was established at the outset, was by the 1874 Constitution divided into two chambers and given legislative and financial powers, which were, however, restricted by the veto exercised by the Danish Minister responsible for Icelandic affairs. Home Rule was established in 1904 and an Icelandic Minister became responsible to the *Althingi.* The Icelandic Administration was enlarged.[12]

Until the turn of the century the Icelandic system lacked, apart from the *Althingi,* the Administration, and the Press, any marked or regular organised political activity. The *Althingi* was characterised by a network of groupings on ad hoc issues in which a multitude of allegiances appeared. Each member of the *Althingi* was simultaneously a member of many issue groupings; his collaborators in one were most likely somewhat different from those in another. The bulk of the population was either without the right to vote or generally disinterested in politics, elections being almost exclusively non-competitive and with an extremely low rate of participation. It was quite common for a member of the *Althingi* to be elected unanimously by a dozen or so electors.[13]

At the turn of the century, the prospect of Home Rule and the realisation of the great political benefits to be drawn from an organised majority in the *Al-*

thingi led to the formation of parliamentary parties. This development introduced a new competitive dimension into Icelandic elections and a general tension in the political process which was further strengthened in the following period with the emergence of class politics. These transformations in the first decade of the 20th century brought certain pluralist traits into the Icelandic system.

The Icelandic power structure continued during the second half of the 19th century to be highly elitist in character. The major institutions in the country – the *Althingi,* the Administration, and the Press – were in general controlled by personnel who constituted a cohesive elite, which in addition to its simultaneous bases in all the three major institutions was cemented by a network of kinship linkages and moulded by the educational process. In addition to controlling the most significant institutions, the elite initiated all major activities in secondary spheres, such as literary societies, economic enterprises, e.g. banks and trading societies, the highly popular spiritualist movement, the temperance societies and so on. The function of these secondary spheres was thus to a great extent to enlarge the elite's field of leadership. They also provided bases for the furtherance of individual power positions within the major institutions.

Mosca's description of the elite as an organised minority, monopolising power and performing all or most of the political functions, could in general serve as a fair summary of the Icelandic situation during this period. The elite determined the course of both major and minor issues, directed the institutions, initiated other political activity, and extended their power into the economic as well as the cultural sectors of Icelandic society. It was responsible for drawing the line of demarcation between issues and non-issues. Together with the Danish authorities it defined the scope of Icelandic politics and brought about major historical changes as well as minor developments which occurred within the country. The collective power of the elite, being all-embracing in nature, was for most of the time almost total in its political, economic, and cultural implications. This position was enhanced by the very marked cumulative inequalities in the distribution of political resources. The top leadership was firmly established within the three major institutions and was endowed with the greatest amount of the most important attributes: political skill and experience, education, and wealth.

During the whole of this period the Press served as an additional basis for those leaders who were already established within the two principal institutions, the *Althingi* and the Administration, and as a forum for the discussion of policies which were either initiated or finally determined, or both, by their personnel. Although some of the elite members first established themselves in the Press and then moved into the *Althingi,* the Press first and foremost strengthened the power of those already in elite positions.[14] The papers exercised a traditional or charismatic authority over the political opinions of certain sections of the population and provided the leaders with forums from which to initiate or mobilise political action elsewhere in the system. These characteristics of the Press were continued into the period of class politics and have thus both in the last and the present century been among the fundamental features of Icelandic politics.

The divisions which occurred in Icelandic politics gave the power structure a

certain resemblance to Hunter's revolving clusterings of leaders who link with each other on matters of policy and political action, every sector of the system being related, directly or indirectly, through its personnel to other sectors.[15] During this period the Icelandic elite meets on a general basis the criteria laid down in both Dahl's and Thoenes' summarised version of the elite hypothesis.[16] It can also fit into each of the groups of elite theories which were distinguished by Mills.[17]

The elite was, however, in its operations subject to a variety of restrictions. In addition to the final authority and veto power exerted by the Danish authorities, the King and his ministers, it was indirectly inhibited by the legalistic, egalitarian, and non-violent political culture in Iceland. The members had to mould their decisions within a social framework which continued to be strongly characterised by these traditions. At the turn of the century and thereafter, electoral pressures contributed increasingly towards the circumscription of the elite's power. Up to that time elections had generally been non-competitive and with a very low rate of participation, often below 10 per cent. In most constituencies there had usually been only one candidate, either self-appointed or chosen through a consensus among the leading constituents. This state of affairs had given the elite freedom from electoral pressures. In the first decade of the 20th century, elections, political meetings, societies, and other forums gave the public considerable influence over the composition of the elite and the fate of various issues. Bills were defeated and Ministers were brought down because the electorate changed the composition of the *Althingi*. Political careers were either temporarily halted or completely terminated by electoral defeats. Prospective leaders were thus obstructed in extending their zone of influence into the major institutions. The parliamentary and administrative personnel became increasingly influenced by electoral opinion. The reactions of the electorate, anticipated or actual, began to figure significantly in the fortunes of the elite.[18]

The extension of the franchise, the group formations, the competitiveness of elections, and the transfer of the Icelandic Ministerial Office, which was established in 1904, steadily strengthened the democratic features of the Icelandic system. These changes brought the *Althingi* and later the Administration out of an isolated institutional position and into an atmosphere of public pressures and electoral fortunes. However, they affected only the personal careers of already established elite members, and were thus confined to causing differentiations within the elite. These developments, combined with the rival ambitions and career tensions between elite members, and the individualistic nature of Icelandic politics, tended to produce a certain personalised pluralism among the political leadership, which was not institutionalised because of the lack of permanency in group divisions and loyalties. Apart from the class leaders who emerged in the second decade of the 20th century, these changes did not produce any counter-elites. It should, however, be noted that the constitutional changes in 1904 also served to increase the power of the Icelandic elite through the transference of authority from Danish to Icelandic institutions; thus the scope of power within the Icelandic system was extended.

Despite the conflicting views on fundamental issues and rival ambitions, there was a sufficient amount of common non-political characteristics and relationships, e.g. through the kinship structure and other social networks, to prevent the elite from splitting into a multitude of hostile cliques. All the members co-operated with each other on a great many political issues and activities, both within the *Althingi* and elsewhere in the system. The political groups were also in a considerable state of flux: the members moved easily into new conglomerations, opponents often becoming partners in a new front on the independence issues. Some realignments occurred in almost every session: the Valtyrists in 1897, the Home Rulers in 1900, the Progressives in 1902, the National Guards in 1903, the National Power Group in 1905, the Independence Group in 1908, and the Union Group in 1912.

The personalised nature of the political positions within the major institutions and in the secondary spheres, together with the frequent transformation of group membership, the co-operation on many issues, and the educational and kinship ties, helped to prevent permanent splits in the elite. The lines of division were neither all-embracing nor long-lasting. Although at each particular time rival groups and cliques operated within the Icelandic system, which thus could appear pluralist in character, a long-term view brings out the fundamental elitist nature of the system. Collectively the elite members determined the ultimate course of Icelandic politics and brought about most of the significant changes which occurred in the country. The competition, the group formations, and the decreased tightness of the kinship structure, however, reduced the dominance of the elitist features and introduced some pluralist elements into the system. Although co-option and promotion on kinship basis still characterised a great deal of the recruitment to the elite, political power had to be earned increasingly in a competitive way, the public becoming more and more decisive in determining individual careers.

The co-ordination of the major institutions by the elite members, who exerted power in every sector of the system, obstructed the realisation of any full-scale pluralism which was latent in the institutional division of the Icelandic structure and the political mobilisation which was taking place. The bargaining and negotiating traits of Icelandic politics which became more pronounced after the turn of the century did, however, introduce yet another pluralist component. Coalition-building became an important prerequisite for the exercise of legislative power and later also administrative power. Furthermore, the dominant role of the *Althingi* in the decision-making process brings the Icelandic case closer to pluralist theory, which grants the legislators the key role, whereas according to Mills, Hunter, and other elitists, the legislators are only lieutenants of economic entrepreneurs.[19] The leaders of the political institutions in Iceland initiated fundamental economic changes and directed the most significant economic bodies: banks and trading societies. The economic sector served the political one, not vice versa. Power was acquired through political and administrative institutions and primarily exerted by political techniques; it neither rested on economic foundations nor depended on financial pressures.

In the final decade of the period, the developments in a pluralist direction were given an additional impetus when class became a growing factor in Icelandic politics, bringing a new diversity of actors and allegiances into the system. The co-existence of two entirely different foundations, one inherited from the independence campaign and the other emerging with the growing class consciousness, had, at the end of the period, created a fundamentally new situation in Icelandic politics, the pluralist features consequently becoming stronger than ever before.

1910–1930

The pluralist traits were reinforced during the second and beginning of the third decade of this century, which was the period of transition from the independence struggle to class politics, when the emerging parties of workers and farmers co-existed with the old elitist groupings. The class leaders, who first entered through the Press and local government, had by the end of the second decade already taken a seat in the *Althingi* and in the Government. The Icelandic power structure was thus for a brief period dominated by two sets of leaders. The former consisted of the remainder of those brought to power by independence politics. Although operating within an increasingly pluralist framework, these leaders retained the traditional elitist features of Icelandic politics. They had operated and acquired their political training in a setting which, although having certain pluralist components, was characterised by the existence of a relatively cohesive elite which exerted decisive power in all spheres of the Icelandic system. One outstanding example of the scope of their power was that the Chief Justice of the High Court was simultaneously an M.P. and a manager of the largest bank in the country.[20] The latter set of leaders was composed on the one hand of those established elite members who had transferred their political orientation towards class interests and on the other of a certain number of people who had arrived on the scene primarily to further the new class politics.

The arrival of the class protagonists was based on the growing strength of the trade unions, the co-operative movement, and the agricultural societies. The first trade unions were established in the late 1890s and during the first decade of the 20th century. At the same time, the co-operative societies had become sufficient in number and strength to found their federation. The growing class interest of the farmers was transforming the functions of the agricultural societies from the giving of technical advice to the furtherance of economic interest. At the end of the 1920s, this bilineal set of elite members – those descending from the old elite but now class orientated, and those who had established their power through the new class associations – had merged into a relatively cohesive leadership and completely replaced the former set of elite personnel.

During the 1930s, the class leaders consolidated their power and, as it turned out, maintained the most significant elitist features of the power structure. The fundamental characteristics of the Icelandic system of power had remained intact, although the bases of the elite had changed.

1930–1950/60

During this period the main institutions of the Icelandic system were controlled by a small group of people within which the party leaders formed the hard core. Through strong party discipline and the practice of party appointments to administrative posts, party leaders soon established a firm hold over both the legislative and the executive institutions. This hold was furthermore extended to judicial bodies as appointments influenced by party considerations were also customary in that field. Thus, the co-ordination of the three branches of government by a single group, which characterised the period of Absolutism and independence politics, was continued into the era of class parties, the party leaders succeeding the governors and the ministers of Iceland as the co-ordinators and the controlling group of the theoretically separated branches of government.

The power of the party leadership was further strengthened by its relation to the pressure groups and the Press. The main interest organisations – the Trade Union Association, the Co-operative Federation, and the Employers' Association – were all either formally or through their leaders directly linked to their respective parties: the Social Democratic Party (established in 1916), the Progressive Party (established in 1916), and the Independence Party which was formed in 1929 by a merger of the Conservative Party (established in 1924) and the Liberal Party (established in 1927). The same people were often leaders of a party and the associated pressure group. There were no different sets of leaders – only different hats. The same situation characterised the Press, only more so. All the papers were party organs. The chief editors were party leaders and frequently became ministers. The Prime Minister in the Progressive Party's first government (1927–1932) was the editor of the party paper; the leader of the Social Democrats in the early 1950s was simultaneously editor of their paper; and one of the most influential ministers of the Independence Party became editor of the chief party organ, while continuing as a parliamentary leader when the party moved into opposition in 1956 after having been in power for twelve years. As these examples show, the Press did not constitute an independent sphere of influence; it was simply yet another arm of the party leadership.

The party-based elite, which thus exercised control over all the major political institutions, was furthermore highly influential in the economic and cultural sectors. The managers and the boards of directors of the banks were in practice party appointed. The boards of the various funds, which were established during this period, had to be selected by bodies in which party leaders exerted the strongest influence. The major firms in the country were closely linked to the party leadership, especially the leadership of the Independence Party and of the Progressive Party. The firms were either owned by party leaders, e.g. Kveldúlfur, the largest fishing enterprise, or partly directed by them, e.g. the many enterprises of the co-operative movement. Thus, there existed a multi-dimensional co-ordination of the political and the economic spheres. The special power relationship, which in most elite theories characterises the economic and the political establishment, was during this period almost turned on its head, as was the case in the 1845–1910 period.[21] The political leaders in Iceland dominated the economic establishment,

not vice versa. Although the economic institutions constituted a part of the elite bases, they were not of the greatest significance when it came to the exercise of political power.

Party influence was similarly strong in the cultural sector. The educational system was almost entirely state controlled. As in other spheres, appointments were in the hands of those party leaders who formed the existing government, especially those who controlled the Ministry of Education. The appointments of teachers and headmasters of primary schools and secondary schools and other educational institutions were often influenced by party considerations. Some of the largest publishing enterprises were established to serve party political interests; a few of the others were controlled by party leaders, e.g. the very active state-owned publishing house. During the 1930s and the 1940s the Socialists' own publishing house was one of the largest in the country and promoted many of the most successful writers of the period. When the Cold War was at its peak, the right wing elements found it necessary to establish a special challenger to the Socialists' firm. This new firm had a leader from the Independence Party as the head of its board of directors; this leader later became Prime Minister. Although there exist many other publishing enterprises, these two ideological competitors are still, together with the state publishing house, among the largest publishing enterprises in the country.

The power of the elite, composed of interlocked institutional positions, both formal and personal in nature, embodying all the major political spheres and the most significant economic and cultural institutions, seems to be during this period similar in scope and magnitude to that which characterised the highly elitist power structure of the 19th century. Despite the increased competitiveness of Icelandic politics, the emergence of class parties, pressure groups, and free elections, in which over 90 per cent of the electorate finally participated, the old elitist features of the system remained intact. The transfer from an absolutist administration to independence and the emergence of a system which fulfilled all the formal requirements of a modern democracy had not during the first three decades of class politics basically altered the fundamentally elitist nature of the Icelandic power structure.

As before, this system was, however, subjected to various pluralist restraints. The personalised pluralism among the political leadership, which during the 19th century was not institutionalised because of the lack of permanency in group divisions, now developed into permanent competition between the leaders of different parties. But this rivalry, which was created by the very nature of the party system and the rules of the democratic process, was balanced by unifying bonds. The leaders of the parties, like the 19th century elite, resembled Hunter's description of revolving clusterings of leaders who linked with each other on matters of policy and political action, relating every sector of the system to other sectors through various coalition formations at different levels: in the *Althingi,* in the Government, in some pressure groups, in local government, in banks, and in various funds. The durability of the party leaders – all the parties were led by the same sets of leaders during most of this period – together with the coalition

nature of Icelandic politics, helped to create a situation in which all the party leaders had at one time or another worked in one way or another with all the others in taking fundamental decisions for the development of Icelandic society. Thus, the leaders of the parties were moulded by the system into an elite which dominated the power structure in a way which basically resembled the 19th century situation.

However, the underlying party conflict and different class interests served, with the competitive elections, to bring decisive pluralist restraints into this elitist structure. The effects of elections were similar to those which were established in the final decade of independence politics, although they became again somewhat restricted due to the stability which developed in the party support base and the control which the party leaders obtained over the nomination of candidates.[22] Icelandic elections during the period of party politics have in many ways resembled an oligopolic market situation in which the voters simply indicate their preference for a particular set of party leaders. The nature of the Icelandic coalition system deprives the electorate of the power to select a government. The electorate only endows the party leaders with alternatively strong or weak bargaining positions within the fundamentally elitist power structure. It is, however, possible that the pluralist restraints have been reinforced by the smallness of the Icelandic system which allows the ordinary citizen ample opportunities to make his views known to the party leaders. The anticipated reactions of the electorate can be more easily estimated in such a system, and thus the voters possibly have a greater potential to influence the elite's decision-making.

1950/60–1975

The pluralist traits of the Icelandic system have in the last fifteen years become more pronounced. The increasing professionalisation of some of the significant sectors and the growth of their independence vis-à-vis the parties are among the chief causes of this development. The number of ministries and other administrative bodies has increased. The Icelandic civil service has obtained greater professional efficiency and a certain power of its own over the recruitment process. The growing technicality of the problems facing the government has furthermore enabled the higher echelons of the civil service to establish their own authority in many areas of policy and of every day decision-making. The size of the civil service establishment by itself indicates a fundamental change. From the beginning of the century to the end of the Second World War the administrative branch of the civil service numbered only a few dozen persons; now the figure is in the hundreds.[23]

The professionalisation process, which has altered the role of the civil service, has also made its mark on the Press, the judicial institutions, and the economic sector, especially on the banks and some of the larger enterprises. A body of professional journalists has emerged who have been employed on more than one party paper. The party label is no longer an absolute prerequisite for entry into journalism. Newspapers have tended to separate their political and news side. An influential party position is still a condition for employment on the former. This

professionalisation process has also affected the State Radio and Television. The Radio and Television Council, which has a significant role in the planning of programs and in controlling their content, continues, however, to be elected by the parties in the *Althingi*. It is a measure of the importance which the parties attribute to this zone of influence that during most of the 1960s the Council was almost exclusively composed of M.P.s, three of whom were also editors of their party organs.

In the judicial area it is becoming more and more unusual for judges and district magistrates to be active politicians. The present session of the *Althingi* is the first without any such judicial officials among the M.P.s. Appointments to significant posts in the judiciary are still, however, affected by party political considerations and Ministers of Justice are unlikely to surrender this patronage in the near future.

In the last decade the number of banking institutions has increased, both through the establishment of new banks – the Industrial Bank, the Bank of Commerce, the Co-operative Bank, the Trade Union Bank – and the opening of new branches. The three state banks – the National Bank, the Fisheries Bank, the Agricultural Bank – are, however, by far the largest, and consequently yield most influence in the economic sector. The growth of banking institutions has, together with a depolitisation similar to that characterising the judiciary, established the influence of professional bank employees. Whereas in the late 1960s five of the sixty M.P.s were managers of important banks, bank managers have now disappeared from the *Althingi*. However, despite these changes, party influence continues to be strongly felt within the financial sector. The boards of directors of the state banks and of the most significant funds are elected by the parties in the *Althingi* and all of the non-state banks have strong party ties.

In addition to the increasing professionalisation of the civil service, the mass media, the judiciary, and the financial institutions, and the growing independence from party control which has accompanied these developments, the pluralist traits of the Icelandic system have been reinforced by the transformation of the pressure groups. The closely correlated network of the parties and of the few and large pressure groups which characterised the former period has now given way to a conglomeration of pressure groups which in many cases have successfully established an independent role in the decision-making process. The older pressure groups are furthermore no longer as closely linked to the top party members. The pressure group leaders are now less frequently also active politicians, although there are still important cases of such two-dimensional roles. These changes have in recent years made the functions of the pressure groups within the Icelandic system more similar to the situation in most other European democracies; they form an increasingly independent institution within the political structure. Together with the professional civil service, the main pressure groups already constitute a challenge to the power of the party leadership. This challenge will be continuously more significant in the coming decades.

The developments in the past fifteen years have thus given the Icelandic power structure far greater pluralist characteristics than it has ever had before. The

Icelandic situation has come to resemble the fundamental feature of pluralism that 'instead of a single centre of sovereign power there must be multiple centres of power, none of which is or can be wholly sovereign.'[24] The changes which have occurred in the civil service, the mass media, the judiciary, the pressure groups, the banks and also in other sectors of the economy have created many different sets of leaders, each having varying political resources and somewhat different objectives from the others and each being relatively independent.[25]

Despite this movement towards pluralism, the Icelandic system still retains many of its former elitist features. The party leaders still exert considerable influence in the sectors which were previously noted for their increasing independence from party rule. All major appointments in the civil service and the judiciary have to be agreed to by the party leaders who hold ministerial offices at each particular time. There are still many examples of party patronage in this area. The same is the case with the chief managers of the state banks. The Press is still party owned or party directed. There is a multitude of ties between the parties and the major pressure groups. The leaders of the parties are as before the only set of leaders who hold significant decision-making power in a multitude of sectors. All the other sets of leaders are by and large restricted to their respective sectors. The party leaders thus still retain their fundamental control, although they now have to associate themselves with more manipulation and negotiations than before.

The pluralist developments have furthermore been partly offset by the growing power of the State over an ever increasing number of areas. As the party leaders hold the key positions within the State through the Government and the *Althingi*'s election of almost all State boards and governing bodies, this development has helped the party elite to retain its power. In addition to these elitist features the prevalence of kinship ties and school bonds among the leaders, especially within the parties and between the parties and other sectors, further contributes to the persistence of the former elite characteristics of the Icelandic power structure.

1975–2000

The Icelandic system can at the present be regarded as a mixed polity of elitist and pluralist elements with the latter gaining ground as time passes. On the basis of the existing indicators a prediction can be made of future developments. All these indicators – the professionalisation of the civil service and the mass media, the increasing number and independence of pressure groups and economic enterprises, the decreasing frequency of kinship ties and school bonds (see the following section) – point towards an increasing pluralism. If this prediction turns out to be correct, the Icelandic system could at the end of this century have reached the pole opposite its initial state. The indicators show that the system, which from the beginning of the 19th century and into the first decade of the 20th century was almost completely elitist in character and then obtained some pluralist features but moved again towards a strong elite system, would, with the maturity of these pluralist traits, have fundamentally altered its nature.

The research on the Icelandic power structure within the framework of elitist and pluralist theories logically supports the prediction that by the end of the 20th century the Icelandic system will contain a 'plurality of independent, relatively equal and conflicting groups' which will produce an autonomous power balance within the system.[26] This balance or checking of one agency by another will be 'vertical as between central and local authorities, or horizontal as between organs of any level of government'[27] such as the parties, the civil service, the pressure groups, and the mass media which will then have reached an autonomous position in terms of the institutional personnel and its leadership functions. Instead of a single centre of power there will be multiple centres of power, none of which will be wholly sovereign.[28] Politics will depend more upon bargaining across institutional boundaries than upon a leadership hierarchy which resolves conflict by unilateral decisions. Negotiations and compromise, mutual adjustments and gradual accumulation of incremental changes will be the fundamental characteristics of Icelandic politics.[29] The Icelandic system will thus have attained all the essential features of pluralism.

5. Elite Characteristics

The preceding account shows how predominantly elitist the Icelandic system has been since the early days of political modernisation; it traces the major phases through which the Icelandic elite has passed and indicates its chief characteristics: the interlocking of bases in the major institutions, control extending into the economic and cultural sectors, cohesiveness created by kinship ties and the educational process. For further illustration this article will be concluded by a condensed description of the characteristics of the elite, showing their predominance through the peak periods of elitism and their weakening with the increasing emergence of pluralism.

Operational definition

A key task in the research has been the construction of elite tables which list the elite personnel and mark the significant features, such as:

(1) positions in the *Althingi,* the Administration, the mass media, the parties and the pressure groups
(2) positions in the economic sector, the judiciary and in publishing enterprises
(3) literary, intellectual and other cultural activities
(4) occupations
(5) social origins
(6) kinship ties
(7) education

For the sake of operationalisation the elite tables have been restricted to those who have served at least five sessions in the *Althingi,* or, although serving fewer

sessions, had either held influential administrative positions or been especially dominant in other spheres. All those who have held top positions in the Administration, in the mass media, in the parties, and the major pressure groups are thus included in the tables whether or not they have sat in the *Althingi*.[30] This operational definition brings the entire top institutional personnel into the elite tables and minimises the possibility of excluding some *éminence grise*.

The multi-column elite tables are still in the research stage. The tabulation of the first two periods has been completed but some gaps remain in the tabulation of the other periods. The final period in this analysis is of course a theoretical contention, although a prediction could be made about the future personnel by investigating the present lower echelons in the various institutions and linking these to the past process of advancement.

Elite sections

Although the tabulation of elite members and their multi-column characteristics has not yet been completed, it has already brought out some significant features. It appears that the elite personnel can in all periods be divided into two sections which resemble the distinction drawn by Lasswell and Kaplan between the elite and the mid-elite or Miller's differentiation between the key and top influentials.[31] The former section which is here called the primary section includes those who served for a long time in the *Althingi* and the Administration and also held top positions in one or more of the other major institutional sectors. They constitute a nucleus of members who tied together the decision-making process in the various spheres and were in many other ways the most cohesive group within the elite. Such a nucleus has emerged in all periods, the Stephensen-Finsen family being the first example and the class party leaders the latest. At the turn of the century, the primary elite section included the top parliamentary leaders who also controlled the Administration, the most significant papers, and a large part of literary and publishing activities, managed the National Bank, sat in the High Court and had initiated all political groupings and most of the major economic enterprises.

The other section of the elite which is here called the lower section includes the personnel who qualified for the elite tables but who operated in fewer spheres, most commonly held only one institutional position and were not as prevalent in the secondary spheres as the members of the primary section. The significance of the lower section has increased in recent years with the growing professionalisation and independence of some institutional sectors, especially the civil service, the pressure groups, and the mass media.

Kinship

Kinship ties have for centuries been highly significant in both political and social relationships in Iceland. As has emerged in the preceding analysis, they have constituted one of the major contributions towards uniting the political leadership in a cohesive elite. The prevalence of this characteristic has, however, during recent decades of class politics been steadily on the decline. The increasing domi-

nance of non-kinship among the political leaders and the growing absence of family ties as a decisive factor in the access to power are among the more pronounced pluralist traits in the Icelandic system.

Whereas the power structure was at the beginning of the 19th century dominated by the closely-knit Stephensen-Finsen family, at the present there can be found only scattered clusters of kinship among the leadership of the major institutions. Kinship connections are, however, still an important factor in some power relationships and they continue to affect elite recruitment in one way or another. The following examples are here especially noted in order to illustrate the prevalence of the kinship network in Icelandic politics.

In the first three decades of the 1845–1910 period, which succeeded the era when the two major institutions in the country were controlled by the same family, the kinship factor was still so strong that only four of the twenty-six members of the primary section were without kinship ties to other elite members or leading political participants. As the proportion was higher in the lower section of the elite – nine out of thirty-four – this indicates yet another difference between the two elite sections. The primary section has in all periods been more cohesive due to such cementing factors as higher frequency of kinship ties. In the latter half of the 1845–1910 period only three memberes of the primary elite section, or about 5 per cent, were not endowed with kinship ties whereas one-third of the lower section bore that characteristic. Nearly 90 per cent of the new primary elite members during this time were related to elite members or other political personnel in the former half of the period; the corresponding figure for the lower section was 75 per cent.

Politics at the local level were also during the latter half of the 19th century greatly affected by kinship connections and this characteristic has to the present day been continuously prevalent. The significant district assemblies in western Iceland were directed by members of one kinship group, and another group fulfilled a similar role in eastern Iceland. In some constituencies members of the same kinship group were successively elected to the *Althingi*. About 20 per cent of the M.P.s who sat in the *Althingi* during the first four decades after it attained legislative and financial powers were elected in constituencies where their father, brother, or a close kinsman had previously served as an M.P. or resided as a governor. It is also worth noting that in all only 16 of the 115 members of the *Althingi* during 1845–1874 were without any close kinship ties to other members, and over 80 per cent of the elite members with kinship ties in the following four decades belonged, in one way or another, to an extended version of the 1845–1874 kinship structure. Recruitment to the elite, both parliamentary and administrative, has thus in many cases been characterised by co-option based on kinship ties. A quarter of the new M.P.s who entered the *Althingi* in the 1974 election were elected in constituencies where their brother, grandfather, or uncle had recently served.

To indicate how closely-knit the kinship structure of the elite was during the 19th century and into the first decades of the 20th century, it is possible to fit most of the elite on a multi-sectional kinship graph which has the leading mem-

bers of the Stephensen-Finsen family as its founders. Such a graph clearly demonstrates the growth of the elite and how it developed into a somewhat dispersed branch-like structure which included the remaining activists of the Stephensen-Finsen family, but also consisted of others, who, although they had some kinship ties to the initial family elite, had their primary orientation in other branches of this kinship structure.

The political significance of the kinship structure during the final stages of independence politics can be further indicated by noting that at one time all the top administrative officials belonged to the same kinship group. When the first Minister of Iceland succeeded the National Governor in 1904 it was of great political importance that he belonged to this same kinship group. Thus, there was no real change in the internal power structure despite the great constitutional alteration. The new Minister of Iceland had close kinship ties with a third of the primary elite section. Two of his successors in the following decade also belonged to this kinship group.

In addition to being a cohesive factor, kinship ties can furthermore be distinctly felt in political divisions. The previously mentioned ruling group was opposed by an alliance led by five pairs of brothers and in-laws. When crises arose in group loyalties, kinship ties could emerge as the decisive factor. They quite often ran parallel to the political lines of demarcation which appeared with the creation of splinter groups and new alliances. The kinship structure thus simultaneously reduced and reinforced the strength of political divisions. It could give political rivalries an additional dimension of vigour by putting one kinship cluster against another.

Towards the end of independence politics the cohesive kinship structure of the 19th century had become divided into loosely connected clusters. The increasing plurality of kinship relations and the growing absence of kinship ties among the elite members became even more marked with the arrival of class politics. In the late 1920s and the early 1930s, when class parties were establishing their control, the power structure was characterised by the presence of a few kinship clusters which operated within the two largest parties. The Thors family became the power nucleus of the Independence Party. The Thors leadership was in fact maintained into the 1960s when the Benediktsson brothers – one of whom was the son-in-law of the Thors leader – came more to the forefront. At the end of the 1960s the rule of the Benediktsson brothers was terminated by the death of those two brothers who were politically most influential. The largest Icelandic party was thus for forty years led by two closely related kinship clusters. Furthermore, among the secondary leaders of the party, kinship ties were a significant factor.

The Progressive Party, the second largest party, has not to the same extent been marked by kinship relations, although they clearly existed within the party. The Progressive Party's first Prime Minister was succeeded by his brother-in-law; the main leader of the party during 1934–1964 left, in the late 1960s, his constituency to his son who subsequently obtained a place in the party leadership. Kinship ties have furthermore often affected the selection of parliamentary can-

didates for the Progressive Party as well as for the Independence Party. All the new M.P.s who in 1974 were elected in constituencies where their brother, grandfather or uncle had previously served, belonged to these two parties. Within the socialist parties the existence of kinship ties among the leaders has been very rare. Some of the socialists' leaders have, however, been related to other contemporary or previous elite personnel.

Although kinship ties have in the period of class politics not formed as cohesive a network as during the era of the independence struggle, and have been restricted largely to the right and the centre of the political spectrum, they have always been and still are among the significant explanatory factors in Icelandic politics. A quarter of the present M.P.s are closely related to previous parliamentary personnel and many of the most influential top officials in the Administration have strong kinship ties to other elite personnel. Although such examples can still be found, it is, however, quite clear that the importance of the kinship network within the power structure has sharply declined. This development is a significant indicator of the increasing presence of pluralist traits within the Icelandic system. A comparison between the period of the closely-knit Stephensen-Finsen elite and the present situation of isolated and dispersed kinship clusters presents a clear illustration of the fundamental changes which have occurred in Icelandic politics.

Education

The Icelandic elite, especially the primary section, has in two important respects been affected by the educational process. The first involves the outstanding learning and the intellectual qualities of the elite. The second is due to the cementing which was brought about by the elite's joint educational experience, notably in the 19th century.

The members of the Icelandic elite have from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day not only provided the political leadership but many of them have also been among the most outstanding intellectual figures in the country. Many of the most important books which appeared at the beginning of the 19th century were either written or published by members of the Stephensen-Finsen family. Some of the most outstanding writers, poets, and scholars in the 1845–1910 period belonged to the elite. With their original works, translations, and other publishing activities they reinvigorated, extended, and modernised the Icelandic literary and intellectual tradition and dominated the cultural life of the nation. The elite not only surpassed any other group so far as power was concerned but it did so also with respect to knowledge and intellectual strength; collectively it constituted the most learned body in the country.

In the 20th century this unique position of the elite has been changed. Literary activities, academic research, and other intellectual and scientific persuits are now mostly carried out by people outside the political circle. Many elite members have, however, in recent decades enjoyed a position similar to their 19th century predecessors, but to-day they have to share the intellectual leadership with other sections of society. The exceptionally durable coalition of the Independence Party and the Social Democratic Party during the 1960s included some of the most out-

standing intellectuals of their respective generation: two leading former professors of law and one of economics together with one of the pioneering engineers in the country. The present *Althingi* includes a few highly successful writers. As has previously been noted, the area of publishing continues to be dominated by enterprises which are controlled by elite members. Thus, there can still be found examples of those elitist features which previously were outstanding characteristics; now they have, however, become less pronounced.

The second respect in which education affected the elite was the moulding which was brought about by the educational process. During the 19th century the Latin College in Reykjavik and the University in Copenhagen constituted the main educational channels.[32] As it took about a dozen years to proceed through these two institutions, and as the community of students numbered at any time respectively about one hundred (in Copenhagen, counting Icelandic students only), ample opportunities were provided for the creation of intimate personal relationships. During their years of study some elite members had already started to compete for status and influence. A few of the most prolonged and severe rivalries in Icelandic politics during the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century can, for instance, be traced back to such student activities. Meetings, publishing, entertainments, and general social intercourse through residence on the same educational premises served to create a community among the students which was continued after they had taken up positions in Iceland, being maintained by correspondence, visits, and the encounters at the *Althingi* sessions and other political occasions. Between a half and three-quarters of the primary elite section during the 1845–1910 period shared most of their education with elite members of that same section. The proportion among the lower elite section was considerably less, the difference in cohesion between the two sections being thus reinforced by yet another factor. In addition to the closely-knit kinship network which existed during this period, the educational process established a conglomeration of personal relationships among the bulk of the most important elite members and these relationships were endowed with dimensions of both friendship and rivalry and were maintained throughout the professional and political careers of the respective elite members.

Although the number of advanced educational institutions increased somewhat during the early half of the 20th century, the educational process continued to cement the elite of class leaders in a way similar to the moulding of the 19th century leaders. The University of Iceland was founded in 1911 and to a large extent came to exercise the same elite function as was exercised by the University in Copenhagen. As some Icelandic students continued to obtain their university degrees in Denmark and others began in the 1920s and the 1930s to seek their education elsewhere, e.g. in Germany, the educational process of the elite became gradually more dispersed and its effects were consequently somewhat reduced. This tendency was reinforced by the establishment of two new colleges of secondary education which decreased the position of monopoly enjoyed by the Latin College. These transformations, however, did not basically alter the fundamentally elitist nature of the educational process. The previously described features

of the 19th century elite have to a great extent characterised their 20th century successors.

In the past 10–15 years important changes have occurred in the educational process which will during the rest of this century contribute to the increasing pluralism of the Icelandic system. There are now ten colleges of secondary education spread all over the country and they all qualify people for a university education. Furthermore, the Icelandic students now select a multitude of subjects for their university training and go to many different countries. The University of Iceland has also been changed from a coalition of divinity, law, medicine and arts faculties into a multi-subject institution. These three types of transformation have made the educational process so geographically and institutionally dispersed that its effects on the cohesiveness of a possible future elite have been almost minimised. The students who are trained within such a complex network are less likely to be already cemented into a special group when they enter their professional positions.

Together with the loosening of kinship ties these fundamental changes in the educational processs will reduce significantly the non-institutional elitist network within the Icelandic power structure and thus, during the remainder of this century, help the growing professionalisation and independence of the major institutional sectors to transform Icelandic politics into a highly advanced system of pluralism.

NOTES

1. F. Hunter, *Top Leadership, USA* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 6.
2. F. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 138.
3. K. Loewenstein, *Political Power and the Governmental Process* (The University of Chicago Press: 1965), p. 7.
4. R. A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States, Conflict and Consent* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), p. 24 and pp. 188–190.
5. See, for instance, G. Parry, *Political Elites* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), pp. 120–140; N. W. Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 113, 115–116; R. M. MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), p. 75; M. H. Danzger, 'Community Power Structure: Problems and Continuities', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 29, No. 5, 1964, p. 711; R. A. Dahl, 'A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 1958, pp. 465–466; R. A. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 34–35; A. M. Rose, *The Power Structure, Political Process in American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 291–294; W. V. D'Antonio et al., 'Further Notes on the Study of Community Power', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 27, 1962, pp. 848–854; N. W. Polsby, *op.cit.*, pp. 45–46, 63–67, 98–111; T. Parsons, 'The Distribution of Power in American Society', *World Politics*, Vol. 10, Oct. 1957; D. Bell, 'The Power Elite – Reconsidered', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, Nov. 1958; P. Bachrach and M. S. Baratz, 'Two Faces of Power', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 1962, p. 948; R. M. Merelman, 'On the Neo-Elitist Critique of Community Power', *American Political Science Review*, Vol.

62, No. 1, 1968, pp. 451–460; and C. W. Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 244–245.

6. E.g. C. W. Mills, H. D. Lasswell, R. A. Dahl and N. W. Polsby.
7. P. Bachrach and M. S. Baratz, *op. cit.*, p. 948.
8. R. A. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, p. 52.
9. *Ibid.*
10. See e.g. Vilh. H. and Olaf Finsen, *Slaegtsbog for Familien Finsen* (Copenhagen, 1903); Jón Helgason, *Hannes Finnsson* (Reykjavík: Isafoldarprentsmiðja, 1936); Páll Eggert Olason, *Islenzkar æviskrár*, Vol. 1–5, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1952).
11. For the history of this period see e.g. Thorkell Jóhannesson, *Saga Islendinga VII 1770–1830* (Reykjavík: Menntamálaráð og Thjóðvinavélagið, 1943); Jónas Jonsson, *Saga Islendinga VIII 1830–1874* (Reykjavík: Menntamálaráð og Thjóðvinafélagið, 1955); Thorleifsson, *Frá einveldi til lýðveldis* (Reykjavík: Bókaverslun Sigfúsar Eymundssonar, 1973); Knut Gjerset, *History of Iceland* (New York: Macmillan, 1924).
12. For the history of this period see the following, in addition to the works quoted in the previous footnote: Einar Arnórsson, *Réttarsaga Althingis* (Reykjavík: Althingissögunefnd, 1956), and *Althingi og frelsisbaráttan* (Reykjavik: Althingissögunefnd, 1956), Björn Thórdarson, *Althingi og frelsisbaráttan 1874–1944*, (Reykjavik: Althingissögunefnd, 1956), and 'Althingi og konungsvaldið. Lagnasynjanir 1874–1904', *Studia Islandica*, Vol. 11.
13. See e.g *.Landshagsskyrslur*, Vol. 1, pp. 17–27; *Landshagsskýrslur 1912; Stjórnartíðindi*, C-deild 1882; *Hagskýrslur Islands*, 3 and 14; *Thjódólfur*, Vol. 2, 4, 10, 11, 16, 17, 21, 38, 44, 46, 52, 55, 56; *Isafold*, Vol. 1, 2, 3, 7, 13, 17, 21, 27, 29, 31, 38; *Islendingur*, Vol. 4.
14. See e.g. Vilhjálmur Th. Gíslason, *Blöð og blaðamenn 1773–1944* (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1972), and 'Islensk blaðamennska', *Eimreiðin*, Vol. 29; Halldór Hermannsson, 'The Periodical Literature of Iceland down to the Year 1874', *Islandica*, Vol. XI; Jón Guðnason, *Skuli Thoroddsen*, Vol. 1–2, (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1968) and 1974; Einar Laxness, *Jón Guðmundsson* (Reykjavík: Isafoldarprentsmiðja, 1960); Hannes Thorsteinsson, *Endurminningar* (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1962).
15. F. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 6 and 138.
16. R. A. Dahl, 'A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model', *op.cit.*, p. 464; P. Thoenes, *The Elite in the Welfare State* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), p. 25.
17. C. W. Mills, 'The Power Elite: Military, Economic and Political', in A. Kornhauser, *Problems of Power in American Democracy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1957), pp. 146–147.
18. See footnote 13.
19. A. M. Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
20. Kristján Jónsson, M.P. 1893–1903, 1909–1913, Minister of Iceland 1911–1912, Manager of the Bank of Iceland 1912–1914, Justice of the High Court 1886–1908, Chief Justice of the High Court 1908–1926.
21. A. M. Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
22. See e.g. Olafur Ragnar Grímsson, 'Iceland', in Stein Rokkan and Jean Meyriat (eds), *International Guide to Electoral Statistics* (Paris: Mouton, 1969); Olafur Ragnar Grímsson, 'Iceland: Recent Althingi Elections', *Scandinavian Political Studies* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), 6/71, and 'Iceland 1971: A Year of Political Change', *Scandinavian Political Studies* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973), 8/73.
23. See e.g. Agnar Kl. Jónsson, *Stjórnarráð Islands 1904–1964*, Vol. 1–2, (Reykjavík: Sögufélagið, 1969); *Starfskrá Islands* (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Islands, 1917); *Starfsmannskrá ríkisins 1975*, A og B hluti, Fjármálaráðuneytið, 1975; *Flutningur ríkisstofnana*, Nefndarálit, Forsætisráðuneytið, 1975.
24. R. A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States, Conflict and Consent*, p. 24.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 188–190.
26. C. W. Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 243.
27. C. E. Merriman, *Systematic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 173.
28. R. A. Dahl, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 188–190.
30. The following works constitute the most important bases of the tables: Brynleifur Tobíasson, *Althingismannatal* (Reykjavík: Althingissögunefnd, 1956), and *Hver er maðurinn?*, Vol. 1–2 (Reykjavík: Fagurskinna, 1944); Jón Guðnason and Pétur Haraldsson, *Islenskir samtíðarmenn*, Vol. 1–2, Reykjavík, 1965 and 1967; Páll Eggert Olason, *Is-*

lenskar æviskrár, Vol. 1–5; Agnar Kl. Jónsson, *Lögfræðingatal 1736–1963* (Reykjavík: Isafoldarprentsmiðja, 1963); and a great number of biographies and biographical articles in periodicals as e.g. in *Andvari* and *Skírnir*.

31. H. D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan, *Power and Society, A Framework for Political Inquiry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 201–202; D. C. Miller, 'Decision-Making Cliques in Community Power Structure: A Comparative Study of an American and an English City', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 1958, pp. 299–311; and 'Democracy and Decision Making in the Community Power Structure', in W. V. D'Antonio and H. J. Ehrlich, *Power and Democracy in America* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961).
32. See e.g. Bjarni Jónsson, *Islenzkir hafnarstúdentar* (Akureyri: Bókaútgáfan BS, 1949); Heimir Thorleifsson (ed), *Saga Reykjavíkurskóla I* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1975); and also biographies of many political leaders during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.