



Klausturgate revisited

Citizens of Iceland hold delinquent politicians of the Worlds oldest parliament (Althing - 930 AD)- to account for “bad boy” sexist banter

One year ago on 20 November 2018, Bára Halldórsdóttir sat down in a Reykjavík bar where six Centre Party members of Iceland’s Parliament also happened to be socializing. What was meant to be a quick coffee break turned into a four-hour recording session as Bára pulled out her phone to document insidious and extremely sexist and violent banter among Iceland’s elected members of parliament.

Today, “Citizen Bára” is Iceland’s favourite whistleblower. The case has since been coined “Klausturgate”, a play on the name of the bar and the Watergate scandal.

Among the MPs at the bar that day was former Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, who had been forced to resign due to financial impropriety revealed by the Panama Papers. During those four hours, the Centre Party MPs were recorded mocking disabled political opponents, using violently sexist slurs including calling a female co-worker a “raving mad c**t,” joking about rape, and describing how they would or wouldn’t have sex with certain female MPs. The MPs also divulged explicitly how they used their personal connections to abuse power.

Bára felt her responsibility as a citizen was to hand the recordings to the media with no financial incentive. Media coverage made the Icelandic public aware of the gross ethical violations by the Centre Party members.

Iceland is one of the world's most **gender**-equal countries. It is listed as number one in the 2016 best places to work by The Economist's **women index** and purportedly the most feminist country in the world. Iceland’s Prime Minister hosted the September 2019 hugely successful global #MeToo Conference. However, the silence regarding the “Klausturgate affair” at the #Me Too conference was deafening.

To date, the MPs have faced no consequences or accountability aside of a slap on the wrist from the ethics committee for their behaviour by those maligned or even by the public whose responsibility it is to hold its elected officials to account.

Bára, who identifies as a queer, disabled activist and artist, is dependent on welfare and determined to steer the conversation back to the issue and seek gender and intersectional justice for those deeply disappointed by their MPs.

First and foremost, Bára has organised this forum to reflect on Klausturgate, the lack of accountability of people in power, and to give citizens and parliamentarians transgressed voice.

Tactics by the Icelandic Centre Party who initiated aggressive legal action against Bára, accusing her of espionage and conspiring with opposition parties -- this detracted from the core issues at stake namely -elected officials engagement in quid pro quos and violent sexism.

Despite the significant financial and emotional burden endured by Bára, the Icelandic public has rallied around her, organized fundraisers to help with her legal costs and support her initiative. This historical event will be televised, and the citizens of Iceland will be given a virtual platform to comment.

This unprecedented citizens dialogue will include keynote speakers:

- Svandis Svavarsdottir -Icelandic Minister for Health
- Caroline Hunt-Matthes, an Independent Sexual Violence Investigator, UN whistleblower, University professor and Global-Geneva collaborator;
- Stella Samueldottir - UN Women;
- Freyja Haraldsdóttir, University teacher and former MP subject of Klausturgate recordings, and a disability activist;
- Samtökin 78, Iceland's national LGBTQ organisation.

Citizens Dialogue: 'Klausturgate' Revisited

When: November 20, 4-7 pm

Where: DECODE-Sturlugata 8
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