

February 2024



Dear Club Members,

On the 1st February in 2009, fifteen years ago, Iceland elected its first female prime minister. Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir was also the first openly gay head of government in the world. Under her administration same-sex marriage was legalised and in 2010 she married her partner Jónína Leósdóttir, an author.

For a long time she was the only woman in Iceland's government serving as Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security from 1987 to 1994. She was elected in 1978 to the Althing, Iceland's national parliament, where she also served as deputy speaker.

In 2008 the Icelandic financial sector was plunged in to crisis, all 3 of the country's privately owned national banks defaulted. The political turmoil that ensued led to the formation of a coalition government between the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement, Sigurðardóttir was proposed as Prime Minister for this coalition due to her popularity with the general public. When elections were held later in April the Social Democratic Alliance gained seats, and Sigurðardóttir remained in post as Prime Minister. Under her leadership Iceland's cabinet contained equal numbers of men and women for the first time.

Inspired by the political protests the government also created a constitutional assembly, tasked with creating a new constitution, although the legislation needed to pass the new constitution in to law failed to pass.

In 2013 she stepped down from politics, and retired as Iceland's longest serving member of parliament. She remained popular with the nation, with most wishing her well as she retired from politics, now in her seventies.

Her political career comes from what seems like an unpromising beginning. Her first job was as a stewardess for Loftleiðir Icelandic airlines, working from 1962 to 1971. But in this career she became very active trade unionist, twice serving as chairman of the board of the Icelandic Cabin Crew Association. On 24th October 1975 Iceland was brought to a standstill by the Women's Strike, 90% of the female workforce went on strike, protesting against gender inequality. This day of action prompted Jóhanna to move in to national politics.

At the time women who worked outside the home earned less than 60% of what men earned. During the strike women did not go to their paid jobs, nor take part in child rearing, or do any housework, it's estimated that 90% of women took part. The following year the parliament passed a law mandating equal pay. Five years later Iceland had first democratically elected female president in the world; Vigdís Finnbogadóttir,

Every ten years on the anniversary of the strike women stop work early. In 1975, the women strikers left work at 2:05 p.m., and in 2005 they left at 2:08 p.m., reflecting the amount of progress made in 30 years. Increasing the frequency of strikes, in 2010 they left work at 2:25 p.m. and in 2016 at 2:38 p.m. In 2023 the second all day strike took place in protest at the lack of progress. Among

the participants was Iceland's prime minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir, who set a goal of achieving "full gender equality" in the country by 2030.

Your fibre today is inspired by the colours of the Icelandic flag, and was designed to be the sort of wool you could spin in a way that might work for a classic Iceland colourwork jumper.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

25% Faroe Island Wool,

13% Tussah Silk

62% Shetland

Further Reading-

The Women's Strike-

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/24/power-of-the-masses-the-day-icelands-women-went-on-strike-and-changed-history>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34602822>

<https://www.npr.org/2023/10/25/1208577504/gender-inequality-protesters-in-iceland-refused-to-do-work-for-a-day-even-childc>

Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir

<https://www.councilwomenworldleaders.org/joacuteehanna-sigurethardoacuteettir.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/30/iceland-elects-gay-prime-minister>