

Estonia Today

1 December 1924

In the early morning hours of 1 December 1924, a couple of hundred armed Communist conspirators attempted a coup d'état in Tallinn. The conspirators killed approximately 20 people including the Estonian Minister of Transport Karl Kark. The Estonian people reacted quickly and crushed the attempted coup.

1923 and 1924 were economically very difficult years for Estonia. Overestimating the unrest of the Estonian people, the Communist leadership in Moscow decided the time was right for a Communist *coup d'état* in their neighbouring country. This decision was not based exclusively on economic factors -- a coup would have been attempted in any case. In November 1924, 149 people in Estonia were convicted of hostile activities against the state. At the same time, staged demonstrations against Estonia were organised in the Soviet Union.

The conspirators were trained and armed in Moscow, and then sent to Estonia to lead the coup. To help support and organise insurgencies all around the world, Moscow had created the Communist International (Comintern). The leader of the *coup d'état* attempt in Estonia was Jaan Anvelt. A 50-man detachment was to occupy the Tondi Military Officer Candidate School barracks. The other units, which were sent to various locations, had 7-10 members. The plan was to, in co-operation with local Communists, occupy Tallinn's strategic locations, government institutions, military facilities, as well as communications networks, and then to ask for help from the Soviet Union.

The assault groups began their operation in the early morning of 1 December 1924, at approximately five-thirty. The groups had some success, but also met resistance. For example, they were not able to occupy the Tondi Military School or the Ministry of War. The Main Post Office, Toompea Castle, military facilities, police stations and the home of Elder of State Friedrich Akel, who miraculously managed to escape, were attacked.

The coup organisers and the insurgents believed that the operation would end with a Soviet invasion. They also believed that the Estonian working class would join them in the coup. This was a gross misjudgement, since revolutionary conditions had not developed in Estonia, and the majority of the population were proud of their recently won independence.

The attempted coup was quelled before the beginning of the workday. Military personnel, policemen, and civilians went into action without any orders from the authorities. They effectively suppressed the attempted coup in a few hours. The insurgents killed a score of people including the Estonian Minister of Transport Karl Kark. Approximately the same number of insurgents perished.

The attempted coup was sobering and frightening for Estonia. Following the failed coup attempt, the Estonian Communist Party lost a great deal of its support and much of its membership. The successful suppression of the Communist coup attempt increased the Estonian people's self-confidence and introduced Estonia to the entire world.

*This information sheet was compiled with the kind help of historian **Lauri Vahtre**.*



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