

JOAKIM PUHK (1888 - 1942)

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Joakim Puhk, a great businessman of his time, is the last Estonian until this moment, who belonged to the honourable company of the International Olympic Committee. Joakim Puhk was elected to the IOC in 1936 before the Games of the XIth Olympiad, in Berlin, and he remained an IOC member until his death in 1942.

Joakim Puhk, an industrialist and economist, was born in Viljandi on the 25th of May, 1888, as the son of a tradesman and the owner of the match-factory (father Jaak Johann; mother Anna Luise).

Puhk studied at Riia Commercial School, where he acquired a good economic education. While studying in Riia, he took part in the Russian Revolution in 1905 and was in a Russian prison for two years, convicted 'guilty' by the court in 1907¹.

After returning to his homeland, he took an active part in the Estonian economic and political life. His father, Jaak Johann Puhk, had founded a family company, consisting of a department store and a big mill in 1881, which was named: J. Puhk & Pojad (J. Puhk and Sons) in 1914. Besides being a co-owner of the family company, Joakim Puhk became the director of the machine-building factory Ilmarine, and also member of the board of the corporation "Eesti Lloyd"⁶.

In 1917-1918 Puhk became chairman of the Food Office of the Province of Estonia.

In 1918-1919, after the German occupation, Puhk was nominated assistant of the Minister for Food.

Puhk was a member of many Estonian delegations as an economic expert: he was at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919; at the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty in 1920; at the Conference of the Baltic States in Bilderlingshofis¹.

Puhk was elected chairman of the State Tradesmen's Union in 1924; and chairman of the Board of the recently formed Chamber of Commerce and Economy, in 1925.



Joakim Puhk

As member of the Estonian National Assembly, Joakim Puhk helped to work 'out the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia and he became a member of the 6th State Assembly.

Puhk was awarded several medals for his services to his homeland. Later he became Honorary Consul for Lithuania (1921-1927) and Finland (till November 1927) and took part in the work of the League of Nations.⁶

For Joakim Puhk his connection with sports was mostly confined to fishing and hunting, he was one of the first spinning-sportsmen of Estonia. His daughter, Mirjam Kaber,

remembers: "We had a homestead of Pikaveski in Harjumaa, by the Jägala river. My father loved to go fishing and hunting in the neighbourhood."⁵

But first and foremost, Joakim Puhk was supporter and financier of many sports competitions.

He often granted prizes for the competitions and probably this was the reason he was proposed to be a candidate for membership of the International Olympic Committee.

After 1932, when Karl Friedrich AKEL withdrew from the IOC, the Estonian Olympic Committee had quite weak connections with the IOC.

But in 1936, in connection with the preparations for the Berlin Olympic Games, in Estonia arose the need to again have its own member in the IOC.

Puhk's knowledge and his social position were to his advantage.

The candidacy of Joakim Puhk was first submitted to the Estonian Olympic Committee on January 6th, 1936.

He received an unanimous support from the Committee: "Joakim Puhk is a fortunate find for our Olympic Committee in these complicated times", said Harald Tammer, Estonian medallist from the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, and member of the Estonian Olympic Committee.

Joakim Puhk was submitted to be candidate for membership of the IOC with the recommendation of the Finnish and Swedish Olympic Committees.

The voting gave him unanimous support again and so Estonia got its representative in the International Olympic Committee on the eve of the Olympic Games in Berlin, at the end of July 1936.

Joakim Puhk gave his helping hand to the Estonian sports movement, towards which he always had a warm attitude. ²

The success of Estonia at the Olympic Games in Berlin and the services of Joakim Puhk were internationally acknowledged with the German Olympic Decoration in 1936.

Four years later, Joakim Puhk and his three brothers were arrested according to the orders of the People's Commissariat of the Internal Affairs of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Estonia, on August 31, 1940.

Joakim Puhk, like many other arrested people, was held in the Battery Prison (Patarei vangla) of Tallinn till 1941. He was sent to the Kirov (Vjatka) oblast at the end of June.

Puhk was very much appreciated and honoured by his fellow prisoners as a great personality. He often held lectures for his companions about his travels and business experiences. As a brave and courageous man, he always helped his companions with his excellent knowledge of the Russian language, explaining situations to the warders, although he was also punished ³.

Special deliberations of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the U.S.S.R., condemned Joakim Puhk to death on August 8, 1942.

The, so far, last Estonian member of the International Olympic Committee, was shot dead in the prison in Kirov, on September 14, 1942 ⁴.

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