

KARL FRIEDRICH AKEL (1871 - 1941)

by Reelee Remmelkoor, General Secretary of the Estonian Olympic Academy.

Karl Friedrich AKEL has been the President of the Republic of Estonia, he was three times the Foreign Minister, and he also represented his country Estonia in several foreign states (Finland, Sweden and Germany). Thus one might say he had a big influence upon the formation of Estonian political life and an outstanding role in Estonian foreign politics. Akel was the leader of the Christian People's Party which was represented in the State Assembly of the Estonian Republic. He was also a well-known churchman and sportsman.

Dr. K.F. Akel was chosen the first President of the Estonian Olympic Committee, he fulfilled this post for eight years, resigning in 1931. Besides Akel was a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from 1928 to 1932. Nine years later, he was executed by the KGB. His numerous activities have unfortunately not been reflected in published materials; there is no article about him in the "Estonian Encyclopaedia".

Karl Friedrich Akel was born on the 5th of September (on the 24th of August by the old calendar), in 1871, in Halliste parish, in Viljandi county (father Juhan and mother Kärt). His father had been able to buy a dairy-farm, named Kaubi. Akel obtained an elementary education at two schools: at Viljandi Elementary School, director of which was Fr. Kuhlbars (who was known for his patriotic aspirations) in 1881-1883, and at Viljandi County School in 1883-1887.

Against the will of his father, who wanted his son to be a farmer¹, Akel entered the Tartu Gymnasium in 1889 and finished it in 1892. From 1892 to 1897 Akel studied medicine at the Tartu University. In his student time, he was a member of the Estonian Students Society and in 1897 became its chairman. Akel graduated from the medical faculty of Tartu University in 1897 and was an assistant oculist in the Tartu polyclinic for a short period (1898-1899), in the Ujasdov hospital in Varssav (1899 to 1901), in the Reimers' eye-hospital in Riga (1901-1902) and also a period in Berlin, Prague and Leipzig. In October 1902, Akel set up a practice in Tallinn, where he resided permanently.



He participated in the Russian-Japanese War in 1904 and 1905.

Akel was one of the founders of Tallinn's Doctors' Hospital in 1907; in 1912 he founded a private hospital for eye-sickness.¹

Akel married Adele Karoline Tenz in Tallinn in 1906. He had three daughters, Vilma, Asta and Lia, and one son, Friedrich.⁶

Akel took an active part in social activities in Tallinn. He was a member of the board of the "North Baltic Doctors Society" and the "Tallinn People's Education Society"; and the Tallinn Estonian Society ESTONIA. Further he was the president of the "Tallinn Mutual Loan Society", later called Credit Bank; the chairman of the Tallinn Town Council, and the first vice-president of the "Estonian Lutheran Consistory".

When independency was established in Estonia, Akel really began his political career.⁴

According to his political sympathies, Akel belonged to the Progressive Party, later on to the People's Party, but finally joined the Christian People's Party in 1919.⁶

In 1922, already being 51 years old, Akel started his career as a diplomat and statesman.²

The government of Konstantin Pats nominated Akel for the post as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the Finnish government in Helsinki in April 1922.

During the time of the 2nd State Assembly from August 2nd, 1923 to March 1924, Akel was Foreign Minister for Estonia in the cabinet of K. Päts. When, under the pressure of the left

Labour Party and economic difficulties, the government of K. Päts fell, Akel himself formed a new cabinet on March 20, 1924, which consisted only of members from the central parties.¹

Despite the resistance of the most important opposition party, the Farmers Party, the government of Akel, under his leadership applied the necessary measures, which stopped the falling of the quotations from the Estonian Mark. Thus, his government helped the later successful monetary reform, which changed the Estonian Mark into the Kroon.²

In December 1924, Akel resigned with the whole of his cabinet, to make way for the government of J. Jaakson, which was formed from all parties supporting the independence of Estonia.¹

Later on, Akel resumed his political activities: from 1926 to 1929 he was a member of the 3rd State Assembly; in 1926 and 1927 again Estonia's Foreign Minister; from 1928 to 1934 Ambassador for Estonia in Stockholm, Sweden; and from 1934 to 1936, Ambassador for Estonia in Berlin, Germany.

In 1936, he for the third time took up the post of Foreign Minister, which he kept to 1938; when he returned to being a member of the State Assembly.

In 1939, Akel started working in the field of economics: he became vice-chairman of the board of the joint-stock company Estonian First Oil-shale Industry.²

At the beginning of the century, Dr. Friedrich Akel started his activities as a sport promoter in the Tallinn sports society Kalev. In 1907, he was elected chairman of this society. By the time he took up the post, the activities of Kalev were almost non-existent, but in a short time Akel managed to bring back enthusiasm into the society and the membership of Kalev began to grow again. Considering all the work he had done, on May 5th, 1924, Akel was elected a member and also the first president of the Estonian Olympic Committee (E.O.C.).⁴

In one of his first speeches as the president of the E.O.C., Friedrich Akel said the following: *Physical culture is a new area for us yet. Here we must invest our determination and power to enable ploughing and sowing, making the fields green and fruit-bearing, from which health, willpower and the selfconsciousness of the people can find nourishment.*⁴

Akel, appreciated as a great diplomat, made a remarkable contribution to the start of the Estonian Olympic Committee during its early years. His personal contacts and liaisons with the elitary society helped the E.O.C. along, to provide the necessary background during hard times, which came just before the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad, in Paris in 1924.

"We can give Dr. Akel credit for making the E.O.C. an integrally functioning organization, where people really could stand for the good of the Olympic Ideas", said Ado Anderkopp, the General Secretary of the E.O.C.⁴

Dr. Friedrich Akel was the president of the E.O.C. for eight years, from 1924 to 1931. He then resigned this office. Almost at the same time, he resigned as a member of the International Olympic Committee. He had been a member of that body from 1928 to 1932. The main reason for his resignation from both the E.O.C. and the I.O.C. was presumably his excessive workload.

The more tense the international situation became in the 1930s, the more time and strength Friedrich Akel put into serving the Estonian Republic.

It is also thought, that Akel left the leadership of the E.O.C. at these very hard times, because the participation of Estonia in the 1932 Olympic Games in far-away Los Angeles had become a real problem, for which the former president of the E.O.C. did not see any solutions to help the Estonian sportsmen participate.⁴

The departure of the first president of the Estonian Olympic Committee, as well as many other members of the E.O.C. at that time, was a real tragedy.

After the occupation of Estonia, in the summer of 1940, Dr. Friedrich Akel was oppressed by the new powers. He was known to be a follower of a straight foreign policy.⁴ He rejected the proposals of foreign diplomats to leave Estonia with the words: *"I will not go away from the graves of my ancestors"*, as his daughter Asta Treude has said.³

On July 18, 1940, at the time of a football-match between Estonia and Latvia in Kadrioru stadium in Tallinn, a large demonstration against the sovietizing of Estonia took place. A lot of arrests followed, among others several Estonian sports leaders were arrested by the occupying forces.²

On October 17, 1940, Dr. Friedrich Akel was arrested too, when he came home from his work (he worked as an oculist at the time).³

He was held in the Batterey Prison (Patarei vanglas) in Tallinn for almost a year. Packages for him were accepted until June 1941, when his family was deported.³

Access to the records of the KGB, finally exposed the horrible reality.⁵

The KGB interrogations came to an end in the springtime of the first war-year. Akel's working for the Estonian Republic, and therefore against the Soviet power had been sufficient to condemn him to death.

The first president of the Estonian Olympic Committee was executed in Tallinn, on July 3, 1941.

No information can be found in the records of the KGB, about the place where his remains have been buried.⁵

Liane Wachtmeister, granddaughter of Karl Friedrich Akel, became a member of the Swedish Equestrian Team in 1990.⁴

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