



## Red Star Over Iraq: Iraqi Communism Before Saddam

By Johan Franzen

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Recent outbursts of sectarian and ethnic violence in Iraq have made many observers question the viability of the state itself. It is said that due to the artificiality of the state and a lack of deep-seated political institutions, Iraqi politics is doomed to endlessly revert back to primordialism. Political parties are mere facades for the real intention of pursuing ethno-sectarian interests, the argument goes. But the present situation has largely been caused by Saddam Hussein's infamous rule over the past three decades, combined with the plight of international sanctions. Before Saddam's ascent to power in the late 1970s, however, the Iraqi political spectrum was full of political parties operating from ideological platforms. The largest, and arguably most important of these groups, was the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). The ICP stands out as the only true cross-sectarian party in Iraqi history, drawing support from all of Iraq's diverse communities. From its inception in 1934, it continuously fought the various regimes in power and endeavoured to spread communist ideology throughout Iraq. At times the party achieved considerable success in this regard, although ultimately never able to seize power. Red Star over Iraq analyses the twists and turns of the ICP from its inception until its ultimate demise as a significant political force at the hands of Saddam in 1979.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"One of the great virtues of Franzén's study lies in its interweaving of the story of the Iraqi Communist Party with the story of Iraq itself. He succeeds in bringing out, through exemplary and detailed research, the ways in which the party's sometimes turbulent inner political debates and struggles did not prevent it from appealing to a wide spectrum of Iraqi society. In doing so, he reminds us of the courage and imagination of the thousands of Iraqis who believed that the ICP held out a better prospect for the country than strident nationalism on one hand, or sectarian division on the other." --Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*

#### About the Author

**JOHAN FRANZEN** is lecturer in Middle East Politics at the University of East Anglia. He holds a PhD in Middle East history from SOAS and has published extensively on the politics and history of the Arab world. He is the author of *A Modern History of Iraq* (forthcoming with Hurst).

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