



Czechoslovak Political Prisoners (second amended ed.)

This book introduces ten victims of Stalinism who became political prisoners in their own country. Political persecution changed the lives of individuals, families, and perhaps whole generations in many places. Here we deal with the 1950s in former Czechoslovakia. Young Czech authors introduce five male and five female forced laborers in communist prisons and uranium camps. Their life-stories show the everyday life behind the Iron Curtain where sudden captivity for ideological reasons was the daily bread.

All the narratives were recorded in 2007-2008 using the method of oral history interview. The first edition was co-financed by the European Union within the programme "Europe for Citizens" 2007-2013. The second edition was published by the Czech non-profit organization called Političtí vězni.cz (Political Prisoners.eu) established by the authors in 2010. This book is meant as an educational as well as a popularization tool. Witnesses of the past eighty years described what they had gone through in a very authentic way. What and how they tell the authors had one major aim: to share the secrets of those who were meant to be forgotten and thus commemorate the Czechoslovak political prisoners of the initial phase of the socialist dictatorship.

www.politicalprisoners.eu
www.politictivezni.cz

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Tomáš Bouška Klára Pinerová



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of 5 Male and 5 Female
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Tomáš Bouška, Klára Pinerová:

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Preface to the Second Edition

In 2010 we published the first edition of the Czechoslovak Political Prisoners: 5 Female and 5 Male Victims of Stalinism. It was the first publication we put together, followed by a set of student workshops and an international conference. The informal student events we held in 2009 gave birth to a formal organization that was officially registered at the Prague City Court on November 19, 2010, under the name “Političtí vězni.cz”. (The English translation we have used is Political Prisoners.eu, and it clearly follows the same idea to link the name of the organization to the web domain, although it was never officially registered along with the Czech brand). One can say this book gave birth to the institutionalization process of what later became formally registered as a non-profit & non-governmental organization.

The overall aim of Političtí vězni.cz is to research and popularize life stories of former political prisoners. So far, we have mostly focused on political imprisonment in the 1950s in former Czechoslovakia, but this has never been a strictly defined field of our focus, both topic or period wise. Since the first edition of this book we have published our works on our website (www.politictivezni.cz in Czech and www.politicalprisoners.eu in English) and in two books (the Czech version has been extended and is available online). We have also presented a documentary about former political prisoner Karla Charvátová called “K. Ch.” In addition we have engaged eyewitnesses, experts, and the wider public through conferences, workshops, and popularizing initiatives such as reopening the knowledge trail “Jáchymov Hell”¹. We remain volunteers, though we have changed from students to professional scholars working in archives, research institutions, and memorials.

What makes the second edition distinct? Firstly, it would never have emerged without the kind help of young scholars Leah Scheunemann, Savannah Lee Harrelson, John R. Leake and Matthew Dickason and a dear expat supporter Brian Belensky who kindly edited the texts of the first edition and made it much more comprehensive to non-Czech readers. We are very thankful to them. Secondly, we have added a bit more contextual information and sources with the aim of bringing more light to the overall situation the narrators describe in the course of their lives. We replaced some of the photos as we have gained better ones in terms of their explanatory and descriptive function. We added a list of key words and names of historical figures used in the book with which the non-Czech reader might not be familiar. The historical chapter was revised and enlarged with a reference to the post-prison life and the democratic period in the Czech Republic which substantially contributed to forming the prisoners’ memories. We have also better described the ten narrators in their short bios before each interview and have linked them to the archival files we were able to research. The files are an important feature of each story as they offer a view into the socialist dictatorship. Obviously, the stories described by the communist interrogators and courts do not have the same words and mean-

¹ For more about the trail leading through former uranium mines and penal labor camps see the online version at www.jachymovskepeklo.cz.

ing when narrated, but they are an important part of the puzzle. We did not stress this aspect in the first edition.

There is also one important aspect we wish to reflect in the second edition. It is about our organization. We have changed our view of our research topic during the last seven years. We have met new narrators and visited the old ones several times. We have listened to different interpretations of the Czechoslovak ex-political prisoners' narrative. We have researched archival materials and new studies on different facets of the political imprisonment. New sources have given us a different perspective, and we have begun to think about their narrative within in the broader context of memory studies. Memory is one of the most important ways by which our histories animate our current actions and experiences and is influenced by many factors. Narrators told us their stories which differ from other sources. Some memories—traumatic, painful, and shameful—are untold; others – positive or heroic—are exaggerated. However, we would like to note that from ethical reasons we did not publish some sensitive and painful information found in the archives which were not mentioned by the narrators themselves.

As public discourse evolves more initiatives like ours tackle the fates of the victims and survivors of the socialist dictatorship. As political prisoners were meant to be forgotten, initiative like ours bring their stories into the public sphere. Their commemoration has become a part of the political and media routine in the Czech Republic. We have used a different approach towards both the narrators and the topic in general. It is perhaps more critical, more careful, less admirable and hopefully, more professional. This shall be judged only by the readers, but what we mean to say here is that we realize we see the second edition of this book from a different perspective than we saw it when writing it. We hope this contributes to its higher quality.

Unfortunately, by the time we prepared the second edition, most of our narrators were not able to read it anymore as they passed away before it was re-published. However, our intention was to offer their oral histories as a material showing their interpretation of recent past, and this did not change. Their narratives can be studied from the perspectives of history, sociology, penology, political science, anthropology, psychology, and many other disciplines. We believe they preserve the narrative of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic of which all of them were members and some of them even leading representatives. This is why we really value the below published explications of their memories. What is more, all ten of them faced no issues in coming to terms with their position in society after their release from prison. As the archival research demonstrates, they were not made collaborates with the State Security Police or they were not considered too passive anti-communist fighters to be excluded from being decorated by the Czech Ministry of Defense unlike other political ex-prisoners². This is another unique aspect of the ten interviews selected for this book. Last but not least, what is not new here is our wish to dedicate this book to the memory of all the Czechoslovak political prisoners who are not with us anymore. They are an important part of our recent history, and we wish to continue to study and popularize them as a research phenomenon.

*The authors
Prague, summer 2016*

2 See more on this topic in the Historical Overview that follows both prefaces.

Preface to the First Edition

This book is part of a larger project targeted at commemorating the victims of Stalinism. We, young volunteers from the Czech Republic, are introducing life stories of former political prisoners as an educational tool for youth and the wider public. The lives of political prisoners persecuted in the 1950s, then young people themselves, seem unbelievable today. It is the very subject of our interest, the narrators and their personal beliefs, strengths and hopes that underline the times when Europe was split into two ideological blocs. It is their stories that question the basic values we now take for granted. It is their voices that will commemorate the victims of Stalinism.

We do not mean to rewrite history with this book. In today's world nothing is older than yesterday's newspaper. Life is fast, and even faster is the information all around us. In order to achieve an effective and efficient distribution of the results of this project, a combination of communication tools are used. We publish our work on our website, in a book publication, and during youth conferences and workshops. Our intention is to stress an interdisciplinary approach where interpretations of the past can be studied from the perspectives of history, sociology, penology, political science, anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines. Male and female memories of political oppression in the former Czechoslovakia offer a complex interpretation of the recent past. Individual histories are something we do not have to believe in. However, we can try to imagine how it felt to be a young captive sentenced for crimes against the Czechoslovak regime – crimes which usually did not contain any criminal activity at all. Victims of political brutality became the worst enemies of state. They were not allowed to live a free life, to study, to travel, or see their families. They were sent to prisons and penal labor camps instead. What is seen as impossible today was then a common occurrence.

Furthermore, the men and women who survived and started new lives after release were meant to be forgotten. Their persecution continued. They were only able to find manual labor jobs, and their children were excluded from the official education system. As former political prisoners, they refused to support the communist government and their leading institutions. They subsequently had to pay for it.

Indeed, they did pay. They lived a life full of stigmas and the political pressure regarding their anti-communist beliefs did not stop until the Velvet Revolution of 1989 which collapsed the communist regime. Finally, when most of them were in their golden years, they were free. Luckily, they agreed to share their memories with us. Some of their captors are still alive. Some of the "modern slaves", today's former political prisoners too. What do we know about them? Do we want to know? The answer is up to everyone of us. But we, the authors, want to voice the life stories of those who would probably never be heard again. It is not the solution, but it may help us in finding the right answer.

Life story interviews and biographical narratives started to be popular in Central Europe after the fall of communism. Even this book has been prepared using the modern approach to oral history. Yet not all the experts studying recent history are familiar with these methods,

and some Czech scholars and citizens even refuse to acknowledge them. This is why we would like to contribute to the debate and offer empirical examples of how fruitful oral histories can be. We do not argue that ten spoken memories equal historical sources such as standard historical annals, chronicles, and other records (which are equally subjective). What we believe is that they are equally valuable historical sources and, perhaps, even general knowledge. Individual histories should contribute to the descriptions of the past especially here, where traditional, "official" in government historical records, fail. Such information can only enrich the well known facts. After all, history was originally oral, and all knowledge was spread by a spoken language. It is our task to put down the words of those who "were there." If not for ourselves, then for generations after us, as it seems obvious that such stories can teach us more than many textbooks. It was not always easy to explain to the narrators that there is a tangible reason or reasoning behind all the recording, transcribing, and editing.

As a result, in 2008, we gathered ten examples of the "little history" of former Czechoslovakia. We provide you, our readers, with stories dealing with "big history," but using one's own words and delivering personal explanations and interpretations of what has happened, what has been seen and lived through. We do this during the boom of electronic technologies which offer fast and precise information and online data. Reading books may seem old fashioned and unpractical, especially from the point of view of today's youth. However, we are aware of it, and our aim is to go further than that. We do not want to fall back with conventional books only. This is why we created a website dedicated not only to former Czechoslovak political prisoners, but also to all who were once politically oppressed. We wish to give the floor to all who feel they belong to the huge family of political prisoners in the world.

Last but not least, it is important at this point to thank all who assisted in making this dream come true. This book would never have been born without the kind help of Kamila Nováková and Justin A. Osswald who translated it to English from the Czech original. Many volunteers including Marcela Kubíčková, Michal Louč, Berta Štěpánová and many others contributed to the existence of our initiative with great enthusiasm. The Czech non-profit organization ANO pro Evropu (YES for Europe) gave us the auspices for running a project supported by the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission. Some of the necessary costs related to publishing this book were covered by this project. Another important partner to be mentioned is the Czech Oral History Association and mainly its President, Mirek Vaněk, who kindly supported our work which, in reality, is a great understanding. Special thanks goes to Ondřej Kafka, head of Kafka Design Studio, and Jana Petrželová, graphic designer, who gave this book its visual identity.

However, the biggest gratitude shall be expressed to the heroes of this book. The ten former political prisoners introduced in this book are the most precious result of this project. Their stories are the peak of an iceberg of victims of political oppression in the sea of oblivion. Unfortunately, one of the narrators, Mr. Jozef Kycka, will not be able to read this book anymore as he passed away before it was published. It is for the memory of people like him, respected wise men and women, that we run initiatives like Political Prisoners.eu. Therefore, we wish to dedicate this book to all the political prisoners who are now unable to read it.

*The authors
Prague, Christmas 2008*

Historical Overview

Postwar Development of Czechoslovakia

The postwar development of Czechoslovak society was deeply affected by the wider historical and geopolitical context of the region. The world was divided between two superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States, which seriously altered the European political scene. The superpowers fought together against Nazi Germany, but afterwards their relations deteriorated until they and their respective allies coalesced into two antagonistic blocs. Reunited Czechoslovakia wanted to become “a bridge between East and West”; a country that would connect both blocs while maintaining good diplomatic, economic, and political relations with both powers (though Czechoslovak politicians were sympathetic to the Soviet Union and by 1948 managed to silence most of those who opposed it). As described below, the government was unsuccessful in this ambition, and from 1945 to 1948 Czechoslovakia leaned more and more towards the Soviet Union.

The end of WWII brought great changes in the political, economic, and social sphere to Czechoslovakia. The most important change was in the country’s population: between two and three millions of German inhabitants were forcibly relocated from the Czechoslovak border area. This often chaotic transfer ended the centuries-old coexistence of Germans and Czechs in the area. Czech resentment against the occupying Germans and a desire for revenge after the WWII meant that this expulsion involved many cases of impulsive violence, inhumane behavior, and the humiliation of Germans. During this wild and uncontrolled resettlement between nineteen and thirty thousand people died. The organized part of the transfer began on January 1, 1946, when the Great Powers gave their consent at the Potsdam Conference on August 2, 1945. Due to the resettlement, Czechoslovakia lost more than 20% of the population, which caused a huge economic struggle in border areas where the population volume never recovered. The memory of the German population was meant to disappear forever. German names of villages, streets, and public places were dispatched. The Czechoslovak government also attempted to displace the Hungarian population living in southern Slovakia. This transfer lacked international support and was thus largely unsuccessful.

Another effect of the war was the pursuit and punishment of Nazi collaborators. As in Germany where the leaders of Nazi Germany faced the Nuremberg Trials in 1945, some Czechoslovaks of various nationalities were also punished for their collaboration with the Nazi regime. They were tried on the basis of Retribution Decrees Number 16 and 17. The members of the Protectorate government were judged by the newly established National Court, setting an influential political precedent and affecting judicial independence. Low-level collaborators and other people who cooperated with the Nazi powers were judged by the Special People’s Courts. In total more than 730 people were sentenced to death, and more than 33,000 people were sentenced to long lasting punishments. The retribution processes were conducted in an atmosphere of exacerbated emotions, accompanied by various forms of extrajudicial repression. Some people became targets of hatred and personal revenge, envy and other base motives.

Postwar Rise of the Left and the Election of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

With the end of WWII, the political situation in Czechoslovakia turned dramatically towards the left. Of course, this was a worldwide phenomenon, and similar situations arose in places like Italy and France. In fact, after the war many right-leaning political parties were banned outright. In Czechoslovakia, this meant the end of the Czech Agrarian Party and the Slovakian People's Party. These two parties were prohibited on the basis that they "strongly overstepped the interests of the country."¹ A new political bloc was established under the name *National Front of Czechs and Slovaks*, which profoundly shaped the national political stage. There were four Czech parties after the war: the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia², the Czechoslovak People's Party, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party³, and the Czechoslovak Social Democracy. There were also two Slovak parties: the Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Slovakia. The government from 1945 to 1948 was known as a "delimited democracy" because there was no opposition against the National Front, which allowed the party to mold all state policies and to influence the main matters and business issues of the country. Its decisions were accepted completely and its laws applied to all those in government, parliament, and others in public service. The National Front was in a way built largely above the parliament and especially outside democratic control. Government power was concentrated in a chairman and five deputies who represented each of the political parties. These six people decided all of the important questions and in this way they held an unusual amount of power.

The different political situation changed the economic sphere as well. Extensive nationalization was introduced on the basis of Presidential Decrees in 1945. In addition to the confiscation of property of expelled and relocated Germans, there was a large, one-time nationalization of mines, large industrial enterprises (essentially above 500 employees), food industry, banks, and private insurers. Before that, the production and distribution of films was nationalized. This set Czechoslovakia on the path towards socialism. After the communist coup d'état in February 1948, the process of nationalization was completed, and remaining businesses gradually got into the hands of the state. State enterprises enforced a production monopoly and dominated the market. In the early sixties, the private sector remained almost inexistent. Its main drivers were the two political powers: the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party. Nationalization happened in other countries in Western Europe as well, but its reach was not as extensive as the Czechoslovak case. This was because the compensation was expected, and denationalization was eventually planned.

The next big change was with agrarian policy reform. Land confiscated from Germans, Hungarians, and collaborators was given to landless Czechoslovaks and small farmers. Although this land was mainly located in the Czechoslovak border area, there were also changes in

1 **The Republican Party of Agriculture and Farming**, the Agrarian Party for short, was one of the most influential parties in the interwar period. It was often blamed for Nazi collaboration during WWII. However, many of its representatives joined the resistance movement at home and abroad and had no sympathy towards Nazi occupants. As was already mentioned, the representatives of the Protectorate government were sentenced to imprisonment after the war.

Hlinka's Slovakian People's Party was a Slovakian right wing political party, which existed in the first half of the 20th century. Its original aim was the autonomy of Slovakia, but gradually an authoritative and fascistic tendency grew within the party. It was a leading party of the newly established Slovak Republic on March 14, 1939. The main ideologies this party proclaimed were: catholic clergy, nationalistic intelligentsia, and a Christian and nationalistic thinking nation.

2 Here referred to as "the Communist Party" as well.

3 Not to be confused with the Nazi Party NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party). The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party was a rather left wing party.

the interior. This agrarian reform was orchestrated mainly by the Communist Party, earning it many votes in the election in 1946. Changes in agriculture followed after the communist takeover during the process of collectivization, where private farmers were forced to transfer their assets into agricultural cooperatives. Collectivization had a great impact on the lives of other residents of rural areas, because they disrupted traditional social ties and cultural habits. Rebels and opposition to these changes were persecuted and even sentenced to prisons and penal labor camps.

The Successful Elections of the Communist Party

The first postwar elections in Czechoslovakia took place on May 26, 1946, and these were the last democratic parliamentary elections to happen for a long time. In the Czech lands, four different parties were campaigning: the Communist, Social Democratic, National Socialists, and the People's Party. In Slovakia there were two possible winners: the democrats or the communists. Just before the elections, two more parties were established: the Freedom Party and Labor Party. The voters who did not agree with existing parties had the chance to express it with so-called *white ballots*. It was expected that these ballots would be used by supporters of prohibited parties. Communist Party slogans had one main theme: *"There's more work for the country, and it's our work."* The Party also claimed that it would work on construction and farming without benefit to itself. The economic effects of their activity were weak, but it earned them political clout. The Communist Party won over 40% of the total vote, and for the first time in the history of Czechoslovakia, it became an official major part of the government. It benefited from postwar attitudes and expectations, and its ideas spread wildly in the middle class and people living in the country. The party mainly received the votes of the previously mentioned Agrarian Party, which was not allowed to run. The day after the elections, Monday, May 27, the official Communist Party newspaper *Rudé Právo*⁴ came up with the banner headlines: *"Communists as a Leading Power of the Nation – No political party ever had so much support before – In democratic elections the population proved and extended the communist mandate – The nation is happy – Only a few people used the white ballots against the People's Democratic Regime and against the National Front."*

President Beneš, one of the founders of the First Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, pre-WWII President and President in exile, was again unanimously elected as Head of State, and on July 2, 1946, he announced his new government, which was represented by the communist Prime Minister Klement Gottwald. The government included a new constitution and a two-year economic plan in its program aimed at renewing the damaged postwar economy.

Governmental Crisis and the Communists Take Over

Major change for the growing Eastern Bloc came in 1947. That year, relations between the Great Powers became tenser and communists openly paraded their plans for regional domination. This also affected the Czechoslovak political sphere. In July 1947 the U.S. came up with an initiative to aid Europe with economic support to help rebuild European economies after the end of WWII named after the U.S. Secretary of State, George C. Marshall. Czechoslovakia want-

4 **Rudé právo** – (English: Red Right) a daily newspaper of the Communist Party which played an important propaganda role until 1989.

ed to participate, foreseeing a fast recovery with the help of American money, and accepted an invitation to the plenary meeting in Paris. The Soviet Union refused to participate in this plan, meaning that Czechoslovak foreign policy was in direct opposition to the policies of the Soviet Union. Participation in the Marshall Plan determined individual country's development for many years to come and influenced which side of the Cold War the country eventually joined. On July 9, the Czechoslovak delegation, composed of Prime Minister Klement Gottwald, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Masaryk, Minister of Defense Prokop Drtina and other influential politicians left for negotiations with the Soviet Union. On the same day at 11 p. m., they were ushered into Stalin's office. The night ended with the Kremlin's ultimatum: If Czechoslovakia did not call off its participation in the Marshall Plan by July 10 at 4 p. m., there would be serious consequences to Czechoslovak-Soviet relations. The final decision was made by the Czechoslovak government and a special meeting was called early in the morning on July 10. After long discussion, the Czechoslovak government rejected the invitation from Paris. Jan Masaryk, son of the first Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, commented after returning from Moscow, "*To Moscow I left as a Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, but I came back as Stalin's plowboy.*" Accepting Stalin's ultimatum also cemented the reality that Czechoslovakia had come under the control of Moscow.

In its fight to obtain power, the Communist Party used various means; democratic means such as demonstrations and strikes and undemocratic methods including intimidations. A very influential institution was the State Secret Police (Czech: *Státní bezpečnost* or *StB*) under the control of the Communist Party. On February 17, 1948, the government crisis began in Czechoslovakia. A government meeting began in the morning in response to a report by the Minister of Justice. This report was connected with a government resolution that was given out on February 13, which commanded the communist Minister of Internal Affairs to halt personnel changes in the State Secret Police. This government resolution was ignored, and the ministers of three non-communist parties, the National Socialist Party, the People's Party, and the Democratic Party, decided to resign. They were relying on the assumption that they would be supported by the Social Democrats and also by the President, who would refuse their resignation or name a new government. However, the communists mobilized the entire party and worked effectively to influence the public. One section of the population was threatened by the communists, and the other part was supporting its politics. The whole crisis then started to snowball, and after one week everything was settled. The Communist Party became the leading political power in Czechoslovakia.

During this momentous week in February 1948, powerful new organizations called the *Action Committees of the National Front* were established. Although the existence of Action Committees had no legal basis, they were created in municipalities, factories, publishing houses, schools, and offices, as well as the ministries and the parliament. They issued decisions that deprived jobs and functions of the political opponents of the Communist Party. These decisions did not appeal. The *People's Militias*, armed unit forces, were established by factory workers and controlled by the Communist Party as well. The emergence and existence of the People's Militia was not regulated by any law.

A one-hour general strike to support Gottwald ensued on February 24. Prime Minister Gottwald, with his cabinet, refused to resign. Two Social Democrats and two independent ministers

named Jan Masaryk⁵ and Ludvík Svoboda⁶ also remained. Gottwald suggested to President Beneš that he fill the missing positions in his cabinet with members of other parties whose ministers had recently resigned, and unfortunately President Beneš did not realize that all of the parties had been infiltrated by the communists. Three parties were relying on the final word of the President to solve this government crisis, but President Beneš succumbed to Gottwald's persuasion. Directly after the Presidential signature, Klement Gottwald went to Wenceslas Square where he presented on a stage to thousands of supporters and said, *"I am just coming back from the Castle, from the President of the State. This morning I convinced him to accept the resignations of several ministers who resigned on February 20, and at the same time I also recommended a list of people to him who should replace them and help reconstruct the government. I can tell you that the President accepted all of my suggestions exactly the way they were put to him."* During this February coup, the Communist Party paved the way to full control of the state.⁷

Dissenters and all anti-communist forces were immediately hunted down and imprisoned. Many soldiers who fought during WWII in Western countries, politicians, priests, nuns, businessmen, and even farmers and workers disappeared behind the gates of prisons and penal labor camps beginning in February 1948. In addition, no one needed to be charged with a crime to be interned for up to two years in the forced labor camp. Suspicion was evidence enough of wrongdoing. Some of the reasons people were put into the camps included *"having contacts abroad; his sister is Austrian; does not have a positive attitude toward the regime; listening to the foreign radio; did not agree with nationalization; was spreading false messages; owned a luxurious residence; in touch with stockholders; he is a gambler, he is avoiding work; wife was against nationalization, [...]"* Anyone between the ages of 18 and 60 was eligible for internment, and many communists in power used internment as a tool of retaliation against their political enemies.

Searching for the Enemy: Political Show Trials in Former Czechoslovakia

As of 1948 the big wheel of various political show trials against political elites, clergymen and, several years later, even the Communist Party functionaries started spinning. These trials were mainly run by the powerful State Secret Police. They prepared the trials very well and in many cases actually fabricated them: constructing the charge, coercing the victims with physical and psychological violence, pushing them to memorize the scenario of the trial. The accusations were supposed to be very serious because the punishments befitting the crime were to be very severe. In this way, the communist power was strengthened, and the Czechoslovak

5 **Jan Masaryk** (1886–1948) – a son of the first Czechoslovakian President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. From 1925–1938 he was an ambassador to England and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the government in exile. After the war he held the same position back in Czechoslovakia. He died on March 10, 1948, of unnatural circumstances. There are three theories about his death: it was a murder (he was thrown out of a window); he committed suicide (he jumped out of a window); or the third version is that he was escaping from his apartment (where enemies were at that moment), and he was climbing on the window sill and fell down.

6 **Ludvík Svoboda** (1895–1979) – an Eastern Front Army General, in 1945 a Czechoslovakian Minister of Defense as an "independent" politician and in 1968 was elected as the Czechoslovakian President.

7 There are various opinions on the situation in February 1948. Some say it was just a formal finish of a long-term process directed from the U.S.S.R. that had already begun during WWII, continuing in the years 1945–1947. The governmental crisis was just a pinafore that made things quicker. The same results would probably have been reached anyway, but this is an issue which has already been heavily debated among scholars.

population was threatened and afraid. The Soviet consultants were taking part in the biggest trials, making them up and giving advice to the investigators on how they should obtain a confession. Besides this, they were also providing psychological support. They legitimized the violent acts of the investigators, and if there were doubts about the political trials and the tactics used, then the Czechoslovak State Secret Police were told that the Soviet consultants had additional secret incriminating information which justified the trials. Since Czechoslovak investigators did not have this information, these tactics could have seemed excessive without the validation that the Soviet presence provided. One of the main investigators who worked on these big trials wrote in his memoirs, *"I remember one chat with a guy from the People's Militia named Mr. Brůha, who told me shortly after his entrance into the State Secret Police, 'You know, if there weren't these consultants I wouldn't believe anything and I would think we're doing some pretty dirty business, but this way it's different. Those people know what they are doing.'"*⁸

The main wave of the political trials took five years. The State Court, which was established for the purpose of conducting show trial, gave out 233 death penalties—out of which 178 people were executed. One of the biggest trials of the first years of the socialist dictatorship involved General Heliodor Píka⁹, who worked in one of the foreign partisan groups during WWII. In January 1949 he was sentenced to the death and was executed. Coincidentally, General Heliodor Píka was a former schoolmate of the French President Charles De Gaulle. When he was executed, an entire day of national sorrow was observed in France.

The whole world paid attention to the trial of the ex-National Socialist politician Milada Horáková¹⁰ in June 1950. There were another twelve politicians, publishers, and public officers also involved in this trial. The arrangements for the trial were coordinated by Soviet consultants who, among others, established a special procedure for the accused. The accused people had to learn and memorize their speeches for the court over and over again. The way the processes looked and the truth that everything was decided before the trial had even begun are illustrated in words of Antonie Kleinerová, who was one of the thirteen accused in Horáková's process: *"Šváb [an interrogator] was present at my hearing three times. During each visit he smashed my face until it would bleed. At the last meeting he yelled at me, 'If you confess or not, that doesn't matter. We have sentences for you anyways...'"*

The whole trial was subject to communist propaganda. In factories, offices, and even schools, people could get tickets to enter the courtroom. Working people were taken there by buses.¹¹

8 KAPLAN, Karel (Ed.). *StB o sobě. Výpověď vyšetřovatele Bohumila Doubka [StB about itself. The testimony of the investigator Bohumil Doubek]*. Praha, 2002, pp. 61–62.

9 **General Heliodor Píka** (1887–1949) – a Czechoslovakian soldier and legionnaire. During WWII he formed an army unit of Czechoslovakian soldiers in the Soviet Union. In May 1945 he returned to Prague where he was named the Deputy of the Chief of General Staff of Czechoslovakian Army. After February 1948 he was arrested and executed. In 1968 his process was renewed and fully rehabilitated.

10 **JUDr. Milada Horáková** (1901–1950) – a Czech politician. During WWII she was arrested and brutally interrogated by the Gestapo. She was sentenced to death, which was then changed to life imprisonment. The rest of the war she spent in the prison in Terezín. After the war she joined the National Socialist Party. In 1949 she was arrested, sentenced to death in the communist political processes. She was fully rehabilitated in 1968.

11 This "theater" with monster processes is remembered also by former political prisoner Josef Čech: *"Here in Pardubice [city in Eastern Bohemia] they ran the monster processes in the Grand hotel. That doesn't exist any more, but it was the biggest hall in the town for 400 of 500 people. They were giving us tickets to that. People used to go to watch the processes and they were so fanatic that they would really see criminals in those victims. There were for example businessmen who just hid their fabrics and were later detected as 'fat cats' who wanted to earn during a crisis. They paid for the fabric, and they were just saving it for a better moment to sell it!"*

The trial was also extraordinary because of the public's acceptance. After the first three days the court was swamped with appeals from factories, offices, and towns. All of them demanded cruel punishment and most of them demanded the death penalty. Similar appeals had even been voted on by pupils at some primary schools. The whole thing went so far that the accused defendants' kids were forced to disown their own parents.¹²

Although the process was meticulously prepared and practiced, its progression sometimes got out of the organizers' hands when the accused endeavored to defend themselves in court, attempting to disprove some of the accusations. The whole trial lasted nine days. Each day, after the court was over, officers from the State Secret Police met with a member of the government and evaluated the run of the day. The process resulted in four death penalties, none of which the protests from abroad could prevent.¹³

Another group of people who often got long sentences were members of the clergy and Catholic intellectuals. The Catholic Church gradually became a target for persecution beginning in the spring of 1949. In December 1949, an alleged miracle happened in a small village named Čihošť in Eastern Bohemia. During the mass given by priest Josef Toufar, a half-meter-long cross (19 inches) placed on the main altar moved a couple times from side to side. This event was recorded in the history of the country as the *Čihošť Miracle*. The Secret State Police locked up pastor Toufar in January 1950. During the process, he was supposed to "confess" that he had staged the cross's movement. He was tortured and as a result of the torture he died on February 25, 1950.

The universities and colleges where future Czechoslovak intellectuals were coming of age were not exempt from pursuit, either. On March 4, 1948, a meeting of teachers and professors was held at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University. So-called reactive teachers and students were suspended. The only person who stood up against that decision was the professor Růžena Vacková¹⁴, who paid for her courage with fifteen years in prison. Political processes were launched against all sections of society and did not omit even the highest representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Beginning in 1950, the interrogators of the State Secret Police concentrated on "searching for the enemy even among its own." The leading communist investigated in this way was the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Rudolf Slánský.¹⁵ His process was nothing special in the Soviet Eastern Bloc. Similar processes were run in other countries as well. In Hungary the Secretary of Foreign Affairs László Rajk was sentenced; in Bulgaria it was Trajčo Kostov; in Poland Władysław Gomułka. After months of physical and psychological force, all of the accused on trial with Slánský were gathered at the courthouse in Pankrác. The trial took place from November 20 until the 27, 1952. All of the accused had

12 The stories of children whose parents were arrested can be found at this website: www.enemysdaughters.com.

13 Many smaller series of trials started all over the country after this one. In thirty-nine processes, 639 people were sentenced; ten people to death penalty and forty-eight to life sentences.

14 **Růžena Vacková** (1901–1982) – a professor of classical archeology, an esthetician, and an art historian. She studied archeology at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague. During WWII she participated in anti-Nazi activities. In 1947 she was named an adjunct professor of the university. In February 1948 she was the only professor taking part in the anti-communism demonstrations of students, in the first term of the academic year 1950–51 she could not teach, February 22, 1952, she was arrested and sentenced to twenty-two years in prison. She was released in spring 1967, and in 1969 she was fully rehabilitated. In 1971 she was de-rehabilitated. In January 1977 she was one of the first to sign the statement of Charter 77. October 28, 1992, she was posthumously honored with the Decoration of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

15 **Rudolf Slánský** (1901–1952) – Czechoslovak communist politician, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and General Secretary of the party (1945–1951).

to memorize their testimonies, which were written by investigators. They also had to rehearse a couple of times before the main trial. The process had strong support throughout the whole country; more than 8,500 people openly supported the sentences, out of which a majority voted for the death penalty.

There were fourteen people on trial besides General Secretary Slánský, including Vladimír Clementis, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Artur London¹⁶, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Karel Šváb, the Deputy Secretary of the Interior. All of these people ranked highly in the communist hierarchy. In the end, eleven death penalties were issued and all were executed in the morning hours of December 3 at Pankrác prison. Ashes of the condemned were scattered by members of the State Secret Police on a road near Prague.

Methods and Techniques of Secret Police Investigations

"You are being arrested" were the words that changed lives of tens of thousands of people in former Czechoslovakia. The words meant a complete turning point in their lives had been reached. All of a sudden after these words, one fell into another world that included brutal interrogations by the interrogators of the State Secret Police. Trials and interrogations hardly ever took place without psychological and physical violence. Using cruel methods was indirectly encouraged at the meetings and trainings of State Secret Police investigators. It even became a part of the criteria for their work evaluation. Investigators who were not meeting the requirement and did not use enough violence or force were considered weak and inefficient.

Why were such cruel and inhuman methods used? Bohumil Doubek explains, *"Since we had no convincing evidence or testimony, Karel Košťál¹⁷ and I were told that a sophisticated enemy and experienced spy does not leave any material or proof and we have to push him to confession. We were also told that these kinds of people are very obstinate and we cannot give them time to get ready for trials. The [Soviet] consultants were emphasizing the need to tire the person's nerves out, make him sure that he has no chance to be saved and point out that a confession could give him at least some kind of an advantage."*¹⁸

The incarcerated were beaten in various ways. They suffered from sleep deprivation, were forced to pace in their cells back and forth, often did not receive any food, and faced the threat that their wives, children, or friends would be arrested as well. However, there were also other more drastic methods of interrogations; from tying or hanging up the prisoners, hitting the private areas, to using electricity and even faking their executions. Interviews in this book present various examples of torture and forms of interrogation violence. Josef Kycka remembers his experience with torture in the electric bathtub, Augustin Bubník the use of physical violence in a Prague prison called *Domeček* [Small house], Josef Pospíšil describes the humiliated interrogation while sitting naked, etc. We can picture how the hearings were run and what was happening during the investigation thanks to the report from a compliant of Dr. Horňanský who complained about practices in prison in Uherské Hradiště in South Moravia: *"He [the suspected] said he was assaulted with fists to his head so that he bled out of his nose. He was put*

16 **Artur London** (1915–1986) – Czechoslovak communist politician and co-defendant in the Slánský Trial. London was accused of being a Zionist, Trotskyite and Titoist and sentenced to life in prison, but he was released in 1955 and rehabilitated in 1963. He wrote a memoir of his investigation called *Doznání [The Confession]*.

17 **Karel Košťál** – State Secret Police investigator and the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs.

18 **KAPLAN, Karel**. *Nebezpečná bezpečnost [Dangerous Security]*. Brno, 1999, p. 239.

face down and beaten with rubber truncheons on the chest, lower back, buttocks, and legs... He was mainly hit on his feet, where blister bruises appeared afterwards. He was forced to do knee-bends, and if he fell, he was kicked...Then electricity was used during the investigation process; electrodes were put into his shoes...After the hearing he was put onto a metal bed, and each arm was tightened to the bars of the headboard."

Women were not spared from this inhuman treatment, either. One example is the life story of Julie Hrušková, who miscarried after the violent interrogation. The same story can be heard from the investigation report of Vlasta Charvátová¹⁹, whose brutal treatment led to the loss of her baby, *"I had to get naked and, without a mattress or blankets. I was kept for another ten days... Afterwards I was put into a dark room, and I found out I was bleeding badly, so I told this to Pešek, who was the investigator, and also to the woman who was guarding me. I mentioned I was afraid of miscarrying my baby. I asked both of them for a doctor, but Pešek just answered that it would be better off if another beast like me would never be brought into the world."*

Physical violence was one of the most common ways people were pushed into confession, or at least to say anything at all, regardless of whether or not it was true. Some people also went through the Gestapo hearings of WWII and compared them in this way: *"The Fascist torturer wanted to tear out the truth from you, the communists in this country wanted the lie."* Demoralizing a person was also a favored method. These techniques also crossed the bounds of rationality, as illustrated by the words of Czechoslovak communist Ladislav Holdoš who said that, *"In the morning something terrible happened. The door opened and into the pigsty came a guard with a tub full of shit. He was telling me to wash myself. I refused, showing him the water in the tub wasn't clean. The guard was ordering me though, to wash myself! Again, I didn't want to do it. So he grabbed my neck and put my head into the tub starting, and I started to fling about... Nowhere [in any other prison that Mr. Holdoš went through] did they ever degrade us like they did in this one instant."*

The investigators found another way to persuade communists, because they were the people who believed in communism and its ideas. Ladislav Holdoš, who was a committed and passionate communist, described the tactic this way: *"In October 1951 I started to 'plead' again. The Party wants that, so I will do it. There was Doubek, the boss of the investigators and he was present during one of my interrogations, throttling me and yelling that I would confess to something that I had never dreamed of... Doubek said, ' You are on one side of the river; the Party is on the other. If you want to help it, you will have to jump into the cold water, swim across, and confess your guilt as well as the others. Then everything will be alright.'"* The methods of investigation aimed to destroy the suspects' morality, identity, undermine their dignity, and force them to into a confession. The confession was very important for investigators because it legitimized the whole show trial process. From their point of view, it was necessary to make the accused person speak. It was not important whether what he said was the truth or a lie; it was more important whether the admission suited the direction of the investigation. At the end of the investigation there was a trial, which was a farce because the sentences were already prepared. In any case,

¹⁹ **Vlasta Charvátová** (1925) – a former political prisoner, studied at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague. After her studies she made a living as an interpreter. She was arrested when she wanted to help her friends break free out of a prison in Litoměřice on August 22, 1949. She shot and wounded a guard during the attempted rescue. The whole group were arrested. Vlasta herself went through brutal interrogations, and she miscarried during that time. Her husband was sentenced to the death penalty, but Vlasta Charvátová was sentenced for life sentence. She was released on December 18, 1963.

none of the sentences were short; a lot of the punishments were longer than ten years. When such a sentence was decided, many people felt relief because in many cases there was a possibility that they could have had a worse sentence; the death penalty.

Prisons and Penal Labor Camps in Czechoslovakia

Let's focus shortly on which prisons and penal labor camps the prisoners could be sent to after their trials. The Czechoslovak prison system was distinct due to the uranium penal labor camps, which were located near Slavkov and Příbram, but the most "famous" place was Jáchymov. These areas were located mainly in North-Western Bohemia, excluding Příbram which was in Central Bohemia (south of Prague). The conditions here were incredibly cruel. The male prisoners worked in uranium mines where they were exposed to dangerous radon gas and radioactive dust. Work was hard, and there was a high danger of injury. The food and hygiene was inadequate. Prisoners' lives were also complicated by the weather conditions of the locations, where in wintertime the temperatures dropped well below freezing in all of the camps. In 1953 these camps held almost 15,000 prisoners, which was nearly a third of the total number of people imprisoned in Czechoslovakia at that time.

What did these camps look like? In Jáchymov, for example, the camps were surrounded by two rows of fencing which were 2.5 meters high and topped with barbed wire. In between the inner and outer fence there was a space of about 1 to 1.5 meters wide tilled with white sand so that any potential escapees could be clearly seen. In the corners and in spaces between the corners there were guard towers which were six meters high and outfitted with lights and machine guns. The whole fencing system was lit with strong lights. In case the electricity was cut off, there were special generators that could produce separate power. Prisoners were housed in small wooden houses which they could not leave during the night. Mine shafts were placed right inside some camps, but in others the prisoners had to trek to work. In these cases, special corridors were built leading to the mine. In the case of Camp Nikolaj (Jáchymov mining district) the whole shift (some 300 prisoners) was tied together with steel cords into so-called human packages, also known as *Russian Buses*, to avoid escape.

The names of the camps were usually derived from the names of the mines where the prisoners worked. The two most infamous mines belonged to camps that the communists named after the basic motto of the French Revolution; Rovnost [Equality] and Bratrství [Brotherhood]. The third camp was named Svornost [Concord]. To call it Freedom would have probably been too provocative. In Camp Rovnost, one well known Commander was František Paleček. He was especially known for his cruel re-education of Jehovah's Witnesses²⁰. He also beat prisoners without any particular reason. His activities during his duty were examined by the Committee of the Ministry of Interior in 1968, but he was never sentenced for his cruel behavior. In the Vojna Memorial near the town of Příbram, there is the first open-air museum revealing the conditions that the prisoners lived in and what a prison camp looked like. Another open-air museum will be soon opened in Jáchymov in Štola č. 1 [Drift No. 1].

20 Former political prisoner Josef Čech speaks about Jehovah's Witnesses in one of the interview: "[The Jehovah's Witnesses] came because they didn't want to join the army or work in the mines to get the uranium. These people were abused in ways you can't imagine. They would let them stand in uniforms with hats in the snow and frost until they would fall down. Then they were taken to the infirmary and that was repeated several times. They didn't break them so they transported them to other camps where they worked in laundries and other departments that were not attached to the war or violence."

One Jáchymov camp labeled by the secret mark “L” is known for its devastating impact on the prisoners’ health which is why the prisoners called it a liquidation camp. It was not an extermination camp (as were none of the penal labor camps in communist Czechoslovakia). It was a small camp with only four buildings. The headquarters were in one building, and in another was a kitchen and infirmary. Prisoners lived in the remaining two buildings. Prisoners classified as “incorrigible” and deemed the most dangerous were sent there. Lastly, the most learned and intelligent people in Czechoslovakia were also gathered there, from bishops and priests to officers, professors of theology, and high school teachers. This camp was also where the infamous *Red Tower of Death* was located, where the clean uranium ore was ground up into powder for transport. Prisoners had to work there without any special protective equipment and were constantly exposed to radioactive dust at work as well as in their quarters, which were built in close proximity to the tower.²¹

What was the arrival to the camps like? Were the prisoners taught how to work in the mines? It was ludicrous. One of the political prisoners described his first working day: *“When I went down into the pit for the first time in my life I was met by an official guard, and he told me that I would be a breaker – that I would chip. They put hoses, drilling sticks, and a drill in front of me. Up at the surface I already got a special carbide lamp, but I didn’t have a clue how it worked. I also got a helper who was a math professor, and he didn’t know how to hold a shovel. Then we were told that we were supposed to make a progress of thirty centimeters a day, per person, and that the progress was measured four times a month. The guard’s helper, who was handing us the equipment, added, ‘If you don’t meet the requirements, then you will not get anything to eat. Good luck!’”*²²

The conditions in the uranium penal labor camps were the worst out of all Czechoslovak prisons. The quotas were high and not fulfilling them meant restricted meals. People worked in a very harmful radioactive environment, because of which most of them left with various related diseases and different types of cancer.²³ The headquarters made these conditions even more difficult by giving prisoners extra jobs in addition to their main duties. This extra work often consisted of nonsensical tasks. For example, prisoners would often be given the task of moving one pile of snow to another place. Oftentimes the prisoners were given the added punishment of being put in solitary confinement, which was like prison within a prison. They would be placed there for a variety of offenses, which were often fabricated. In solitary they only received half-portions of food, but the biggest problem was that they were not given any blankets. This was unbelievably cruel in a place where the temperature could reach minus twenty degrees Celsius. The solitary cell was often just a reinforced concrete bunker without even glass in the window. Such a stay in solitary confinement is well described by Alois Macek: *“Solitary confinement on Vršek was one of the worst things I went through during my whole imprisonment. In winter when the temperature was between minus fifteen and minus twenty degrees Celsius we didn’t have any beds. There were only iron bars put into the ground, and at night you could put wooden boards to lie down, but we didn’t get any boards. We also didn’t get any*

21 For more information about the *Red Tower of Death* and the work conditions in the camp read the interviews with Hubert Procházka and Zdeněk Kovařík included in this book.

22 PETRÁŠOVÁ, Ludmila. *Vězeňské tábory v jáchymovských uranových dolech 1949–1961* [The penal labour camps in uranium mines in Jáchymov 1949–1961]. In *Sborník archivních prací, vol. XLIV*, 1994, p. 392.

23 For example, Mr. Hubert Procházka (on the page 166) gave testimony about his health problems due to the uranium’s radioactivity.

blankets, and there were three of us – Jindra Hermann, Sotolář, and I started a hunger strike because this was beyond what a human could possibly stand."

However, inside the prisons the stay was not much easier or more pleasant in communist Czechoslovakia. Pankrác and Ruzyně were the most infamous prisons in Prague. Many political prisoners waited for their group trials in the prison in Pankrác where the hospital for prisoners was also located. Another important prison was the one in Plzeň-Bory, located in the western half of Bohemia. The building was in the shape of a star so that all of its parts were visible from one location. In this prison there was a special department called *Kremlin* where the infamously cruel Commander Václav Trepka²⁴ operated. This department was safeguarded with double bars in the corridors and the windows, and the doors of the cells were fortified with special locks. The prison at Bory is known for the case in which one of its warders, Čeněk Petelík, was accused of and sentenced to death for aiding prisoners. Six other warders were sentenced to long-term sentences in prison during the same trial. It was a falsified and phony case in which the warder was set-up in another publicized show trial so that their colleagues could witness everything. The trial was an example of a communist tactic to deter warders from aiding the prisoners whom they guarded.

There was also a prison called Leopoldov located in Slovakia where political prisoners with high sentences were placed. The conditions in this prison were also very miserable and inhumane. Food and accommodation were totally inadequate. In 1956, a new department was established called *Vatikán* [Vatican], which served to separate the clergy from the rest of the inmates. Similar conditions existed in other prisons such as in Mírov and Valdice.

For women, there was a separate prison in the town of Pardubice. In the beginning, the government was placing political prisoners with sentences of ten years or higher here, although in the late 1950s this rule was changed and women had to share the place with murderers, prostitutes, and thieves. There was a special department called *Hrad* [Castle] where the politically rebellious women were located. This department held notable prisoners such as Dagmar Skálová, Vlasta Charvátová, and Charles University professor Růžena Vacková. In total there were sixty-four women in this department. Besides this department, there was also a department called *Vatikán* [Vatican] for nuns and a department called *Underworld* where they mainly put women with venereal diseases, prostitutes, women with mental problems, and habitual offenders. Another prison for women was Želiezovce located in Slovakia, where women worked out in the fields in very difficult conditions.²⁵

Another special prison was used mainly to hold soldiers awaiting hearings. It was the military interrogation facility called *Domeček* [little house], located on Kapucínská street in Prague – Hradčany. It was an institution of the military intelligence service. There they mainly kept soldiers who were forced to testify in certain ways via cruel interrogation methods and torture.

24 **Václav Trepka** (1919–?) – a Commander of prison Plzeň-Bory. Trained as a bricklayer. He was sentenced to five years in prison for listening to the foreign radio and disseminating the anti-Nazi leaflets in 1943. A member of the Communist Party from 1945. He joined the Corps of Prison Guards in the same year. He worked as a guard in Plzeň-Bory prison and in the penal labor camps near uranium mines. From August 1, 1951 to April 30, 1952, he served as Deputy-Commander of the Plzeň-Bory prison and later as its Commander. He was revoked from this position in the year 1968 because of many charges and subsequent investigations by the military prosecutor's office and the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Justice. He is known for his brutality towards prisoners.

25 For more about the conditions in Želiezovce, please refer to Květoslava Moravečková's (on the page 66) or Drahomíra Stuchlíková's (on the page 80) interview.

Professional soldiers were brought there to have their hearings complete with all the cruel tactics utilized during a hearing as advised by Soviet interrogation experts.²⁶

The conditions in Czechoslovak prisons and penal labor camps got much worse after February 1948 when the communists took the power. Bullying became the daily bread – especially for the political prisoners. Warders who had looked after the prisoners for decades were fired and replaced by young warders who were easy for the communists to manipulate. These new warders considered political prisoners to be the biggest criminals; those who wanted to destroy the communist society and put an end to the entire “People’s-Democratic” regime.

Prisoner Diversity in Czechoslovak Jails

The society in communist prisons and penal labor camps was very diverse. In a small place, ex-generals met abbots of different monasteries, prominent politicians and murderers, thieves and Nazi-collaborators. Karel Pecka collected his life experience in a book called *Motázky nezvěstnému [Secret Messages to the Missing Man]*, in it he describes society within the penal labor camps:

“Mukls²⁷ in penal labor camps were divided into groups or classes. The first one, highest in its number, were state prisoners, or so-called political prisoners. The second group was formed by Germans, whose biggest characteristic was passivity. Life had given them a lesson, so they did not show any disdain towards the guards, avoided all possible conflicts, were well disciplined and always fulfilled the commands the way they were used to from the war. From their lines came the lowest number of sneaks. Although they were in cahoots with others, they were not friendly to the political prisoners. The third type were individuals in total disharmony and consisted of criminals. They consisted of any sort of criminal; from murderers, to bullies, or safebreakers, to people who stole something from national property, to rapists [...]. They sought their company and benefited from their position in the group. Many times criminals (also called tattooed) pretended to be political prisoners and behaved very well. The fourth category consisted of collaborators, and the fifth by Slovak Fascists. Except for their gift of hating everything – all Czechs, democracy, all values and ideas – they were characterized by their ability to behave like a parasite; using everything for the own prosperity.”

The prison society could be generally divided into three groups – retribution prisoners, who were sentenced for their activity during war (based on Retribution Decrees of the Czechoslovak President). Many of them were true collaborators, informers, and Nazi helpers; criminal prisoners, who normally populated prisons; and political prisoners. Democratic prison is very different from this situation. During the dictatorship of the Communist Party, political prisoners were seen as the worst group and were sentenced according to Law No. 231/1948 Sb. and

²⁶ See the interview with Mr. Augustin Bubník (on the page 108).

²⁷ *Mukl* – comes from the Czech abbreviation of “a man on death row” (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by the communist or Nazi regimes who were not supposed to be released and were expected to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label was used for all political prisoners.

other similar laws in Czechoslovakia. Among them we could find many innocent people who were just standing in the way of a growing communist rule and also people who actually were actively fighting against the communist dictatorship by printing the leaflets and distributing them widely among the public, or sending secret messages and reports to foreign countries, or were part of the organized anti-communist groups preparing for war. These people were regarded as the most dangerous criminals because they threatened the whole regime.

People from various groups and different moral norms were meeting in prisons or penal labor camps and had to find some *modus-vivendi* to learn how to get along well with each other. Let's have a short look at how the relations among the prisoners looked. On one side there were those who were ready to take advantage of anything they could from prison headquarters. They became functionaries in the camp self-administration, and instead of making the lives of their prison mates easier, they only complicated it. They had power over others, plus they even received some material benefits like packages, visits, letters, or even money tickets. One such functionary in the camp was also a retribution prisoner named Břetislav Jeníček²⁸, who organized a beating group of the camp. This group was officially allowed to beat others, but mainly the vilified political prisoners. Jožka Husek remembers this: *"All in all, they would attack us, political prisoners, and they would hit us, beats us, and kick until we would fall unconscious."* Other functionaries who acted in similar ways included Rudolf Fuchs in Camp Svornost [Concord] and Václav Byžovský in Camp 12 near Slavkov.

On the other hand, there was group of prisoners who made the decision to respect each other. Alois Macek speaks of some in his interview, *"...such thieves and defaulters [who] were quite nice people. I would say criminal prisoners had a high respect for us and tried to behave well towards us. We were tolerant and forbearing because we didn't know what they were sentenced for. It matched quite well together."* All relations must be considered individually. Of course there were always people who felt powerful and liked to terrorize others. On the other hand, there were people who ascribed to moral standards and would never sink as low as to serve the regime. In the end, all of them knew there was just one enemy: the socialist dictatorship, which in prison was represented by warders.

Hunger Strikes and Protests

Life in prison was basically very monotonous, and each day had its rhythm and routine – starting with wake-up calls and ending with bedtime and finally getting to sleep. Sometimes this monotonous life was disturbed a little, especially during protests, hunger strikes, and working strikes. There were not many cases that were large-scale and involved a lot of people, but when they did happen they were spontaneous and never effectively organized. One thing they had in common was that the majority of prisoners joined in without prior agreement.

One famous example was the hunger strike of 1954, which took place in the women's prison in Pardubice. From May 4 to 7, approximately sixty women voluntarily protested and went on a hunger strike. They were all from the department called *Hrad*, meaning they were the prisoners singled out as especially politically subversive. It was called for a commission from the

28 Břetislav Jeníček (1902–1970) – a main camp functionary in prisoners' self-administration in Camp Nikolaj. In 1946, convicted of denunciation as an active collaborator with Gestapo to twenty years of prison. Cooperator with the State Secret Police. Released in 1954.

Ministry of Internal Affairs who then investigated the whole situation. The protestors gained the ability to access basic hygienic products and regular canteen hours.

Sixteen months later, in September 1955, there was another hunger strike which was bigger in its range. The estimated number of prisoners who participated varies. Some estimations say there were about 520 women, whereas others are more conservative, counting only 105 women who participated in the hunger strike. The majority of women I talked to remembered the hunger strike beginning as a protest against the bullying from guards, especially the one they called *Elsa Koch*.²⁹ There are often other reasons mentioned, such as bad food and bad living conditions. Some people say that the exact reason for the hunger strike was the solitary confinement of Dagmar Tůmová. The hunger strike took place for a week, and some women went hungry for even longer, as for example, Julie Hrušková, whose life story is presented in the book. Women who were identified as the main initiators of the protest were transported to the State Secret Police department in Pardubice on December 15, 1955. There they were punished with ten days of solitary confinement. Other women who joined the hunger strike could not write letters, receive parcels, or have visitors.

In Pardubice there was another notable incident involving twelve letters which were sent to the General Secretary of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld about the conditions of the Czechoslovak prisons and penal labor camps. They demanded the basic rights of political prisoners. Some letters were even translated depending on the language skills of the author. Of course the letters were never sent, and even today they remain in the personal files of their authors.

Probably the largest revolt, due to its size, character, length, and resulting punishments, was the so-called *Noodle Revolt* in the penal labor camp Vojna in 1955. It started on Monday, July 3, and even today the participants continue to argue over its origin. Some of them say it was started because the food was so bad that it had worms, some say it was meant as an honor to the anniversary of the United States being established, and some say the Commander of the camp triggered it because he insisted that prisoners line up before each meal. František Šedivý claims, "*The reason for the hunger strike was that we were getting noodles for lunch almost every day. That's also why it's called the Noodle Strike.*" Mr. Šedivý remembers:

"The situation became acute when hardworking prisoners refused to eat boiled noodles served several times in a row and they announced a hunger strike. It looks like a narrow-minded reason, but it had great consequences. The noodles were also refused by other shifts, so Headquarters couldn't allow hungry prisoners back into the shafts. So the hunger strike just changed to a strike. The strike was at the same time as the anniversary of America's independence, so the political implications were even deeper. The Commander called the emergency services, the camp was enclosed, and the guards were more heavily armed. On the next night, a roll call was commanded, and during that time people from the emergency services entered the buildings and began to heavily toss all the cells, also called filcunk. High emotions supported the resistance of the prisoners. When the Commander ordered the lineup after the cell-toss, prisoners re-

29 For more about the hunger strike, see the interviews with Hana Truncová, Julie Hrušková and Jindřiška Havrlantová.

sponded by singing the national anthem. The earnestness of the men who were plundering grew; they threw sugar on the floor together with tobacco, torn-up blankets, mud, and trampled clothes. Wooden walls, where literature was being hidden, as well as the floors, were torn up. It turned into a real mess that could only be ended by uncontrolled violent methods. The majority of our books were destroyed. The hunger strike lasted four days. Some prisoners collapsed because they were physically and psychologically exhausted. On Friday there were just a couple people left who hadn't eaten yet. The whole camp was a real mess. Areas between the buildings that were always fresh and clean were damaged, the flowers were trampled on, and everything that was destroyable was destroyed. During the hunger strike some prisoners were transported to normal prisons, often with extended sentences. So the lineup for each meal was finally enforced together through the worst forms of bullying."

Some prisoners were able to starve until July 9. There were forty-five men who were punished with solitary confinement and sent to normal prisons. Eleven prisoners were sentenced for organizing the strike, and their sentences were raised from eleven to twelve years.

The Never-ending Desire for Freedom: Escapes from Prison

The conditions in the prisons and penal labor camps were inhumane – lack of food, strenuous labor, unhealthy conditions, and nonstop harassment. That is why some prisoners decided to do something about their situation and planned escapes. The escapes were achieved in various ways. Sometimes they were completed by lone individuals, and sometimes they were organized in groups. Some escapes were attempted without much forethought and took advantage of the opportunities at hand. Others were planned with great detail for a couple of months, for example the very popular "dig for freedom" method in a camp called Nikolaj. As for the unsuccessful ones, those usually failed because the very participants of the escape were not careful enough and revealed their plans to too many people. The prisoners always appreciated the insubordination of the successful escape attempts by their peers. They did not mind the punishment that logically followed an escape. Jožka Husek wrote in his book, *"All men stopped being tired, and no one was really mad at the group that escaped. On the contrary, the whole camp was kind of empowered with happiness that the escape was successful."* There were many escapes that were constructed with the assistance of the headquarters and guards of camps. In fact, the biggest escape in the history of the penal labor camps was when twenty prisoners escaped from the mine Kamenná on November 29, 1952. During this escape, there were two mine guards and also one master involved in the plans. The prisoners stole explosives, which they used to make a tunnel from the mines, but they were unfortunately caught soon after escape. In 1953 they were re-tried on new charges, and their new sentences were around three years additional time for prisoners and around eighteen months for the civilian employees. At that time, these sentences were very low.

The most tragic consequence came after the attempted escape of twelve prisoners from mine Number 14 near Slavkov. Prisoners from camp twelve escaped on October 15, 1951. Only four prisoners survived, one of whom, Karel Kukal, was able to give a testimony in his book called *Ten Crosses*. Two of these prisoners were sentenced to death and the third one lost his memory

after the inhumane beatings. Karel Kukal himself was sentenced to another twenty-five years in prison.³⁰ The dead bodies of the participants in the escape were taken back to the camp and left in the open. This left many bad memories for all prisoners who were eyewitness to this brutality. The bodies of their friends who were shot during the escape were thrown into the middle of the courtyard and those who were apprehended alive had to stand next to them while the whole camp marched past without being allowed to stop and pay their respects. If someone did attempt to do this, they were put into solitary confinement for a couple of days. Jožka Jelínek describes this experience, *"From that moment on we had hardly any sense of forgiveness. Even for priest, who had 'love thy enemy' in their job description, this commandment became a life-long problem."*³¹

The escape has another dimension that is important to mention here. We remember one interview with Alois Macek, who was arrested as a nineteen-year-old and sentenced to serve twelve years. While at penal labor camp Mariánská, his friends decided to escape and, knowing Mr. Macek to have a similar attitude, they informed him of their plans. However, Alois Macek refused to participate because they were planning to kill one of the guards on their way to freedom. The escape was ruined, and all of them were caught. Cruel interrogations followed their capture, including a search for other prisoners who were aware of the plan and did not reveal it. After some time, it was revealed that Alois Macek knew about the prisoners' plan. Later, a huge show trial was organized, and many people working in the camp as guards watched it. Four death penalties were sentenced. Alois Macek survived with "only" twenty years of imprisonment. When telling me this sad story where four young lives were lost, Mr. Macek also told me, *"Since then I have always had on my mind, 'If I had reported the planned escape, the whole Confederation of Political Prisoners³² would never have talked to me; I would be the worst bastard; in camp others would be kicking me, and my life would not be worth it, but four people would be alive.' It was the highest principle that I simply could not break."* This "highest principle" which Mr. Macek refers to was the principle established firmly in the prisoner's code of ethics; nobody would snitch. On the other hand, this example shows us the kind of radical dilemmas prisoners were often faced with, the decisions which are remembered heavily and haunt them even today. Many other successful and unsuccessful escapes were attempted. All of them had one thing in common. The desire for freedom.

Life Afterwards

Political prisoners were very often released from prison after a long period of time. It was not an exception that some of them returned home after ten or more years of imprisonment. They could be released after serving their entire sentence, based on probation, on Presidential pardon, or on amnesty. The most frequent case was an amnesty. There were several amnesties during the 1950s which followed the changes in the penal policy in the Soviet Union. However, the significant change in the attitude towards the political prisoners came in the year 1960, in which the victory of socialism in Czechoslovakia was announced. The proposal for amnesty was discussed by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which approved the list of released political prisoners. This amnesty designated 5,319

30 See more in the interview with Mr. Jan Pospíšil (on the page 152).

31 See more in the interviews with Mr. Augustin Bubník (on the page 108) and Mr. Jan Pospíšil.

32 See below the subchapter Life Afterwards and the list of keywords at the end of this book.

people, but three thousand prisoners excluded from this amnesty were regarded as instigators of "subversive" activities. Persons convicted of offenses "against the state" were released on the condition that they would not commit an intentional crime in the next ten years. All political prisoners had to sign a declaration that they would not talk to anyone about the methods of investigation or the conditions in prison. Those released from prison had been strongly warned against attempts at public appearances and interviews about their experience of staying in jail.

Amnesties issued by the President of the Republic served as suitable remedial tools for many years, as each collective act served as the saving grace that enabled the release of many political prisoners without the need to order a retrial. However, it is necessary to mention that these released prisoners were still viewed as criminals, which in turn prevented their full return to society as well as caused an inability to obtain compensation for their unlawful convictions. Interviews with former political prisoners prove them to be well aware of this fact. Some became paranoid of being convicted of even very light offenses; a speeding fine, for instance.

Political prisoners were still socially and civically discriminated against after release. They were not allowed to work in those jobs for which they were qualified. They were additionally prohibited from performing any public function. The majority of narrators more or less confirmed existential problems. In addition, some had to contend with the changing socio-economic status of their families, which represented for many a great mental strain. Moreover, children of released political prisoners were socially discriminated against as well since they could not attend a high school of their choice and were prevented from studying at universities.

Some of the political prisoners were also monitored by the State Secret Police. Some narrators said that they were even lured to cooperate with State Secret Police in exchange for better jobs or better employment for members of their families. Informants were placed at their houses or apartments to live with them and monitor their movements as, for example, Květoslava Moravečková remembers. In addition, the released political prisoners faced with the society's prevailing fears: their former friends were afraid to associate with them. Therefore, some of them did not seek to renew old friendships so as to avoid complicating their lives. These feelings in turn united the community of released political prisoners. They visited each other; confided their problems; and married one another for, as in some of the former prisoners' words, "*nobody could understand them more than the one that went through similar experiences*".

The desire of most political prisoners was to be rehabilitated, to be part of the society with full rights again. This could be done only by full rehabilitation which was, however, undesired by the Communist Party, because, in the opinion of the leadership, information about the vast amount of corruption and persecution undermined the status and authority of the regime. A glimmer of hope in this process was the Prague Spring in 1968 when a space for freedom of the press was opened and all manner of civic activities were created. The question of rehabilitation and correction of past injustices resonated in the society more and more. Among the movements which brought together former political prisoners was Club 231. It is known under the title K 231 and was established on March 31, 1968, in Prague. There were up to eighty thousand members from all over Czechoslovakia. The main goal of this association of former

political prisoners was their rehabilitation – not only judicial, civil, and property, but also political and moral justice.

The search for rehabilitation resulted in Law No. 82/1968 Coll., *Concerning Judicial Rehabilitation*. Surprisingly, the development of judicial rehabilitation did not disturb the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops, but on the other hand, it was gradually made more and more difficult. The biggest change in this process was Law No. 70/1970, which made the rehabilitation of the political prisoners almost impossible. Another change after the invasion was the dissolution of the organization K 231.

For ordinary political prisoners, rehabilitation was very difficult, as is proven by many interviews. Many of the released prisoners did not apply for rehabilitation; other interviewees said that the rehabilitation of 1968 ended in a fiasco, as Drahomíra Stuchlíková or Jozef Kycka recalled. Although some were later rehabilitated and given compensation, in the post-1968 period so-called *normalization*, rehabilitation was abolished, and beneficiaries were forced to return the compensation. Few non-communist ex-political prisoners achieved the full rehabilitation during the rule of the Communist Party. Many have since been rehabilitated only after 1989.

New Life in the Freedom

The biggest change occurred in the year 1989 when the Iron Curtain fell and Czechoslovakia started on a new path of democratization. Unfortunately, many prisoners did not live to see these changes, but for those who witnessed the breaking down of communism, it was a time full of hopes and desires, but disappointments as well. Finally, they were rehabilitated and financially compensated and became again a full part of the majority society. They established the organization *Konfederace politických vězňů České republiky* (KPV ČR – Confederation of the Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic), the main goals of which are to fight against the return of the communist ideology or communist regime, documentation of the crimes committed by the Communist Party, defense of the civil, political, and social rights of the political prisoners, and commemoration of the victims of communism. It plays also a significant role in dealing with the trauma of imprisonment, as well. It provides to its members a variety of meetings where they could share topics, such as torture, interrogation, hunger, and the feeling of extreme cold.

However, the time of big changes meant for them also a time of huge disappointment, because perpetrators responsible for their torture have not been punished even today. Only one person, Ludmila Brožová-Polednová, the female prosecutor of the State Court responsible for the death sentence of the politician Milada Horáková, was convicted and sentenced to six years of prison. Other judges, prosecutors, interrogators, guards etc. escaped punishment. Moreover, the former political prisoners also feel as a great danger the contemporary existence and stable popularity of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, successor of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which was the third most influential political party in the Czech Republic during last election in 2013.

A significant role in building the identity of former political prisoners and their status in the society is played by recognition from the society. Although there are lots of oral history projects at schools, universities, or made by various NGOs, political prisoners from the 1950s have

had the feeling that their memory and view of history is being played down by the memory of dissidents from the 1970s. They wanted to be recognized by Czech society not as victims of communism, but as fighters against communism. This could be seen as a never-ending struggle which was mainly held by the Confederation of the Political Prisoners. One of its victories is a Law No. 262/2011 Coll. *On the Participants in Anti-communist Opposition and Resistance*, which recognizes those who fought against communism during the years 1948–1989. For the Confederation this law is associated with the idea of moral tribunal or another condemnation of communism. This law from historical point of view also represents a reconfiguration of the role of the political prisoner in the public and the self-image. On some awarded “resistance fighters” is visible the politicization of this part of the history and search for the “heroes” who opposed the “totalitarian” behemoth.

Even Long-term Imprisonment Cannot Break Human Spirit

People who were sentenced by Czechoslovak communist justice, often to very long sentences, suddenly stood at the edge of society. Despite the fact that they spent many years in prison, it is admirable that some of them were able to come to peace with their situation and do not recall it with the bitterness which we would expect. Jakub Antonín Zemek, Prior of the Dominican monastery in Znojmo, remembers this, *“They were hard but beautiful times. One could meet a lot of good, strong, high-principled, and upright people.”* Other people remember these times in a similar way. For example, the years-long persecuted Army General Tomáš Sedláček says, *“My time in prison offered me a chance to get to know myself. What I am like, and what I can bear. I really found my possibilities and discovered my limits. I was lucky that I went to prison in very good physical and psychological condition. As I already mentioned I was always waking up with the motto, ‘Hold on!’ and this really kept me above water. Also, I met a lot of people who remained my friends for the rest of my life. How I was able to go through my life with my conscience clear and my backbone straight is something for the others to judge. I hope I managed it quite well.”*

Others appreciated the experience they had in prison as a chance to develop. They mentioned that they were greatly influenced by fortuitous introductions with other people and by the so-called *prison university*, which deeply touched their lives. When these people are telling you about their imprisonment, you get the sense that this period was one of the most defining experiences of their lives. The majority of them admit that if they would not have spent a part of their life in prison, they would have missed a special experience and an important turning point in their lives. If they had to make the same decisions again they would choose to fight against communism all over again. They would say that it was a good decision, despite the high price they had to pay.

The most beautiful answer to the question *“What did the prison take from you and give to you?”* was given by a former political prisoner, Alois Macek. No words can describe these feelings better, and so here we are giving the floor to the eyewitness:

“Prison influenced my life 100%, and it gave me a base for my values for the rest of my life. Thanks to being in prison, I was able to learn the value of friendship that was born during such terrible conditions. It didn’t matter who was who, but what the person was like and how can you trust and rely on him and how much

did he fight for his friends. For example, Láda Majer was able to climb over the barbed wire of the solitary confinement in Camp Nikolaj. It was freezing difficult, and he was risking his own life in front of the machine guns just to throw me a piece of bread, tobacco, and newspaper to wrap a couple cigarettes through my window. These we called balenky that satiated hunger, and I also got a thing called cunder to light it up. Why did he do that? These are values and memories for your whole life, and for the rest of your life you really have to recall all of these things. Then you can understand that if you meet these people as a free man, there is no wonder that you will have tears in your eyes and that you will be standing as a weakling, without words and a hug. Without prison, I would have never lived this and it wouldn't have shaken me.

The prison gave me a chance to meet the most beautiful and intelligent people of our nation, and the chats with our people allowed me to learn something I didn't know before. During that time I still had to realize that I had a lot to catch up on and make up for. I'm really telling you the truth when I say I don't regret the time spent in the prisons and the labor camps, because even the terrible moments gave us a chance to wake up. ...I'm not a writer or poet, and I cannot describe what I feel in my heart when my thoughts stray into that time. All I know is that I'm not the only one that feels it like this. This is proven by other former prisoners. I would be happy if our nation would find out that these are the people that are very precious. What to tell the Bolsheviks? We don't feel hate towards you, but more disdain! You are aware of the crimes you did, but only to gain power you are willing to commit them again. I feel sorry for you because you do not know what you are missing!

What did the prison take from me? Well that's twelve years of life – nothing else. Although it's not little, the positive side is so high above the loss that these seem to be just trifles."

The previous words prove that not even a long-term imprisonment can break the human spirit. Such a belief and inner strength may also explain the high age and excellent mental condition of the presented below narrators despite the horrors they faced during their lives. If one can elevate above the hardships and humiliation, it means that the regime has been undermined. From our point of view, these are the words that are worth writing down the most. We should always bear them in mind when speaking about political prisoners in the 1950s in former Czechoslovakia.

“We didn’t just want freedom for ourselves, but for everyone.”



Jindřiška Havrlantová was born in Rajnochovice to a peasant family on October 28, 1929. Her family helped the partisan movement during the WWII, for which she was imprisoned for one month in the Brno prison Cejl on February 8, 1945. She was released from prison before the end of the war. In 1952 she began to be active in a group named by the members of the State Secret Police as Libuše 23, whose goals were according to the archival sources controversial. Jindřiška Havrlantová said that the members of the group were sending various radio messages abroad and hiding their friends threatened by the communist power. Archival sources show that their other activity was obtaining weapons, robbing shops and cottages, and threatening not only regional communist leaders but also the wider population in general. She was arrested on March 8, 1954 at 6 a. m. and sentenced to eighteen years of prison by the Regional Court in Uherské Hradiště on August 14 of the same year. She went through various prisons located in Uherské Hradiště and in Prague, and she spent the longest period of her sentence in the prison of Pardubice. She was pardoned by the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and released on February 20, 1963. She later married, gave birth to four children, and is currently living in a small village in Nový Jičín.¹

¹ Archival sources: Národní archiv (NA) [National Archive], Fond: Správa sboru nápravných zařízení (SSNV) [Fund: Management of Correctional Facility Corps], personal prison file of Jindřiška Růčková; Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Services Archive], investigation files V-2016 OV and V-2017 OV; Fond Inspekce MV (f. A 8) inv. j. 498 [Fund of the Inspection of the Ministry of Interior, (f. A 8) inventory unit 498]; Tzv. historický fond arch. č. H-650 Ostrava (tzv. akce „Malina“) [so-called Historical fund arch. no. H-650 Ostrava (ie. the action “Malina”)].

Interview with Mrs. Jindřiška Havrlantová

Interviewer: Klára Pinerová

To begin, I would like to ask about your childhood and where you were born.

I was born in the Hostýnské Mountains² on October 28, 1929. I wasn't even six years old when I began school. I also had a sister who was four years older, and I really liked her books. I was even able to count up to ten by twos at age six. However, there was a lot of work to be done around my home, and as a five-year-old I had two cows – but in retrospect, I am grateful. I was really interested in school, and I would wake up at four in the morning so that I would not be late for school. It was an hour-long trip. The school was at the lower end of Rajnochovice³.

You had school in the village?

Yes, it was in Rajnochovice, and on the building it was written: "To our kids." There were eight grades in our school, but we had only four classes. I left with honors, but it didn't help me because I didn't go anywhere else. When I was nine years old Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk⁴ died. It was raining at that time, and we took our shoes off because there was a lot of water running on the road. We came to school, and there was a black flag. Then the principal arrived and said, "Kids, when you come to school tomorrow, I want each of you to bring a flower." We had the rest of the day off, and there were no classes for about three days. Each kid brought a flower. Because of all the candles, the black board caught fire and burned down. I remember my mom saying, "What will happen now?" They liked Masaryk a lot. Grandma answered, "There will be a war." And there was.

How big was your farm?

We were living in Bílová on the meadows. There were just a few people; seven cottages, perhaps. Each had a portion of the field, and that's how we would make a living. We had cows, three or four for plowing the field. We were raising pigs and poultry. During the war we were ordered to contribute supplies. We had to hand over pork, beef, butter, and eggs, but we were not given punishments or charged fees for failing to fulfill the requirements. At that time we couldn't get money anywhere. We were just happy to survive and grateful to have the bare necessities. They required 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of butter per year. We were handing in butter once a week then, each Monday. Many times we didn't have a single egg left for us, but at least we were getting money for them. We always had to bring the supplies to town hall. German officers never came to us. Once, when we failed to fulfill the requirements, my dad told them, "I have nothing to pay you with. I'd rather go sit in prison," but they didn't arrest him. We usually bought salt and yeast from the store. As kids we always had to help during the harvest.

2 **Hostýnské Mountains** – mountain range located in the northeast region of the Czech Republic.

3 **Rajnochovice** – small village in the northeast region of the Czech Republic.

4 **Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937)** – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

Were there any German patrols being accommodated in Rajnochovice?

In Rajnochovice there was a big depot of Czechoslovak ammunitions. In 1939 Germans took everything away. As I said, Germans were not walking around the countryside, but they were in the village. They were checking on municipal authorities and even businessmen. Once they came to us. I was home alone at the time. They just wanted to know the way from Bílová to Rajnochovice. They were very polite and thanked me for my advice, but I was still afraid of them.

Do you recall the beginning of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia?

Well, the bad times started then. I was going through it with my dad because my dad was really interested in politics. We didn't have a radio because we didn't even have electricity, which wasn't installed until 1948. At least the forester had a battery-powered radio. When we were occupied by Hitler, dad went to the forester's to listen. Then he returned and said, "It's sad; our people are determined to fight, but it would be a worthless waste of blood." I was paying attention because it concerned me as well. Then it began. In Bílová there were seven cottages, and one of them didn't have any kids. Dad was friends with the neighbors who were living over the hill, and once they came to us and said that they would quarter paratroopers with us. Their surname was Měsíc. They said that they wouldn't bother us for long. They wanted to stay in our stalls, which were empty at that time. Dad agreed to it, but was afraid because we had a childless neighbor who would walk around eavesdropping at night. It was agreed that they would come to our stalls. In the end, we didn't hide paratroopers there. It didn't take long, and my schoolmate came and asked what homework we had for school, and I asked him, "Well Franta, how is it possible that you did not go to school?" He answered me, "Didn't you know that our whole family was picked by the Gestapo?" They were all arrested during one evening. There were five sons, and they spared only their mom and dad, but they were later arrested as well. Their mom died in Dachau. Three of the sons were executed in 1942. One returned, but their dad died a month later. They were very honest people. While they were going to the executioner they were singing a popular national song called *Green Groves*.

Were the members of the Měsíc family executed for hiding paratroopers?

They were hiding paratroopers who were later caught at the border. One of them confessed the location of their hiding place, which made me worry that he would betray us since these were the same paratroopers that were supposed to hide in our stalls. Luckily, nothing happened. Beginning in 1942 partisans started to walk around. The first who came were Nikolai and Ivan. They were Prisoners of War that had escaped from their camp. We didn't know them. They wanted alcohol and cigarettes from my dad, but he was completely abstinent and a non-smoker. They didn't know this and didn't believe it at all, and they pointed at him with a gun. They were really belligerent. I was so scared that I started yelling: "See, we really don't have any! He doesn't smoke – come and look. We don't have any!" Then they calmed down. After 1942 we did not have a single calm night. Often there were as many as forty or fifty partisans barging in throughout the night. We never got a good night of sleep. As soon as we turned the lights off, the dogs started barking, and the partisans would start knocking on the door.

You lived in the meadows and partisans (anti-Nazi fighters) came to visit you every evening. What memories do you have on them?

The Commander of the partisans was Stěpanov Ivan⁵. He was a fair guy. Stěpanov always gave his own opinion. He was a smaller man, blond, and a peace-loving person. He was strict with partisans but wanted to oblige people. He didn't let anyone get hurt. I really liked him. In 1944 Murzin⁶, a new Commander, was supposed to arrive and so partisans wanted to welcome him⁷. A day before they were waiting for a plane, standing on guard. They wanted a pig from us, but we didn't have one. We owned just a sow with small piglets and we didn't want to give that up. Dad offered a sheep, but they were not interested. Finally they got a pig from our neighbor, my uncle. They came to our house to cook it and get it ready for the celebrations. My uncle, who had owned the pig, came to us the next morning and told my dad, "If you have the partisans over here, tell them to leave because they stole my pig, and I'm going to report it. The Germans will come here to check it." Dad didn't even have time to give him an answer as to whether or not we had partisans over. When our uncle was on his way home, the partisans beat him up. My cousin went to report it, unfortunately. He didn't have to do it, however, and he was afraid that it would be revealed that he had gone to the police and his family would get into more trouble. He could have easily gone to report it the following week. At the police station there were only two people to whom he made the report, and then he went back home. The next morning they would take Murzin across the fields and meadows down to the neighbors. There they shaved and fed him. When he found out about the report, he gave a command, "So this is how the 'meadowers' behave? We will be fighting, and they would still betray us?" At that time, many partisans emerged from the forest in two lines. It was terrible. My cousin had already returned home from the police station, and the partisans stabbed him to death. They lit his house on fire and accidentally shot my aunt dead, too. Uncle was the only survivor.⁸ At that time, when someone named Murzin, I didn't understand how someone could give out such a command.

How did you live through the end of the war?

Once a doctor went to take care of a wounded person, but his wife was frightened when suspicious people came to pick him up. He didn't come back for a long time, so she went to report it to the police. When he later came home to find out that she had reported it, he was terrified. Nothing could be done, and he decided that he would hide in an abandoned cottage. The abandoned cottage was a gamekeeper's house in Bílová which was near our house. During the morning of the February 8, 1945 the end of the war was close. I got up in the morning, looked out the window, and saw many German SS soldiers standing side by side. Dad was mixing feed for the animals so he couldn't see anything but just heard: "Achtung!" Partisans ran out and blocked all the doors and told them they couldn't get in. We had to follow the partisans' orders because we had empty hands. Shooting started, and a bullet flew right by my temple.

5 **Ivan Petrovič Stěpanov** – during the WWII a Commander of a second strike group of Žižka, which operated near Valašské Meziříčí (Moravia), especially in Zubří. Upon arrival D.B. Murzin he became a political commissar.

6 **Guerilla Brigade Commander Dayan Bajanovič Murzin** – Soviet officer who took command after the death of partisan Ján Ušiak. He organized a new group and moved to the area near Vsetín, where they participated in partisan activities throughout Vsetín, Vizovice and Zlín (Moravia).

7 D. B. Murzin landed at night and stayed from the 30th to the 31st of August, 1944.

8 This event happened on December 9, 1944.

Everything at that moment was in God's hands. We hid down in the cellar. Then the shooting stopped; we got out and saw that our cottage was on fire. We had tar on the roof that was popping because of the fire. The Germans insisted that there were munitions, but it was just tar. The partisans made a mistake: they didn't stay alert, and in the morning they were sleeping like the dead. I was the first one who saw the Germans. One partisan died in the fire; another guy named Boris was shot. Three neighbors were shot, and another gave up.⁹

What were you able to salvage?

Dad ran away because he wanted to save some machines, but everything was burnt down anyways. That really shook him up. Mom let all the cattle loose while I took some clothes from the closets so that I would have something left. I didn't have a clue what would happen because I was just fifteen years old. It was terribly cold, and the snow was up to my knees. They dragged all the cattle to Loučka where there was a Gestapo base, and they slaughtered them. We were taken to Bystřice pod Hostýnem prison where we were interrogated.

What was the interrogation like?

There was one Austrian guy who could speak Czech. Once they beat me with small chains because I didn't want to name names. It lasted for about a month. They arrested my mom, my dad, and me – and also my sister who was living at a rectory, but they released her after a week. My sister didn't live with us. She was supposed to go to Germany for work, but a priest in Rajnochovice took her as a cook. We were taken to Brno, to the prison called Cejl. I was counted as a youth, and I received double portions, but I wasn't hungry so I would share it with the others. I was dead tired, and I didn't have a taste for food. At Cejl there were twenty-four of us and many bedbugs. Each evening we had to put a scarf around our necks so they wouldn't eat us. The conditions were terrible. Every time there was an air raid we had to stuff a straw mattress into the window through which the guard gave us food. Right before the war, the Germans let mom and I go... but to where could we go? We had just a little shed by the house, which is where we finally went. But we didn't have spoons, cups, nothing. The clothes that I had saved were also burnt, so I didn't have anything to wear. People helped us out a lot, and we tried to get reparations since we wanted to build a new cottage. The communists offered to relocate us to the border area¹⁰, but dad didn't want that. Dad made many trips to the reparation office after he returned from Brno. After asking for reparations for the eighth time, he took off his coat and proclaimed, "I'm not going there again. They want me to join the party [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] and claim that I would receive reparations afterwards. Without joining I could still get them... but I cannot build on our land." Already it was forbidden to build new houses in the mountains. Only little chalets could be built. Mom and I were even willing to go to the border area, but dad refused, saying, "I'm not going to a foreign place. It would tear my heart. I had my own place, which was all that I wanted, and I will not go to a foreign place." Of course, we didn't go anywhere in the end.

9 There were six partisans killed and four arrested, including one seriously wounded. There were no casualties on the German side. Killed partisans were Antonín Matúš, Boris Moškovskij, Nikolaj Jumajlo Tatarin, Antonín Prokopec, František Tomek a František Habáň. Compare to source: POSPÍŠIL, Jaroslav. *Hyeny* [Hyenas]. Vizovice, 1996, pp. 113–115.

10 The Czechoslovakian border area was sparsely populated after Germans in the region were displaced following the end of WWII.

Do you remember what happened to the Commanders of the partisans after the war?

I don't know whether it is true or not, but I heard that after the war Murzin and Stěpanov met face-to-face on Černava Hill and Murzin won. We were at Stěpanov's funeral¹¹.

What did life in the village look like after the war?

In the meadows there were seven cottages left. We stayed there; the Pánek family went to the border area; the childless Kubíček family had died. The damage to our property was appraised at 700,000 crowns, but we got only 40,000. We had to buy everything, including cattle. We were still living in the little shed, and it was very small and uncomfortable, and we were trying to enlarge it. The year 1948 was very cruel. We already had a radio and electricity, but during the winter there were problems; sometimes we didn't have electricity. At that time we found out from the radio what was going on. Then we were getting information about other stuff from everywhere around. In 1949 a group, Hostýnské Hory¹², started and many of our friends were put in prison. More than 700 people in total. My cousin's husband, who was named Doležal, was one example. My cousin was ill, her mother was ill, and they had two kids, a horse, and a shed full of cattle. I went to help them with daddy. The authorities were arresting someone all the time.

Did you know the reason why they were arrested?

Dissatisfaction, of course. The Hostýnské Hory group started in 1949. Some people were arrested and then released again for a lack of evidence. Finally they were all arrested again, and in 1952 there was a hearing where six people were executed as a word of warning. That was the same year that we became involved with an anti-state group¹³. I wasn't very sympathetic to the Communist Party because of how they had treated us after the war. You could either join the Communist Party or move to the border area. I couldn't imagine myself sitting and waiting with my arms crossed.

How did your anti-communist activities start?¹⁴

Through Mrs. Románková we were introduced to Josef Mach. In our group we agreed that Mach would be hidden by the Kovář and Židek family. Both of these families had seen family members get arrested because they were members of the Hostýnské Hory anti-communist group in 1949. However, their sons also decided to stand up against communists. Mach wanted to emigrate, saying he would leave a radio to communicate with. My boyfriend Karel [Volf], who escaped from the army with a sub-machine gun, also went into hiding. Also, Alena Svo-

11 Stěpanov died April 10, 1945 on Černava Hill. Partisans themselves did not talk about the circumstances surrounding his death. Though some presented the whole thing as a matter of bad luck, others had a different opinion.

12 **Hostýnské Hory** – an anti-communist group named after the Hostýnské Mountains that was established on the night on June 26 to 27, 1948. The first Commander of the group was Josef Čuba. This group existed until the end of 1949 in the area of Bystřice and Vsetín (east of the Czech Republic). Many of its members were active in partisan anti-Nazi groups. In Rajnochovice fifteen people were imprisoned. The history of the Hostýnské Hory group is very complicated, because among its members were also criminals and thieves, and the goals of the group changed during the time period. The main leaders were judged in The Big Cinema (housing more than one thousand seats) in Gottwaldov (Zlín) on May 22–26, 1951. Four people were sentenced to death (Josef Čuba, Miloslav Pospíšil, Vladimír Rajnoch, and Sigmund Bakala). They were executed in Pankrác prison in Prague on September 4, 1951.

13 Anti-state in the sense of "anti-regime" or "anti-communist".

14 Members of the group were Josef Mach, Josef Malý, Josef Šimon, Josef Zajíček, Karel Měsíc, Karel Polášek, Karel Volf, and others.

bodová was hiding with them as well. That lasted for quite a long time, and after some time, they didn't really continue hiding. People in Rajnochovice would meet them and wonder who they were. They all wanted to escape abroad, but they were all waiting for the most opportune moment. Mach wanted to make the group bigger and take other people from the surrounding villages. So he kept hiding in Rajnochovice, but the State Secret Police started to follow him. I also had a feeling that something was amiss and that I was being spied upon. Once, when I was walking to the dentist, a car stopped and asked to give me a ride. I knew I was being followed by it, so I refused. I needed to give some messages to people in hiding and I didn't want to give them away.

How long were you hiding them?

It started in 1952, which was when we began with our activities, and lasted until March 8, 1954. That means two years then.

What did your anti-communist activity involve? Were you arrested for just hiding people or did you try to expand your involvement into other areas?

Aside from hiding these three people we were also smuggling guns and transmitting messages through the radio.¹⁵ Once we even heard these messages from Radio Free Europe. We were working this way so that the communists would be a little afraid and people would be aware of what they were doing. I finally got eighteen years of prison, and others were sentenced to twenty and twenty-five years. We were sentenced with people we really didn't know, because Josef Mach organized another group.¹⁶ Those other people were farmers too; Gába, Hruška... The army court sentenced Karel to death, but that was a year after our sentencing.¹⁷ Alena and I were in the process together.

How did they find out about you and your group?

The first person arrested was Josef Zajíček, to whom Mach had given a letter. Zajíček then went by bus to Southern Moravia, where he was supposed to send the letter. There they arrested him, examined him, and took the letter. That was a week before our arrest. First, Zajíček didn't return, and we had no idea why. Then Mr. Žídek didn't return home from work. Right after that the arrests began.

What was your arrest like?

When I was young I used to go out to village parties and let men walk me home. One young man was taking me home this way, and when we were going through the forest all of a sudden we heard, "Put your hands up!" I wasn't surprised, but the guy walking me home was frightened because he didn't have a clue what was happening. They probably thought I was meeting Karel, the one who escaped from the army, in the evenings, but I never went out to meet him. When Karel appeared after his escape, I bluntly asked: "Why did you leave? What do you want here?" He was offended by what I said, and we rarely ever met after that. But on

15 Mrs. Havrlantová, according to archival sources, transmitted three such messages.

16 Josef Mach fabricated that he was cooperating with other groups abroad and forced other members of the group to obtain guns.

17 Karel Volf was sentenced to death by the Military Court in Trenčín in 1955.

that night, they just frightened us. Two weeks after this on March 8, 1954, they came to arrest dad and me. They knocked on the window, and daddy went to get the door. I don't know how many of them came. They stated, "Ms. Růčková, get up – the time of settlement has come." I got so angry and replied, "You want to settle with me, but I didn't do anything!" At that moment I was really sorry I didn't have a gun for myself, although I was offered one by Josef Mach. Today I don't regret that anymore. Who knows what would have happened if I had had one. I didn't feel guilty at all: all we wanted was a good life for ourselves and for others. Dad and I had to get dressed. Mom was crying. Then they took us to Bystřice.

Do you know how Alena Svobodová, Josef Mach, and Karel were finally arrested?

When dad and I were taken to prison in Rajnochovice, we could see that something was happening, but we didn't have any clue as to what. Josef, Karel, and Alena were in Rajnochovice with the Kovář family when we were arrested. In the morning hours the State Secret Police got to them, and there was a shootout. They shot one boy there, and they took his body with them. Even today, no one knows where he ended up. Another nine-year old kid lost his nerves and never got well again. But it's interesting that the Žídek family, the other family whose home we hid people in, wasn't arrested. Only the Kovář family had to pay the price. Those three – Josef, Karel, and Alena – were lucky to escape; Karel was shot in his heel, but he took the bullet out himself. Alena Svobodová, from Brno, went with him and took care of him. They got home to Bílová where they were hiding for another month; by that time, Karel's leg had already begun to heal.¹⁸ Once a forester came and offered to take them to safety. Instead, he took them to where the State Secret Police were waiting to arrest them. Josef Mach also escaped and was hiding in Loučka by Kunovice. There, he established another group. Mach trusted Mr. Žídek's sister. She worked as a nurse in a hospital in Kroměříž. He confided everything to her, and even told her where the code key was for breaking messages. She was bringing him medicines, pretending she was working for us. But she wasn't arrested with us, and she faced no confrontation. His escape looked like this: one farmer, who was in another group also organized by Josef Mach, took him to a designated spot. There was an ambulance car standing there that Žídek's sister was supposed to get. She was supposed to give a signal that the air was clear, but when they came to the certain place and she gave him the signal, Mach already saw that the ambulance was filled with State Secret Police. So he shot himself.¹⁹

Did you ever meet Alena in prison?

Yes, we were together in Pardubice, but we weren't in the same cell. But Pardubice was alright. The worst was Uherské Hradiště²⁰ – that was starvation. From Hostýnské Hory we knew that Grebeníček²¹ was in power there. In the morning we got a little piece of bread and were told that our morning bread was also for supper. For supper they gave us a little piece of Olomouc cheese. I always ate everything before evening. Conditions in the prison were horrible. While sleeping we had to have our hands on the blanket, but when you fall asleep they slid under-

18 Karel Volf and Alena Svobodová were arrested on April 30, 1954.

19 He shot himself on April 10, 1954.

20 **Uherské Hradiště** – a town in Southern Moravia.

21 **Alois Grebeníček** (1922–2003) – one of the most-feared interrogators from the 1940s and 1950s who worked for the Czechoslovak State Secret Police in the prison of Uherské Hradiště. He died of natural causes in 2003.

neath. You can easily fall asleep on a dirty straw mattress, under dirty blankets, and on a dirty pillow. When one comes back exhausted from questioning, one falls asleep very quickly.

Where did they take you after your arrest?

They took me to Bystřice, but that wasn't a real prison anymore. That was some kind of storage facility. After a couple of hours I could hear when they brought someone else in next door. So I knocked Morse code on the wall, and it was Ilonka Romanová from our group. Her mom was arrested three days later. We only stayed in Bystřice until evening, and then they took us to Uherské Hradiště, where examinations went on until the morning. The interrogations lasted about a month.

What did the interrogations look like? How did the investigators treat you?

They no longer beat us. I was really surprised about that, because in 1952 they were beating the men from the group, Hostýnské Hory, very badly. Yet, the behavior of the guards was very mean, and we were always blindfolded with a handkerchief, so I didn't see anything. I would walk slowly because there were steps, but the guards didn't really care, and they dragged us from one side of the corridor to the other. We promised each other we wouldn't say anything, and I would always tell myself that I could not break that promise. Then I realized that there was a lot already out. They got my accomplices to speak, and they had a great deal of information on me and noted that I had never admitted to anything. Finally, I got eighteen years. I was confined and interrogated from March 8 until August 14. I had a little spider there, and I was looking after it. It was there with me for the whole time. There was just a small bench, bed, and two steps so that one could do their business. There was a horribly dirty blanket that stunk. They never let me sleep. They starved me and then interrogated me long into the evening and night.

What did you go through in your solitary cell?

I divided my day this way: first I prayed, then I sang, and then I recited some poetry. Sometimes I put a letter together for my mom, which I would then read aloud while walking around in my cell. In the interrogation cell I didn't receive a single letter. On August 14 I had a hearing. It was strung out over several days, but I didn't have a hearing with my dad because he was sentenced in a different court. In 1960 there was amnesty, but I wasn't released because our case involved guns. They let me out on February 20, 1963.

When was the hearing held?

The court hearing, which lasted for three days, took place at Uherské Hradiště. It was secret, so my mom was not present. For a brief period after the hearing I stayed in Hradiště where I worked in the laundry, which made my hands sore. So then they put me in the kitchen to peel potatoes, which was nice because we actually got something to eat. I had festers all over my body because of the bad food. I was used to everything that was homemade, and there were all kinds of unnatural preservatives and additives there. We stayed in Uherské Hradiště for about a month, and then they took me to Pankrác²². I only stayed there for a couple of

22 Pankrác – one of the largest and most infamous prisons in Prague.

nights, but I have some really ugly memories from that time. I slept upstairs in a double-room, and dogs howled all night. I looked out the window when some girls were saying that there would be executions again. There, on the square where the executions were held, mothers rested with the babies they had borne in prison. We stayed at Pankrác for three nights, and then we went to Chrudim for a short while. Finally they took us to Pardubice. I arrived in 1954 and stayed there until 1963 when I was released. They put me into a sewing workshop right away, even though I didn't understand it at all. Anyway, I quickly got into it, and the sewing machine quickly became my friend, but the main thing was that in Pardubice we were living so freely. After one of us had a visit, she would share it with everyone. I must tell you that we all got along really well there since we were all of the same opinion and frame of mind. We knew about those who were snitching, and we ignored them; I, for one, didn't talk to them at all. I was surrounded by a very nice circle of friends.

What was your arrival to Pardubice like?

After our arrival we went to get a check-up from doctor-prisoner Blanka Picková. I went to section A with about sixteen other girls, but no one paid any attention to me. My accomplice was put into section B, so I was completely alone and didn't know anyone. It was a three story building that had to be made shorter after the detonation in Semtín²³. There were twenty-four girls in the same room with bunk-beds. I came with my bag like some kind of bag-lady. They just pointed to the bed where I would sleep. On the bunk-beds I was always sleeping up on top because I was younger. None of the Czech girls paid attention to me there, as they were all lying on the bunks and resting. Then it was 2 o'clock, and I was still sitting there like a bag-lady. My bundle was still next to me, because I still didn't know how to fold my blankets or anything since no one had shown me how. All of a sudden, Elfy Tandler came up, started asking me questions, and realized how hungry I really was. She brought me bread, grease, cheese, and jam. There we were already allowed to take bread without limits. She was really nice to me and even made my bed. She was really treating me well. She was a German, but spoke Czech very well. I will never forget about that. She wasn't a retribution prisoner²⁴, but a political one. Then, after the other Germans came, she would sometimes talk to them rather than me, but I didn't obstruct her. Afterwards, she always came back. After her release, she married a Czech and moved to Frankfurt. Even my daughter would later visit her in Germany.

Were you sharing the room with criminal prisoners as well?

At the beginning we were all political prisoners, but then they started mixing us with prostitutes, gypsies, and angel women who worked abortions. It was okay until 1960, but after the amnesty political prisoners were separated into different rooms, and they were usually the only ones together with criminal prisoners. The guards feared the Gypsies because they were always fighting among themselves. Some guards were such heroes that they were afraid to step in between them, so they told us, "Help yourselves somehow." The Gypsies were nice

23 **Semtín** – now part of Pardubice, is one of the oldest and yet fully functional industrial areas in the Czech Republic. In 1921 construction had already started on factory buildings. Initially nitric and sulfuric acids, nitrates, and other products that were intended mainly for the production of explosives were produced here.

24 **Retribution prisoners** – prisoners sentenced on the basis of Retribution Decrees for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany.

to us and didn't attack or harm us. After 1960 it was horrible. I was sorry for the older ladies, like Růžena Vacková²⁵ and Nina Svobodová²⁶. They were precious women. Růžena Vacková was a really tough woman who was always staunchly opposed to taking commands. There were various elements in the prison, and they would not only fight with each other, but in the process, accidentally end up hurting themselves. Yet we didn't really pay attention to such prisoners. We, the political prisoners, stood by each other and took care of one another.

Do you remember the so-called prison university? For example, did you know Růžena Vacková?

Růžena had her own girls there who were high school or college age. I didn't fall into this category, but I was interested. I had a friend, Eduška, who was meeting with her. Růžena was really special. I would later bring her letters from Ilka Ondrášová, who was a professor of math and physics and was released earlier than me. She used to write to me like my sister did. I would bring that to Růžena, who would then read it to other girls who knew this professor. She had her girls who she would prepare. Of course, it wasn't really possible that so many people could be together in one building, so I couldn't really take part in her lectures.

On which blocks were you living in?

After arriving I lived in section A, but later they put me in the Stable. That place really used to be a stable, and there were rats living with us. We would always have to put bread under our heads so they wouldn't eat it; but they could smell it; and so they kept jumping over our heads. Then the C, D, and E wooden barracks were built, and I later moved to E. There was hot water running there. I would tell myself: "Why did they put me here? I didn't deserve this." So I would at least bring that warm water in buckets to the grandmothers in section B. A guard once yelled at me that I'd be reported if it ever happened again. Anyway, I kept doing it, but there always had to be a lookout.

What did the solitary cells look like in Pardubice? How often did you get something to eat there?

Once every two days there was food. Every morning there was black coffee. There was a hard bed that was just concrete and a blanket. For example, Růžena was sent there during Christmas, because she refused to work on Sundays. She spent fourteen days there during the most beautiful holiday. She was then released at a certain hour, and we were all waiting for her. When she saw us, she would open her arms wide as she could to give all of us a hug saying: "Girls, I spent such a beautiful holiday here." The guard would just shake her head, thinking that she had gone nuts. She hadn't gone crazy – Růžena was from a devout family so she prayed the whole time while spending the entire Christmas in peace.

25 Růžena Vacková (1901–1982) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

26 Nina Svobodová (1902–1988) – a Czech writer and journalist engaged in the activities of Catholic cultural movement; worked as an editor for the calendar *Czechoslovak Woman* and cooperated with the weekly *Catholic Woman*. Member of the Czechoslovak People's Party and sentenced in the Liberec show trial.

Since you mentioned Christmas, could you please tell me what Christmas was like in prison? How did you live through it?

We always got together in a group, prayed a midnight mass, and sang carols. It always depended on which guard was on duty. Those who were dependable would let us sing, but those who were bad would come right over and make us line-up. Sometimes those line-ups were just horrible. They couldn't count us all, and there was always someone missing. We had to line-up and stay there for an hour, all chilled. Then, in the morning, we still had to get up for our work shift. The guards were really able to make one's life miserable. In the evening we had potato salad and a little piece of Christmas bread. It was acceptable in Pardubice, and even the cooks were making a small effort. We also got a little piece of fish.

Did you ever meet any nuns there?

There were departments called *Hrad* [Castle] and *Vatikán* [Vatican], but we were not allowed to meet with them. When the nuns were divided between us, I brought a prayer book to one of them. One of my friends told me before she was released, "You know, in my things I have a missal. I would like to give it to you." I responded, "There will be a *čůzák*²⁷ who certainly will not allow it." She just said, "Don't worry, we will smuggle it somehow." So I went with her and although there was a *čůzák*, he was talking to someone, and during that time she was able to slip me the missal. Then we said goodbye to each other. Then I had to go back to the other building at Wenceslas Square²⁸ where a guard was standing. He just unlocked the door and let me into my building. I was nicely surprised that he let me by without problems, because he was known for always yelling at us, and so we called him *Škrhola*.

What did the prison clothes look like?

Brown pants with white and black fur sticking out. It scratched. The jackets were the same kind. Quite frankly, they were clothes for prisoners. If someone was released, we switched blankets and whichever was worse, we gave back. In 1958 before Christmas, we were told to write home and ask for warm underwear. So we were all sent long underpants for men and long-sleeved undershirts. We slept in these for about two or three times before we were told that a boiler had broke down. That was an extremely cold Christmas season. Then they took these warm clothes from us to let us freeze. Almost all of us were ill and got the flu. The whole prison was ill and a few of us kept going to work. So finally it wasn't worth it for them to take our clothes.

How often did they change your clothes?

Maybe every two weeks – but washing was worse. In Pardubice we only had bathrooms and a ditch with cold water only. At most, we were able use the bathroom that was close to the kitchen once a month or once every two months. Showering had to be done very quickly, because everyone wanted to get in. I rarely went there. I remember only one good washing. Water always stopped running and they didn't let us in any more. So we would wash with only cold water in both summer and winter.

27 *Čůzák or čůza* – read [chou:sack, chou:sa]; a prison slang word from prison for a guard, in the Czech language it comes from the word bitch. *Čůzák* is a male guard and *čůza* is a female guard.

28 Big space in the prison of Pardubice where female-prisoners were gathered and proceeded the roll calls.

Did you get anything for hygiene, like a toothbrush, toothpaste, or soap?

We could buy soap from a prison canteen. We also got toilet paper and sanitary napkins. The terrible thing was that this stuff came in such small amounts. Toiletries were absolutely deficient. One always had to keep track of one's money. So let's say you got twelve Crowns per month; one half had to be saved for hygienic items, and the rest of the money could be spent in any way you wished. The wage was always pegged according to the amount of completed work. In the beginning it was less because it took a while before to train someone.

What things could you get in the canteen shop?

Of course there was a limited selection. You could get artificial fat, marmalade or plum jam, some cheese and toiletries. There wasn't any fruit. I remember we got fruit only once. Our teeth were already loose, but I lost my front teeth there. Once we were able to order fruit so I ordered ten kilos (22 pounds).

What did the daily routine in prison look like?

Every morning a guard would yell, "Wake-up time!" So we would all wake up – even those who had the afternoon shift and were able to sleep-in longer. Those who had a morning shift had to get up. They went to wash their faces and made their beds. Sheets and blankets had to be put in a certain order. If they weren't, a guard would mess them up again, sometimes on purpose. Then there was a role call before the morning shift. Girls started to line up in front of the gate. Then we sat down by the machines, each of us already knowing what to do. Two girls would distribute tasks and then machines started off. When the weather was extremely hot, we moistened some big sheets and hung them in window frames. We never had anything like a break or a snack. We worked until 2 p. m. and then there was lunch. I didn't smoke so I only got up to go to the bathroom, which was always brimming with smokers. At the end of the first shift, the machines had to be cleaned because the second shift was coming. Afterwards we ate in the canteen, and then we were allowed to go to our cells. What we didn't eat, we could take with us. We already had our lunch pails with us when we left for work. Then we could have a rest. Whoever wanted to read could read; whoever wanted to rest could rest. In the late afternoon there was a gathering for a walk, and then the blocks closed down. The second shift worked late until 10 p. m. Then they were counted, and if they were all there, we went to bed.

Do you remember why a hunger strike started in 1955 in Pardubice?

We were not treated well. The guards were arrogant; they made us nervous, and were always trying to concoct something while we worked. To solve this and put some order in things, we organized a hunger strike. They promised that the guards who were treating us badly and making us nervous during work would be sent away. A commission even came from Prague. We were all put in a line facing a wall and promised that reparations would be given. Some girls didn't believe it and continued their hunger strike. Some of them went nine days without eating and had to be treated by a doctor. I didn't take part in that because I didn't want to ruin my health just because of some arrogant *čůza*. I stuck to the hunger strike for three days myself. What is interesting is that the male guards were much nicer to us than the female

čůzas. The reparations actually finally came. The worst guard, who we called *Elsa Koch*²⁹, had to leave.

In Pardubice there was also another event when twelve women wrote the letters to the Secretary General. They were called *Hamršildky*³⁰, but they [the prison administration] didn't send the letters anywhere. Yet at least it was a protest where we showed that they could not do anything they wanted to us. We didn't want to be treated like a lower caste of people. We were not people to them. We had to say our numbers instead of our names, so to them we were only numbers. We found things out from one another, and we all knew the content of the letters. We all protested against the way they treated us – especially when they disturbed us at work. As a result we were delayed with the daily portion of work and were sanctioned. Plus there were injuries. Edulka, for example, cut her finger because she was so nervous.

Can you please explain to me how you spent your free time?

We got together and chatted. We boiled water for coffee on radiator pipes, and then we talked about various subjects. Those were the dearest things to me. We didn't have many books. Remember how I was telling you about the Missal? Well, before I was supposed to give it back to the nun Marta, I wanted to read it. I got deep into it and didn't notice when a guard came in. We called him Headtwister. He asked very quickly, "What are you reading? Give it to me!" I was swearing at myself for being so careless. I gave it to him. He looked into it, gave it back and said, "Leave this to the old ones here. You are too young for this stuff." I didn't expect this. Eventually I did give it back to the nun Marta.

Did you stay in touch with your family? How often could you send letters?

I would always write to my mom and sister, but everything was censored. The letter couldn't be closed. More or less I was mainly writing to inform them that I was alive. I was probably writing about nothing. I wanted to know more from them – what was new at home. When I was in Pardubice, mom couldn't come visit me since she was home alone and had to take care of the cattle. She used to visit dad in Ilava prison³¹ so I didn't want her to travel so far to see me. My sister and brother-in-law visited instead.

You were released in 1963. Did conditions changed any way after the amnesty³²?

They put us in different cells, together with murderers and thieves, so that we could moderate their behavior. They respected us. Some Gypsies would fight together right away, but they would never do any harm to us since we were so good to them. They sort of liked us. It wasn't the worst thing for us, but we could no longer be together to chat at night.

29 **Elsa Koch – Ilse Koch** (1906–1967) – was the wife of Karl-Otto Koch, Commander of the Nazi concentration camps Buchenwald (1937–1941) and Majdanek (1941–1943). She was one of the first prominent Nazis to be tried by the U.S. military.

30 **Hamršildky** – on June 28–29, 1956, a group of twelve women sent a letter to the Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld, to complain about the terrible conditions in Czechoslovakian prisons.

31 **Ilava** – prison in Slovakia

32 **President Antonín Novotný Amnesty** – announced on May 9, 1960, the 15th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War, that pardoned sentences for seditious crimes. It was the most important amnesty for political prisoners. Around five thousands political prisoners were released from the prison, but three thousand prisoners excluded from this amnesty were regarded as instigators of "subversive" activities. Persons convicted of offenses against the state were released on the condition that they would not commit an intentional crime in the next ten years.

In prison you met many people that you never would have spent time with or have even met in your normal life. What were your feelings about sharing a cell with murderers or thieves?

I minded it. Once I even jumped. There was one murderer living with me. She was a beautiful girl, eyes like stars. She had killed her kid and portioned it up so that her husband could eat it. She wanted to scare me and once even knocked me down by hitting me on my forehead. At that moment I was terrified because I knew that she was a murderer, capable of anything, standing over me. She got only twelve or thirteen years, which I thought wasn't enough for what she did. Although there were guns in my situation, I never actually held one. In fact, I was always against it.

What was your release like?

They called me to the front entrance. I didn't go there often – only when my sister came to see me. I didn't want them coming too often since Pardubice was far from where we lived. I didn't have a clue what they wanted from me. Sometime before that there was a political officer³³ who offered to drive me to see any town. He wanted to show me how well people were doing in the socialist state – how they loved each other, how well dressed they were; quite frankly, that there was joy and peace everywhere around. I simply replied, "I don't want to go anywhere. You put me in here, and this is my daily bread." Then he started telling me that there had been some sabotage in the workshop and that I must have noticed it. I told him that we were always given tasks, and I knew that I had to fulfill them, because if I didn't, I could be the one who was harmed. So I would only take care of meeting the norms. I then told him, "You don't want me to snitch, do you? The only thing I know is that each person is taking care of her own responsibility." He then replied, "That's what you think, that everyone takes care of their own work? That no one does any sabotage on the side? Well we know that isn't true," while chasing me out. I simply told myself that there was no rescue for me and that I would have to fulfill my sentence until the end. Four months later they called me again, and it was already time for my release. Gathered was a boss from the workshop, a political officer, the Commander, and others. They told me that the President of the Republic, Novotný, pardoned me and that I was free to go. I didn't expect that at all. There were others girls with me, standing there, who were not released. So I asked the people who worked there, "Shall I be released alone? Let everyone go home." They said, "There were others pardoned as well, and no one ever cared about you." Yet, you know, they did care, because the girls who had left cried for us, the ones who had to stay. Then they offered me a job in a clothing factory in Prostějov. I was experienced, and they said that they would arrange it. I refused, because I had to go and help my parents. They also told me, "If something happens to you and people in your village want to criticize you because you were in prison, then you must report it to the police." Yet, I said to myself, that they could forget it.

In retrospect, how do you feel or what do you remember about prison?

Memories about the prison are the most beautiful things we have left. We had a wish: that they would make us a town or village where they could concentrate us after our release. We

³³ **Political officer** – a prison position, in which the individual would organize various ideological lectures for prisoners, offer an opinion upon a prisoner's release, and check that a prisoner's sentence was being fulfilled and that inmates spoke positively about communism. In short, he took care of "political issues."

understood each other better than our own relatives. Even though we all were from different places, we were all of the same opinion and had the same ways of thinking.

Did you ever get together after your release?

Yes, of course. I received the largest amount of mail in our village. They warned me to reduce it, but I ignored that. When I came back in February there wasn't any work in the fields yet, so I would write almost everywhere and every day. When I was first told in prison that I was going home, I lay down on my mattress and cried. The guard, who was quite good and who always treated us like humans, came up to me. His wife was ill, and he did every piece of work he could so that she could go to the spas³⁴. Well, he came to me and asked me what I was doing. I just answered, "I'm supposed to go home, but I will not go alone. Let everyone else go with me." He couldn't understand or just couldn't get it.

Did your parents know that you were released?

They didn't know. At night I knocked on my sister's window, and they thought I was a ghost. I stayed with her while her son played and sang. Then I went home where I registered at the town hall in Rajnochovice. My parents killed a calf right away. Right after returning I had to find a job. I found one at the Forestry Department, and they were very helpful. I could start whenever I wanted, so I stayed home for another month to relax after my release from prison. The girls over there accepted me and didn't look at me through their fingers. Life went on simply without any problems. We were planting trees in the spring, and the quota was a hundred trees a day.

So people didn't look at you through their fingers or you didn't lose old friends because you were in prison?

To tell you the truth, I didn't really consider these girls to be my friends. I treated them as my coworkers. The important friends were the girls with whom I had spent time with in prison. Then I also found out that my manager in the Forestry Department had been assigned to spy on me.

Did you feel that it was getting a little easier in 1968³⁵?

In 1968 Věrka Kadlecová came to say goodbye because she was leaving to emigrate. At that time I was helping at home in Bílová, where I didn't really pay attention and only knew just a little bit about things going on in the country. My dad didn't take care either of the changes. He was really ill at that time and was out of sorts.

34 Spas in the Czechoslovak context serve mostly as a place of recovery to cure oneself of ailments.

35 1968 – a year of political relaxation in Czechoslovakia known as the Prague Spring. During this phase, the regime attempted to embark on a gradual process of democratization – until the nights of August 20 and 21, 1968, when the Soviet Army and accompanying armies of the Warsaw Pact invaded Prague. For the next twenty years, any political dissent was suppressed immediately.

What comes to mind when I mention the year 1989³⁶?

My main concern was informing Milan and Věrka.³⁷ I was extremely happy. I had a little day-dream that I would fly away because I was so happy. I was really glad that everything was over, but I would have different ideas about how things would turn out. I thought the President, who would be elected, would radically break from communists. Yet, President Havel did something else. He gave them the chance to freely live and breathe, even though they never gave us that same chance.

What was your rehabilitation like?

Before the Havlíns [Milan Havlín and his wife Věrka Kadlecová] left to emigrate in the 1960s, Milan came up and asked me whether I was rehabilitated yet. I didn't really think about that, because the communists would never rehabilitate me. In the 1990s the whole case was reviewed. I didn't have to take care of much. In 1991 I got a letter that said I was fully rehabilitated, but I had to wait a long time before I got any restitution or compensation. I got a note from the office in Brno claiming that they were working on it and asking for me to be patient. Nadě [Naděžda] Kavalírová, the head of the KPV³⁸, helped a lot, and they gave me the rehabilitation very quickly thanks to her help. Step by step, we finally got it. My sister got compensation for my dad.

What do you think about the political situation now?

I would be happy if the communists were quarantined behind the second railway. They should never come to power again because communism was a criminal organization. They killed so many good people. Everything was really hard for my family – but from my point of view it all made sense and had meaning. The students at school should really find out the truth of how everything really was and how they treated people. We didn't just want freedom for ourselves, but for everyone. When I recollect on everything, I don't think I did anything wrong. All I did was hold my convictions.

What helped you live through the years in prison?

Mainly it was the friendships that I had. I must tell you, up until now they are still my best lady friends. People who were not there would not be able to understand this. You would have to live through it. The friendships kept us alive. When one of us lost a relative, we all cried with her. When one laughed, we all laughed. Many times the guards were going nuts, but they couldn't do anything to us because the whole cell acted together.

Thank you for the interview.

36 **1989** – the year wherein communist dictatorships across Europe fell. Between November 17 and December 29, 1989, demonstrations and riots took place across Czechoslovakia. 1989's nonviolent transition earned it the name Velvet Revolution.

37 **Milan Havlín and Věrka Kadlecová** – a married couple, both of whom were political prisoners, and Mrs. Havrlantová's friends.

38 **The Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic (KPV ČR)** – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

“It was meant to be, and life just went on. I don’t feel any hatred or bitterness.”



Julie Hrušková was born on May 18, 1928 in Boskovštejn to a gamekeeper family. After WWII she worked at various jobs. She emigrated to Austria on March 13, 1949, where she fell in love with an American soldier Frank Farnetti and became pregnant. Few weeks later, she decided to join the resistance movement, return to Czechoslovakia, and bring more people across the border. However, she was arrested, accused of espionage, and sentenced to fifteen years of prison. She miscarried after a brutal interrogation in Brno. She went through several prisons; the longest period she spent in the prison of Pardubice, where she actively participated in the hunger strike in 1955. She was released on the amnesty on May 9, 1960. She was followed by State Secret Police after her release from prison. She is currently living an active life in a small village in southern Moravia and constantly participates in various forums at schools and other social events. Julie Hrušková was awarded by the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – II. class.¹

¹ Archival sources: Národní archiv (NA) [National Archive], Fond: Správa sboru nápravných zařízení (SSNV) [Fund: Management of Correctional Facility Corps], personal prison file of Julie Hrušková; Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Services Archive], investigation files V-350 BR; svazek prověřované osoby, krycí jméno Venuše, reg. č. 28190, arch. č. 417215 [volume of the screened person, code-name: Venus, reg. no. 28190, arch. no. 417215] ; svazek nepřátelské osoby , krycí jméno Julka, reg. č. 34160 [Volume of a hostile person, code-name: Julka, reg. no. 34160]; Dílčí informace v objektovém svazku reg. č. OB-11529 Brno [Partial information in the object volume reg. No. OB-11529 Brno].

Interview with Mrs. Julie Hrušková

Interviewer: Klára Pinerová

Where did you grow up and what are your early childhood memories?

I was born on May 18, 1928, in Boskovtšejn, which is a small village not far from Znojmo [town in southern Moravia]. My father worked as a gamekeeper for the Earl of Trauttsmandorff². Our house was a gamekeeper's lodge in the middle of nowhere, about thirty minutes from the village where we went to school. I was left-handed, and they tried to force me to write with my right hand, and they used to slap me on my left. That's why I didn't like school very much. However, we had good teachers. We learned good penmanship, reading, and even to love literature. I had two sisters and a brother. My brother and I put our cattle out to pasture. My brother liked to go and see the boys in the village. He used to tell me, "Watch the cows now." I always answered, "Okay, but give me something to read," because I used to be an avid reader then. Sometimes I would forget the cows, and they would run away. I had quite a nice childhood, and I went to my high school in Jevišovice. It was an hour's journey to get there, but the milkmen usually gave me a lift.

Can you remember what your family was doing during the war?

During the war, the property of the Earl came under German custody. There was a person appointed, a Czech, who wanted to appeal to the Germans to open a German grammar school on the castle land. At the time we were already attending senior school when father asked us, "Would you like to go to a German grammar school?" We were being educated along the lines of President Masaryk's³ philosophy and patriotism, so we said we didn't want to go to that grammar school, and our father refused the offer. My father's subordinates were lumberjacks who cut trees and women who planted trees or picked strawberries and raspberries to supply the castle. They eventually said that if Hruška's children weren't going to go to the German grammar school, their children wouldn't go there either. The man who made the initial proposal for the school started to dislike my father, of course. In the end, we moved on to a farm in Blaný, and my father worked as a field hand. They grew carrots and other things there. There were hired workers who worked for the Earl, and they stole carrots, of course. My father was responsible for that. They brought some carrots to my mother as well, and when there was an inspection, they searched the cellars and found some carrots in our cellars, too. They all went for a trial and got ten days in prison. My mother told herself that it could be worse if she appealed, so she accepted the sentence. The hired workers didn't accept the sentence in the end, they appealed, and they got a pardon. So, my mother went to prison in Moravské Budějovice for ten days during the war, and she saw with her own eyes what it was like there. My father was fired; we had to leave the flat which came with his job. We moved to Černín u Jevišovic and rented a house there. My father was called up to do forced labor in a bakery in Znojmo to

2 Austrian noble family (knight), which later elevated to the princely state. They came to Bohemia from Styria in the early 17th century.

3 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

replace an Austrian man who had been sent to the battlefield. At that time, Znojmo was an annexed area.⁴

My father worked in the bakery until the end of the war. He could have returned to Boskovštejn after the war ended. However, during the war a young gamekeeper with two children started to work there. My father said that he wouldn't like to drive him away. All our relatives, from my mother's side as well as from my father's, were in Znojmo. My sister and I used to smuggle things to them all the time because my mother worked for farmers during the war and used to get food from them. My sister and I would stuff our bras with lard, salami, flour, poppy seeds etc., and that's how we smuggled it. Since my relatives had chosen Czech citizenship⁵, they got only half-sized food rations and struggled to feed their children. The end of the war saw our family in Černín. We witnessed the Russians going wild there. The Army of Malinovsky marched through, and its soldiers raped women all over Southern Moravia. That's why our parents shut my sister and me in our cellar, and we remained there until the end of the war. A doctor later told me that sixty women were raped in the Jevišovice area and seven of them died of associated health problems. One man was shot by the Russians when he was trying to protect his daughters, and another man had to watch the rape of his wife. It was atrocious, and that's why we disliked the Russians.

What was it like after the war?

They forced the Earl to move away, and his castle was converted into a senior citizen's home, but that didn't take place until 1948. In 1945 all of his property was confiscated because he was an Austrian citizen. He resettled and opened a rifle factory in Vienna and sold guns and ammunition there. The Countess left to live with her daughter in Italy, and their marriage had probably fallen apart. My father got a job as a gamekeeper in the border area in Vranov nad Dyjí. He received beautiful hunting grounds and a lovely house with lots of bedrooms. My mother didn't want to move there, though, because the house was on the side of a hill and to enter the barn and the shed you had to climb steps. The house was below a castle and nearby was a road leading across the border. I finished my senior school during the war, and my parents got me a job with a doctor's family where I took care of the doctor's child and cleaned his medical offices. He was a doctor and had a dentist working with him. When the war ended, I wanted to begin studying painting, but my parents would not allow it, so instead they enrolled me in a so-called dumpling school, which was a school for housewives. I only stayed for one year. I had fallen in love with a soldier who was already engaged, so I knew I had to forget him. My sister fell in love with a member of the State Secret Police. He was a former partisan. To help me forget the soldier, I found a job far away in Aš [a town in Western Bohemia] at the western tip of the Republic. My sister and I worked there from September 1946 until 1948. After a falling out with a man in Aš, I moved to Brno. There I worked at a lawyer's office. I cared for his two sons and cleaned for him. I read a lot of books there. I also attended a painting course and

4 Annexed to the area of the Third Reich.

5 **Choosing citizenship** – After signing the Munich Treaty in September 1938, according to which Czechoslovakia surrendered a part of its border regions (Sudetenland amongst others) to Germany, the Czechs who stayed in the Sudetenland as well as those who moved away were asked to state whether they wanted Czech or German nationality. However, those who claimed Czech nationality lost the right to live at their original address and those who chose German nationality were in danger of being drafted into the Wehrmacht.

wanted to study at an art college for a year. Once, a professor who led the painting course approached me to fill-out some application papers, which would earn me a scholarship based on merit and talent. He asked me, "Are you a member of the Communist Party? Are you a member of the Youth Organization? Oh, you are not. Well, only members are entitled to the scholarship." Later, I had to stop working for the doctor because it was forbidden to have servants. I found a job in a factory called Matador then and made rubber coats.

How did your anti-communist activities start?

Well, 1949 came, and there was a boy working in the factory who was in prison in 1948. He did six months in prison and wanted to disappear. There was another guy who never said what he was engaged in, but according to what he did mention, I think that he could have been involved with Světlna⁶. Both of them were arrested in 1949 and were questioned for two weeks but then released, because they wanted to catch more people, I guess.⁷ They both decided it was time to disappear. Because they knew how I felt, they came to ask whether I could help them to cross the border. I disliked the fact that they had begun imprisoning foreign soldiers, mainly pilots [Czechoslovak soldiers who fought in France or Great Britain]. I didn't like the communist regime, and I opposed it. So I agreed, but told them to take me along. I thought that there would be an army established abroad, like it was during WWII and that I would take part in fighting.

One of those boys, Ruda⁸, had a girlfriend here who was in the hospital at that time undergoing some treatment, and so he had to leave without her. So, three of them came to meet me at the lodge. It was February. I didn't say anything to my parents, and I waited until they were gone. We went into the woods and around three o'clock in the afternoon, we were crossing the border. We got stopped by an Austrian financial patrol⁹ who knew me because of my father. I didn't know whether they were good guys or bad guys, though, so we decided to run away from them. They were good people, it turns out.

How did you get to Vienna and then to the Western Zone?

We continued walking for about twenty kilometers towards the railway, and in one small village we persuaded a rail worker to put us up for the night at his railway station. He took me to his office, laid me down on his bed, and went to sleep on the table. He gave us tickets for the Vienna train and also schillings¹⁰ for the tram. We were still in the Russian zone¹¹ then and had to be very careful. We caught the train at 5 a. m., and at 8 in the morning we were arriving

6 **Světlna** – presented by some historians as the largest resistance group in Czechoslovakia, it was in fact largely constructed by members of the State Secret Police to show the extent of the anti-communist resistance and also to get to know the thinking of the people in Moravia. From March 1949 until May 1950, State Secret Police arrested 400 citizens at the border of the Moravian and Silesian region and also in South and Central Moravia. The prosecutors, together with State Secret Police officers, put the members of Světlna into sixteen groups which were sentenced in sixteen trials during two years, beginning in April 1950. Eleven people were sentenced to death and executed.

7 In reality they were investigated because of suspicion of activities in the group lead by Mikolovič, which was engaged in the production and dissemination of leaflets, collecting weapons etc.

8 She crossed the borders with Rudolf Honek, Jan Horký, and Vítězslav Janek on March 13, 1949.

9 **Financial patrol** – monitored whether the state and financial borders were respected.

10 **Schillings** – Austrian currency used at that time.

11 **Russian zone** – After the war Austria was divided into four occupation zones, like how Germany was. This division lasted until 1955.

in Vienna. We came to the office of the American CIC¹², and when I reported our arrival there, everybody was surprised. "How come you are here so early? How did you get here so quickly?" They thought that we had walked all the way there.

They had received a report from the financial patrol officer that the daughter of gamekeeper Hruška had crossed the border with three young men. Then they subjected us to questioning and put us in a dormitory house. The boys met a Hungarian there who told us that he would take us into the Western Zone, provided we pay for his travel. We went to Linz with him where we came upon a refugee camp. Soon after arriving, I went to a dance with another emigrant to get to know what life in freedom was like. Well, I was a young girl then. I met an American soldier. His name was Frank Farnetti, and he soon proposed to me. I was twenty years old then, and you only legally became an adult at the age of twenty-one. So the wedding had to wait. At least the American managed to get me out of the camp and arranged private accommodation for me with an Austrian family.

Did you know what was going on at home and with your parents?

My parents were very careful at home. I sent a letter from Linz that I had emigrated and told them not to worry about me. They had to report to the officials that their daughter had left for abroad, but they had already known this three days after I had left anyway, because they were told by the Austrian financial patrol. An arrest warrant was issued with my name. My mother sent me a secret letter via the financial patrol that read, "Please do not come home. They have issued a warrant for your arrest. If you happen to be in Czechoslovakia, don't come anywhere near the lodge because we are being monitored." There was a soldier guarding the castle and checking all the people going in the direction of the lodge. However, there was another path to the lodge that they didn't know about.

Did you stay in the Austrians' flat all the time, or did you visit the camp occasionally to chat with the Czechs?

Well, I was alone among foreigners, so I used to go back to the camp. Czechs lived there that I could have a conversation with. When Frank was on a military exercise in Germany, I learned about the possibility to participate in espionage activities in the course of one of my visits to the camp. They were looking for somebody to secretly go back to Czechoslovakia. I told myself that I would be back from Czechoslovakia well in time for Frank's return from Germany. So together with two other boys, I set off for my home country. My mission was to establish an espionage unit in the Republic and bring people who were in danger of imprisonment safely across the border.¹³

12 **Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC)** – an American intelligence service established during WWII in December 1943. Its task was to search for and eliminate German agents in the ranks of the allied armies. In the immediate post-war period, the CIC operated in the occupied countries, particularly Japan, Germany, and Austria, countering the black market and searching for and arresting notable members of the previous regime. The CIC became the leading intelligence organization in the American occupation zones.

13 They returned to Czechoslovakia on April 27, 1949, and got back to Austria on May 10, 1949.

What was your motivation for going back to Czechoslovakia despite knowing that you were putting yourself in danger and that you were under arrest?

Most importantly, I wanted to help my people. We stayed in Czechoslovakia for two weeks, and each of us had a mission. In two weeks' time we met up again. I was being followed by an agent who worked for the State Secret Police in Brno. His name was Josef Eichler¹⁴. I didn't have a clue about this at the time. We crossed the border via a different route this time, going through České Budějovice rather than Vranov. However, Eichler learned about our route. We were supposed to take several people across, but in the end they decided not to emigrate due to personal circumstances. That's why we ended up going back as a group of four. Ruda [Rudolf Honek], who emigrated with me in February without his fiancée, was taking her with him this time. There was another man returning with us, Franta [František Vošický or Woschitzký], who had been involved in espionage since 1948. He was an agent-walker¹⁵. As we went, he picked up some things at Studánky. I was taking care of his briefcase where he had maps of all border areas from Aš to Šumava as well as lists of the telephone numbers of all Czech and Slovak factories. We crossed the border in Šumava and went by bus to Linz. Policemen were waiting for us and surrounded the bus with machine guns. Both boys from our group passed through because the police were not looking for them.

They were looking for me, and they had my photograph from the agent [Eichler]. They found the suitcase I was carrying and accused me of espionage. They arrested Ruda's fiancée [Libuše Golová] as well, because she had no identification on her. She knew nothing about what I was doing, so I wasn't afraid that she would expose me. They handed us both over to the Russians.

What happened next?

At that time, Austria was divided into zones, and I was arrested in the Soviet Zone. The Russians offered me cooperation, provided that I bring them plans of an American airport. They knew that I was seeing an American soldier in his military quarters, and that's why they were very interested in me. However, they wanted to keep Ruda's fiancée as a hostage. I refused because I could have never forgiven myself if I had left her there. I don't like to recollect my experiences from the Russian prison. The interrogations were carried out mostly at night, from about 10 p.m. until 3 or 4 a.m. They wouldn't let me sleep during the day. When I laid down on the bench without a mattress or blankets, a soldier who guarded the door of my cell started to kick and bang at the door, and I would have to get up. Ruda's fiancée caught pneumonia. They called her a doctor, and he ordered warmth and more nutritious food. She received mattresses for the bench in her cell, blankets, an electric heater, and officer's meals. I ate almost nothing because all they gave us was borsch and dark bread that even mice refused to eat. Then they handed us over to the State Secret Police in České Budějovice. Agent Eichler was ar-

14 **Josef Eichler** (1924–?) was in contact with Czechoslovak State Secret Police. He knew František Vošický (Woschitzký) and Bohumil Hepnárek, whom Julie Hrušková described in archival sources as one the helpers to cross the border to Austria in May 1949. However, Eichler was not officially registered as a collaborator of the State Secret Police.

15 **Couriers** or so-called **agent-walkers** were people who illegally crossed the Czechoslovak borders to bring foreign intelligence agencies (American, French, or British) information from military, economic, or political spheres. They often passed only a very superficial training and were unprepared for the extensive network of State Secret Police informers. Few of them were professional intelligence officers; often these were inexperienced young people looking for adventure.

rested together with seven Slovaks. Allegedly, he was leading them across the border, but he took them instead straight to the Russians. He was in the same transport to České Budějovice as me, but he requested a transfer to Brno and was transported there. He managed to “escape” from Brno three times. Eichler crossed the border a couple more times and managed to send many people to prison. He was not present at my trial, but his court records indicate that he had testified against me.

How were you treated in the prison in České Budějovice?

I arrived there in May 1949. I was starving, and I ate about two liters of tasty soup and the same amount of spinach with dumplings brought to me by a Moravian prison guard on my arrival. She also reunited me with the girl I had taken across the border. Later, when they called us for questioning at the State Secret Police office in Budějovice, they started to scream at us, but I told them, “You have a reputation in Linz for treating people badly here.” The officer in charge then gave an order that they must not touch me and must record everything I said. So, the questionings were okay and without violence. I kept telling them the same thing, that I had gone home to get a goodbye blessing from my parents, and then my case was closed down for two weeks. I was told that I would get about eighteen months. Then Brno surprisingly asked for me. In Budějovice they thought I had some connections there, but I knew that agent Eichler worked in Brno and that it would be much worse for me there than in Budějovice.

So the questionings continued in Brno?

They wanted to convict us of espionage, and they wanted to know more names. I would have to kneel on a chair with my shoes off. When Horák came [one of the State Secret Police senior investigators], one of the guards would hit me several times on my feet with a truncheon. When my feet were swollen, I used to wrap a piece of cloth on them and by the morning the pain would have worn off. Sometimes I felt like fainting. The one who was recording me let me sit down when he saw that I was about to faint. Then Horák came and asked, “Is she speaking? Giving evidence? Naming people? No? Kneel, then!” I wasn’t so much afraid of the beating as I was of them giving me an injection to make me speak. That’s why I didn’t drink water they brought for me from elsewhere. I refused food and went hungry for several days. Sometimes the girls in the cell gave me a bit of their lunch. There were six to eight of us there. They started to call me “Mosquito” then, and people still call me that today. In the cell there was a window which was above the table, and I used to hang onto the window to have a look at the new people they brought in. The jailors started to use that nickname, too, and it has stuck with me until today.

Were the questionings in Brno much rougher?

There they weren’t playing around. I experienced one really rough interrogation where they banged my head against a table, dragged me across the room, hammered me against a closet, and used whatever they could get hold of. I tried not to fall down. A phone call saved me in the end. They had to get ready for new arrests quickly. A guard took me to Orlí¹⁶, where they put me in solitary confinement. In the early hours of the morning I realized that I was bleeding.

16 Orlí – a prison located in Brno.

I was sent to a doctor, but the State Secret Police officers had no time to take me to the hospital like the doctor ordered them to do. I was pregnant with the child of my American soldier. I was in my third month, and I miscarried. They left me bleeding there for three days until I was totally drained. Eventually the whole ward of the prison revolted and requested medical assistance for me. There was an old jailor who eventually helped me and took responsibility for my transport to the Brno maternity hospital. They saved my life there, but they couldn't save the baby. They treated me really well in the hospital and let me have anything I wanted. The doctors told me that I had to rest. They then changed all the interrogators. I was interrogated by a different man who also recorded everything accurately and the records contained only things that I had actually said. Then they handed me over to the custody of the court.

What was the trial like?

I am telling you it was a farce because the verdicts were pre-arranged by the State Secret Police officers, anyway. My lawyer wasn't helping me at all because he was a court-appointed attorney. I received a sentence of fifteen years for espionage. When I was in custody before the trial, I used to write letters to one *mukl*, and I found out that we were a part of the same case. He was a driver of the Avia van and he was accused of handing over some documents to Franta, one of the boys with whom I crossed the boarder. That was the justification they used to accuse him of espionage. I spoke to his lawyer, and we agreed that I would help him if he was mentioned at the trial. During the trial, when he defended himself claiming he had had no idea of what had been going on, I put my hand up and said that Franta, the agent-walker, had boasted to me that he had managed to smuggle some documents on the Avia van and logically the driver could not have known anything about it. The judge looked at me and asked me why I had not said this during the investigation. "Nobody asked me about that. I didn't know this gentleman, so perhaps nobody thought we had something in common," I answered. The investigators were baffled, and in the end he got only three years.

Where did they take you after the trial?

They took me to Znojmo where all inmates were starving and from Znojmo to Charles Square in Prague. From there I went to Kladno¹⁷ where I was seriously considering escaping. Ruda's girlfriend, who had tried to cross the border with us and had been arrested, too, was there with me. She didn't want to leave, though. I don't know whether it was her or somebody else who overheard us by chance and betrayed me, but they called me into their office and told me, "Well, well, so you would like to escape, and you are trying to talk the others into going with you." Of course I wanted her to testify and they called her, but she testified against me and therefore they took me to Ruzyně¹⁸. There was no interrogation, and nobody spoke to me about the escape attempt. I was there for about ten days. They noted "escape" in my papers and put me in transport cell in Pankrác until they transported me to Jičín. I stayed there for four months. In the meantime they sent me to Terezín to work in a prisoners' work unit. After two weeks they found out that I tried to escape and sent me back to Jičín. From Jičín they transported us to Lomnice nad Popelkou. A women prisoner who was a climber had escaped from

17 **Kladno** – a town in Central Bohemia.

18 **Ruzyně** – a prison in Prague.

there shortly before we arrived. She had escaped through a bathroom window on the second floor, and people said she had managed to get across the border and abroad. We weaved canvas in Lomnice. We stayed there for about four months again and then were transported to Hostinné, where they had a spinning factory. We worked at the wet hall and swapped shifts with civilian workers. The work was hard, but we had a good Commander. He allowed us to take parcels from visitors, and we also took money on the sly. The Commander went shopping in town every day together with a retribution prisoner, and she bought everything for us. From there we were transported to Hradec Králové. It was 1952 when they transported me to Pardubice where I stayed until my release.

What was your arrival at Pardubice¹⁹ like?

Prisoners were transported from Litoměřice, Česká Lípa, and Chrudim. We were taken from Hostinné to Hradec Králové and then to Pardubice. There we noticed that something peculiar was going on because the guards treated us nicely and were telling us, "Girls, this isn't going to be a pleasant experience for you." We were actually the second transport to arrive at Pardubice. The first one was from Pankrác. We were used to a certain look of the jailors' shoulder boards [epaulettes], and all of a sudden we noticed their red shoulder boards and immediately knew that we were being guarded by the State Secret Police [in reality National Security Corps]²⁰. They gathered us in the prison yard where they gave us numbers. I got number 176. We were put into one cell, which was a big hall divided into double rooms. We lived on the first floor because there were offices on the ground floor. It was called section A because there were also men in the section B. Then they gathered us in front of the section A section, brought straw, and we had to stuff our mattresses. We were given covers and mess tins. We had to hand in our civilian clothes and got prison clothes. We had no work place yet, because part of the prison was still being built, so in the beginning our job was to help the men with carrying bricks. We also scrubbed floors, which were pitch-black. There was a madman of a captain, and he used to come in wearing boots covered in mud and would order, "Now, scrub it all again!" We used glass, straw, and cold water for scrubbing the floors. There were about eighty of us at the beginning. When we had free time, we used to go lie down and chat behind the main square²¹ where there were grass and apple trees and also some vegetables growing. That lasted about a month. At first, they called for somebody to work in the garden, but I didn't want to do that. First, I worked in the cable room, then in the sewing room, and then the cutting room.

In September 1955 there was a hunger strike in Pardubice. What was your experience with it?

That was when I was working in the sewing room, and the hunger strike originally started in the knitting room. We didn't know who started it and why. It was only later that we learned that the overseer of the knitting room was a downright sadist, but we never had to deal

19 **Pardubice** – a town in Eastern Bohemia where the prison for women was situated. The first transport of political female prisoners arrived on March 26, 1952, and was supposed to prepare the location for coming prisoners. Mostly political prisoners with high sentences were placed into this prison.

20 On May 1, 1951, the Ministry of Justice handed the Pardubice prison to the Ministry of National Security. From then on, the security ceased to be provided by prison guards and was taken care of by the police. Prisoners agreed that as soon as the institution was handed over to the Ministry of National Security, the prison conditions tightened up, violence occurred on a larger scale, and stricter disciplinary rules were introduced.

21 Also called Wenceslas Square by prisoners. A big space in the prison of Pardubice where female-prisoners were gathered and proceeded the roll calls.

with her. They rushed us to the yard, and we were surrounded by State Secret Police officers [in reality National Security Corps] with machine guns and a ministerial commission came for inspection. The girls who started the whole thing were taken to a State Secret Police office in Pardubice. At that time there was a change in leadership; Commander *Sultán*²² was replaced by Commander Huňáček²³. When some of the women were taken to the State Secret Police office, Merina [Jandová], my closest friend in prison, and I told ourselves that we would start a hunger strike to protest. We were put into a run-down building, which had started to break down after the “big move” in the summer of 1955. The hunger strikers were divided into groups of about three and put into cells. The girls who started the hunger strike came back from the Pardubice State Secret Police office. Most of the women had finished their hunger strike, but I decided to go on. There were three of us in our cell. Seven days had already passed, and they made a decision to feed us. Božka Tomášková went first, but when she learnt that the others had finished the hunger strike, she stopped it too. Then Vendula Švecová went, and she tried to fight, but they fed her anyway in the end. I was the last. When they started to hold me tight, I told them, “Look, it’s beneath my dignity to fight with you. You have an order to feed me, so feed me.” So they put in the feeding tube and poured in the broth. When they were pulling it out, I threw up all over *Ruzyňák*, a jailor who was very meticulous about his uniform. They took me to a cell next to Vendula’s. All in all, we were on hunger strike for two weeks, and we used Morse code to communicate. Vendula messaged me that she was unwell. I remember they told us that they would be taking us to the hospital in Pardubice the following day to feed us through the nose, not through our mouths. I was looking forward to it because I thought I would shout out what was going on in front of the doctors. Vendula kept messaging that she was feeling sick. So I messaged her back to start eating and that I was feeling well so far and would go to hospital on my own. However, she collapsed in the evening and would not start eating again without me. So I had to end my hunger strike.

What was the hygiene situation in the prison? For example, how did you wash clothes or bathe?

There was filth in Kladno, so we did our washing by soaking our clothes in cold water, soaping them, rolling them, and rinsing them off the next day. The most important thing for us was to be clean during the visiting times. We did the ironing mattress-style. We slept on the clothes, and in the morning we ironed out the creases in the skirts and blouses. We could only use cold water. If there was some warm water we were happy to be able to use it for bathing. In Pardubice we went to a washroom once a week or once in a fortnight, but I never went

22 **Bohumil Mikovec** (1919–?) – a Commander of female prison of Pardubice in the years 1952–1955. By profession a roofer, worked from 1937 to 1950 as a miner. A member of the Communist Party from June 9, 1945. He joined the Corps of Prison Guard in August 1950. On December 1, 1952, he was appointed Commander to the prison of Pardubice. Bohumil Mikovec was officially released out of service from the Ministry of Interior on March 31, 1955. The main reason was an intimate affair that he kept with the former condemned political prisoner Dr. Jana Hánová. He was sentenced to five days simple imprisonment and then released.

23 **Jaroslav Huňáček** (1924–?) – a Commander of female prison of Pardubice in the years 1955–1964. During the years 1939–1951, he worked as a plumber. A member of the Communist Party from December 1, 1945. He joined the National Security Corps in 1951 and worked as a guard in penal labor camps in Jáchymov. In the years 1954–1955 a Commander of penal labor camp Prokop in Horní Slavkov. In March 1955, he was awarded the medal “For Service to Fatherland”. In October 1955 appointed to a Commander to the prison of Pardubice. In 1962–1963 disciplined twice for deficiencies in the prison of Pardubice. Removed from office of Commander in June 1964.

to the washroom, because it all depended on which jailor was on duty. Some of them were bitches and let us soap ourselves, but then ordered us to finish up and either turned off the water or turned on the cold water. Later on, I found out that the jailors came there to watch us. So I didn't want to show off. For the duration of my time in prison, I was only in the washroom about two times.

What was your experience with the guards, both male and female?

In the sewing room, the guard was *Permoník*, and he was decent. For example, he saw me with a nun, and he said, "Hrušková, you have been talking to Huberta for the last thirty minutes!" and I responded, "I am only explaining the sewing to her, because she can't get her head around it." He never reported on anyone. *Anka Suchá* was the one who worked us the most. Then there was another one whom we nicknamed *Stepped-in margarine*, and she used to be a prostitute. There was also *Jáno Škrhola*. He was always pushing me to do part-time jobs. Then there was a guy who came from close to where I live now. We used to call him *Prince Bayaya* [a Czech fairy tale character]. Once the guards tossed the cells, and I forgot to hide my English textbook. I gave up on seeing it again. A couple of days later *Bayaya* came and told me, "I dumped your English book behind the closet," and it was really there! I never told anyone about it though.

Could you do anything in your free time?

There was an art club and later on *Taussigová-Potůčková*²⁴ became its organizer. She was a communist, and I stopped going there because I couldn't stand it. I had my principles. She was put in my cell at one point. It was during the events in Hungary [in 1956], and she was worried that we would hurt her. She was very lonely in the prison, and I have to say that she had a bad time there. In the section C I got to know *Nina Svobodová*²⁵, a writer who wrote poems which I used to know by heart. She had the idea to do theater in the prison. After we finished work, we used to put on short plays. I used to paint the masks and the faces of the girls who acted and did anything else that needed to be done. We also used to entertain ourselves by listening to the news on the prison radio every day at 7 p. m. I used to write down the most important news, make notes and comments, and when the afternoon shift came back from work at 10 p. m., I used to read it for those women too. Sometimes we could even listen to classical music on the prison radio. However, the prison radio was only on during the last couple of years of my stay there. It was the same with newspapers, and we used to have one newspaper for the whole building. I remember once we organized a ball. We used to play music in the bathroom. One girl would whistle on the comb, another would sing, I would play the drums, and the rest of the girls would dance. *Nina Svobodová* saw it and liked it very much. This was in the winter of 1953. *Nina* liked it so much that she wrote a program, and the girls dressed up in masks and played historical parts and characters from fairy tales. There were seven dwarves, Admiral Nelson, a princess with a star on her brow, a Hawaiian dancer, the Roman emperor Hadrian, and

24 **Jarmila Taussigová-Potůčková** (1914–2011) – a member of the Communist Party; one of the leading members of the Party Inspection Committee. She was responsible for political and stalwart activities within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. She was sentenced in one of the continuous trials with Rudolf Slánský in 1952 and released on amnesty in 1960.

25 **Nina Svobodová** (1902–1988) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

others that I cannot recollect. The musicians were supposed to be beetles. We made antennas, but mine kept falling off of my head because I had shaved my hair off the previous autumn. I couldn't be bothered with it and took the antennae off. In the end the people in masks were sent to solitary confinement, and since I had no mask, I wasn't sent to solitary. People said that the Commander [Bohumil Mikovec] of the prison really regretted not having seen our performance. His Deputy, whom we called *Pepánek*, attended. The girls spent about two weeks in solitary. A couple of days earlier Jiřina Štěpničková²⁶ had arrived and was completely taken aback with all of it, especially with our masks.

Did you ever send or receive a *moták*²⁷ during your imprisonment?

Of course, I sent many of them in prison. In every prison I used to send secret messages to somebody, mostly to men. My mom used to send me secret messages, too. She would put them into scones because they didn't check them. They only cut big marble cakes. I used to tell people I trusted to eat carefully because there might be a secret message inside. I always had to wait until the message was found, and only then would I hand out the scones. I also used to carry secret messages during visits in Pardubice. I would glue one to my palm and when I stretched out my hand to give a handshake, I would squeeze the person's hand. My mother knew that I had something in there, so she took the message and pretended to cry and wipe her tears, and that's how she put the message in her pocket. In 1958 we were allowed to sit at a table. Before then we always received visitors behind railings. I would like to share a little story with you. In 1956 the women from the *Hrad* [Castle]²⁸, which was a closed department, wrote letters to the UN Secretary Hammarskjöld²⁹. In 1958 when they transported the women back from Prague where they were serving their punishment, [Marie] Zenáhlíková, Dáša Šimková³⁰, and Irenka Vlachová again wrote similar letter to Hammarskjöld, and I joined in. I handed this letter in the form of a secret message to my mother. At that time, my parents didn't live close to the border, as they now lived in Věstonice³¹ and had no way of smuggling the letter abroad. My mother was afraid, and that's why she sewed them into the insides of an armchair. When I came back from prison, I had long forgotten about it, and my mother didn't mention it either. In 2006 I wanted to throw the armchair away, but had this hunch and decided to cut the armchair open. A tinfoil packet fell out and there was the letter from 1958! Another thing I should mention is that I also exchanged secret messages with Merina [Jandová], who was my best friend in prison. I can't remember anymore why, but she got a placement at the *Hrad* [Castle]. She was scrupulous and was very honest with everybody. The Commander, whom we

26 **Jiřina Štěpničková** (1912–1985) – a Czechoslovak theater and film actress. She was sentenced to fifteen years in prison in a trial in 1952.

27 **Moták** – a secret message usually distributed among prisoners on a small piece of paper.

28 **Hrad** [Castle] – a special prison department for prominent politically engaged women. For example, Růžena Vacková, a professor at Charles University, Dagmar Skálová, and Vlasta Charvátová were imprisoned there. Altogether there were sixty-four female prisoners.

29 **On the eve of June 29, 1956, twelve prisoners in the Hrad** [Castle] department wrote letters to the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld which described reasons and means of arrest procedures, together with the conditions in Czechoslovakian prisons and penal labor camps. The women were demanding their rights as political prisoners. The letters were supplemented with translations according to the language skills of each individual author. Naturally, the letters were never sent out and were enclosed into the personal prison files of their authors.

30 **Dagmar Šimková** – a former prisoner who is well-known for writing a book of her prison memories called "*Byly jsme tam taky*" (*We Were There Too*).

31 **Věstonice** – a village in Southern Moravia.

nicknamed *Sultán* [Bohumil Mikovec], knew about our secret messaging, but he had no idea how we exchanged the messages. I was working in the cutting room where the pay was a bit better, and we were also allowed to receive parcels once every six weeks or two months. Once, at Christmas I got a parcel, and the Commander brought it to me. *Sultán* was the Commander then. He came to the *Hrad* [Castle] the following day and saw that Merina had the sweets from my parcel spread on her bed cover. *Sultán* told her, "Jandová, I am going to punish neither you nor Hrušková, but tell me how you managed to get that candy here!" He was constantly trying to figure out how I was sneaking the things there. Well, what I did was when I went to the toilet at night, I crawled through the railings there. Merina and I had an agreement about the time I would go through, and she would wait for a signal and then cast down a thread with her bundle of secret messages, or I would tie my bundle onto the thread and she would pull it up to the second floor where the *Hrad* [Castle] was.

In prison, did you know about any women who decided to cooperate and give information about other prisoners?

One never knew who could be coerced into cooperation. They used promises with some and threats to take away children and put them into foster homes with others. It was obvious that any mother would do anything to save her family. They never tried to persuade me because they knew that I had been given such a chance by the Russians, who had tried to persuade me into cooperating, but I had refused. I remember one woman who agreed to cooperate. This was during the time of Huňáček [Commander] in 1958. There was a search raid, and they found my English textbook. I had studied English the day before and had pulled out a box with a double bottom where my English textbook was hidden. One of the inmates asked me, "Mosquito, how was it discovered?" and I replied, "All right [in English]," while staring into the box. I recalled that Věra was there that day. Her husband was imprisoned, her father was abroad, and she came from a well-to-do family in the region of Hradec. They had threatened to put her child into a children's home. I wanted to verify it first. Once, when we were sitting in our cell alone, I started to write a secret message for one of the male prisoners. She came to me and asked, "Mosquito, what are you writing?" and I replied, "Oh, I am just writing to one of the boys, to one of the *mukls*." It was a trap I set for her. In a couple of days, I was called in for questioning. "You are corresponding with the male prisoners!" they said, and the guard started to recite the first line of my message. So I told him, "How can you know that? Have you found it? That's interesting!" I didn't send the message. I burnt it instead, but I played dumb. "Did you find him? Did you punish him?" The interrogator responded, "Of course he got a punishment, and you will get one, too." I then said, "What for? You know, I never sent any message to anybody. I just wanted proof, and you will see the consequences in a little while." The following day I wrote a letter to the Ministry of Interior saying that they made people spy on each other and threaten to put prisoner's children into foster homes. All in all, it was mainly a complaint to the Ministry about the conditions. I said that they bossed us around, they put us into the "Dump" [a wet concrete cell for solitary confinement] for nothing, gave us food only every two days, that it was freezing there, and we had to sleep on the cement floor, etc. I gave it to *Škrhola* and asked him to hand it over to the Commander and said that I was going to start a hunger strike. They brought me to the State Secret Police office in Pardubice where a doctor came to check on me every day. On the seventh day she

told me, "If I can give you a piece of advice, the letter has been delivered to the Ministry. They will come to carry out an investigation, but you are risking your health with the hunger strike." So, in the end, I stopped my hunger strike, and they put me back into the very same cell. I learned that the Commander had come to the cell to do a prisoner count one evening, and he said, "Věra, Hrušková is spreading the news that you are an informer." She went red. I didn't tell anybody, but he told her in public in front of the whole cell because they didn't need her anymore. I came back to the cell, and she wouldn't speak to me. I was thinking, "You signed because you were cornered, so I can't condemn you, but I wanted to help you. I hadn't done it to get revenge. That's why I wrote the letter to the Ministry." About a month later, the Ministry people came to carry out an investigation, so I explained the situation to them, and the prison was probably reprimanded for letting us sleep on the cement floor, because from then on there were always mattresses. Christmas time came, and I went around the cell to give holiday greetings to everyone. We always used to put on a show at Christmas because we didn't want all the mothers to be sad that they are alone and separated from their children. So we used to organize a Christmas pageant. Every year I made a nativity scene out of paper, and every year it got confiscated. So I came to Věra and told her, "Věruška [diminutive of the name Věra], I didn't want to hurt you; I wanted to help you." She held me like this and said, "Mosquito, thanks a lot, because now they are letting me be."

You have mentioned that guards tossed the cells. What was that like?

They usually tossed the cells while we were at work. Sometimes it was really thorough. They ripped straw from mattresses and threw it with jam and sugar all together into one big heap. Once I was ill, and they came to do a search raid. The trouble was that I was hiding things for the girls in my cell in my bed. The guard *Ruzyňák* came. He was a scary man. He demanded, "How come you are in bed? We came to toss cells." I replied, "I am ill. Do I have to get up?" I didn't want to leave my bed because I had all those things that needed to be protected like photos, sweaters, and other things under my duvet. So he told me, "You can stay in bed then. We'll be decent." So I covered my head because I didn't want to watch it, and they were done after a minute.

I heard that there was a "big move" in 1955 in Pardubice. Can you describe what it was like?

One time, they told us that we were going to move. Everybody from the section A had to move to the section B and vice versa. That was during the times of *Sultán* [Commander Bohumil Mikovec], when he started seeing Jana [Hánová], a doctor, in her office. We were also told that we needed to move the closets. In fact, the whole prison was being moved around. We were moving down from the third floor and were dragging the closets down the steps. The whole building was shaking. All of a sudden somebody found out that there was a hole in the third floor and it was getting bigger. They reported it, and that was the end of the "big move." They brought in building inspectors from the Ministry, who came the following day, and they told us to sleep wherever we could find space and that nobody was allowed to enter the third floor. So everybody found a sleeping place with people they knew. Eventually, they found out that the third floor needed to be demolished because of insecure building structure. Later, they put us into a stable that used to be a storage room for textiles and moved all the textiles from there to the barracks in Pardubice. In the stable Vlasta Nováčková found a nest of newborn mice in

the pocket of her jacket. Mice crawled into all our clothes, so we started to hang them up on hooks on the walls.

You met various types of people in prison. Could you say something about them?

For example, we lived with retribution prisoners, and they used to say, "If it was up to us, we would pave Wenceslas Square [main square in Prague] with your heads." They hated us. What's more, there were guards from concentration camps, and they met with their former prisoners there. The retribution prisoners were sent to Germany in 1955. After 1955, there was only us, the political prisoners, in Pardubice and then later on criminal prisoners, who started to come in gradually. The murderers used to say, "We only killed one person, but you wanted to kill the whole nation." In short, some were with us, and some against us. The prostitutes from Ostrava were the worst. They spoke coarsely about this or that in a way that would make your stomach turn. They came in the final years of my internment, towards the end of the fifties. Then there were prisoners who had swindled money from others. Some of them were innocent, but others were just crooks. Gypsies lived there, too. Guards never intervened when they fought among themselves. However, the Gypsies were never aggressive towards us.

It seems that you always knew how to take care of yourself in prison and you had no problems speaking out. Except for the hunger strike in 1955, in which you were the last person to stop, were there some other forms of protests?

I have a funny story from Kladno prison. We refused to move because of a fart. There were about thirty-two women in our cell, and our woman guard lived right next to us. It was the only building without bedbugs. The retribution prisoners lived opposite to our building. The guard used to invite her lover over, and one of my inmates used to watch them through the cracks in the cabin's wood walls. Once, the lover let out a fart while having sex. The inmate who was watching them got carried away and shouted out loud, "Girls, he farted while doing it!" Of course, the guard heard it. She went home for the weekend. Another guard came, and because I was the cell leader at that time, he told me, "Hrušková, this is a list according to which this cell is going to be divided and moved into different cells. This room is going to be vacated, and the Commander will use it as a storage room." I replied, "Guard, wait a second. We are not going to move because of a fart, are we?" He gave me a slap in my face, and I thanked him for it. He turned and left. He was followed by another guard, and he gave me a punch in the face. My nose started to bleed, so I left for the washroom to try and stop the bleeding. He then proceeded to beat up all prisoners from the cell. My nose was broken. In 1962, I had a tumor close to my nose, and when I was having it removed by a plastic surgeon, the doctors tried to fix my nose bones, but they couldn't do it. The bones healed up badly, and the wound was too old. I suffered from frequent nose bleeding then, especially in hot weather. I still suffer from it today, especially when I am ill with a cold.

To get back to the revolt, we refused to move then, and the following Monday a truck came and all of us were transported to *Karlák*³². We were put into a large sitting room and one by one were questioned. I, being the cell leader, went first. I told them the truth. When the fifth inmate came, the interrogators were already protesting, "We don't want to hear about the

32 *Karlák* – prison at Charles Square in Prague.

furt again!" The investigation was soon dropped. We crossed our fingers, got some paper from somewhere, and played cards to bide the time. After two weeks we were transported back to Kladno. I knew they were going to move us. The guard was not allowed to bring her lover there anymore. We were moved into a building with bedbugs. The bedbugs liked my blood very much, and they were killing me.

What was your release like?

When the amnesty³³ came, they read the decree out to us. We didn't laugh. We weren't happy at all. Everybody was wondering why? There had been a rumor going about for some time because they moved lots of people from the section C and D to the section B in March. In section C they only left one room with nuns, and then murderers and prostitutes came. They emptied a room in section A for us, and we were trying to find out why they had put us together. In the end, we found out that allegedly we were all sentenced for espionage against the Russians. So, I was thinking that the amnesty probably would not apply to us. Each of us had to have an agreement from their hometown or village saying that we would be accepted back. My brother-in-law, my younger sister's husband, was a communist. I would say he was an idealist, though, and he trusted the communists. He was Chairman of the village council here in Věstonice and hence he knew when my release would be scheduled. My mother told me that on the day of my release, he came to our place a couple of times to ask whether I had already arrived. They took us to the train station in small groups. One group at a time, because they were probably afraid that we would start a revolt. Our tickets had been bought in advance, and they escorted me to the train, and off I went, straight away. We traveled in our prison uniforms. I went first to Brno to see a friend from the prison first and then went home after that. I rang the doorbell, my mother came to answer the door and asked me, "Are you just visiting, or is this permanent?" and I said, "It looks like I have been released, but I will have probation for ten years." Then my mother went on to tell me that we would go and visit all our relatives, and we would see where we could get a warm welcome. In the end, everybody was glad that I was back, so there was a happy ending to it.

You were sentenced at the age of twenty and spent eleven years of your youth in prison.

What was the most important thing that kept you so strong?

Faith. I was friends with a girl who was imprisoned because of her Catholic activities. We used to go for walks together, and she taught me the whole mass by heart, that way we were able to hold masses in the prison yard. My friend was even able to sneak in some wafers. We were constantly being persecuted because of these "masses". Nuns used to do it in a similar way. The jailors found out, and we were sent to isolation cells. However, during my prison years I kept my faith, and I still keep it today. I always say that the mills of God have a nuclear power engine. I grew up in a religious family, and I saw it all as my punishment. My mother warned me not to come back to the Republic, but I wouldn't listen. I also promised the American I wouldn't go back to Czechoslovakia, and I betrayed him. My mother sent me a letter to Linz saying that there had been a warrant of arrest issued in my name and urged me not to come back and avoid our forest lodge. I didn't listen. As I am saying, it was God's

33 President Antonín Novotný Amnesty – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

punishment for my imprudence and disobedience. Still, I managed to come to terms with it. I still kept my faith.

Apart from the problems with your nose cartilage, do you suffer from any other health conditions as a result of your stay in prison and cruelties during interrogations?

As a result of my miscarriage and long imprisonment, I developed a uterine tumor at the age of forty-five. First, it was only the size of a nut, but in three months it grew into the size of a baby's head. I had to undergo a serious operation during which my uterus and one of my ovaries were removed and the other sterilized. That ended any hopes of pregnancy. This was the biggest blow I suffered from the Bolshevik regime.

Did you have a chance to meet your American boyfriend later on?

No, I did not. I wrote him a letter from prison, but they didn't send it to him in America. Later, when I was released during the amnesty in 1960, I didn't know how to contact him. I was being watched, and on the top of it, I was on a conditional discharge with ten years' probation. So, I bought a book called *Travels through Czechoslovakia* and sent it to him. There was a photo of Věstonice inside on which I wrote in English, "This is my home." But, in three months' time the book was returned. A few years ago, I eventually managed to track him down. The children of a relative of mine with good computer skills, found him using his name and date of birth. They found out that he died in 1991, just after the Revolution. Computers were not common in 1989, so there was no way for me to find him. That's why I only found him after his death.

Is it at all possible to get over all the suffering, pain, and loss that you have been through?

When I was in prison I always had strong support from my parents. Nevertheless, I had to come to terms with the fact that I lost my child. I always say that it was meant to be, and life just went on. I have managed to make peace with everything. I don't feel any hatred or bitterness. When I came back from prison at the age of thirty-two, I wanted to have a baby, but I couldn't anymore. It just wasn't possible after eleven years in prison. So, I stayed alone, faithful to my American.

Thank you very much for the interview.

“What helped me most was that I was myself and I didn’t take the others into consideration. My mind was always at home.”



Květoslava Moravečková was born on February 10, 1924, in a small village near Kutná Hora in Malín into a peasant family. After the war she worked as a teacher in a nursery school. In mid-December 1950 came to them a man, who introduced himself as Novotný (by his own name Jaroslav Němeček) and a preacher of the Church of the Advent. After a few days he told her his real name and the real reason for his hiding. He was searched as a leader of an anti-communist resistance organization. He hid from December 9, 1950, until the day of his arrest on November 12, 1951. Květoslava Moravečková was arrested on February 7, 1952, and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. She went through several prisons, the most important were Želiezovce in Slovakia and Pardubice in the Czech Republic. She was released on February 7, 1959. She returned to her native village where she was monitored by State Secret Police. She died in 2015.¹

¹ Archival sources: Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Services Archive], Svazková agenda, arch. č. 9302 MV [Bond agenda, arch. No. 9302 MV]; Fond Inspekce Ministra vnitra (A 8), inv. j. 1313 [The Fund of The Inspection of the Ministry of the Interior (A 8), inventory unit 1313]; Svazková agenda, arch. č. 572279, krycí jméno „Učitelka“ [Bond agenda, arch. No. 572279, code-name “Učitelka”].

Interview with Mrs. Květoslava Moravečková

Interviewer: Klára Pinerová

I'd like to start with a question about your childhood. Where did you grow up, and what are your memories of your parents?

I was born February 10, 1924. I was the only child, and my parents were very kind. My mom and dad would do anything for me. I went to school in Malín², and I had quite good grades. In Malín there was an elementary school that I attended for four years. Then I passed entrance exams to Vlašský Dvůr secondary school and stayed there for another four years. My family had farmland, about twelve hectares, and we also farmed a field that my uncle owned so that we had enough for the cattle. Altogether we had four cows, a heifer, and a few horses. My family was Czech, and my granddad always taught me Czech songs. My granddad and my dad could speak German and Czech perfectly. I was supposed to go on an exchange program³ to learn German, but unfortunately it never happened because the war started. Before the war started I had gone to a training college for nursery school teachers in Křižovnická Street opposite the Parliament⁴ because I had always wanted to bring up small children.

Did you farm your land by yourselves?

My mom had a maid, Kristýnka, and she helped with the household, and we also had a house that we used for accommodating farm workers. These workers helped us with work and were of course paid for it. We were cottagers, and my father never pretended to be a farmer – although in reality he was a farmer through and through. We also had two women working for us, and they did the hoeing. Sometimes my aunt from America came. Auntie wrote for the journal *Ženské Listy* [Women's Papers] in America and for the *Hospodářské Noviny* [Economic Newspaper] also in America. One time a woman called Mrs. Pavlíková who also wrote for *Ženské Listy* came with Auntie. They both knew Alice Masaryková, the daughter of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk⁵. In America there was an organization called the Czech Ladies Association, of which Alice Masaryková was also a member. Alice was always telling them to stop by at Lány⁶ when they came to Czechoslovakia. Once when my auntie and Mrs. Pavlíková went to Lány, they took me along. I was about ten years old. They dressed me up fine, and off we went. I will never forget the meeting with President Masaryk. I see it as clearly as if it was today. He came riding a horse, nimbly jumped down, handed the reins to the groom, and bowed for the ladies. I remember auntie telling me that I must not greet the President "Ruku líbám!" [Kissing your hand, Sir], but I must tell him, "Nazdar!" [Hi!] So I told him "Nazdar!" [Hi!] and shook his hand. He replied, "Nazdar!" I still like to recollect the meeting even today.

2 **Malín** – a small village close to Kutná Hora, a town in Central Bohemia.

3 **Exchange Program** – a year-long youth exchange between families wherein children learn a foreign language and job skills. In the Czech lands this was usually an exchange with German families.

4 **Old Parliament Building** – an exquisite work of architecture in Prague now known as the Rudolfinum Building.

5 **Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk** (1850–1937) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

6 **Lány** – the summer residence of Czechoslovak and Czech presidents.

Which political party did your parents lean towards?

My father was not a member of any political party, but during the First Republic [1918–1938] he tended to lean towards the Social Democrats. For example, he liked Štefánik⁷ more than Beneš⁸ or Masaryk. He was held captive by the Italians during the WWI, and he was telling me about Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik addressing Czechoslovakian soldiers and trying to persuade them to join the Legions⁹, but some of the soldiers were wounded. For example, my father was shot in the leg, so how could he go and fight? But Štefánik came and addressed them, “Brothers, this is the situation we have, and those of you who can, please join the Legions, but we don’t want to put any pressure on you.” However, Masaryk and Beneš did put pressure on them. My father didn’t join the Legions in the end. With him was a man called Brychta, also from Malín, and he used to bring bones for my father to crush and make into soup. However, news spread, and Brychta didn’t get away with it. My dad used to tell him then, “Brychta, if I ever get back home and slaughter a pig again, I’ll invite you for every single pig slaughter I do.” And so he did. Every time we slaughtered a pig, Brychta came around and helped my father.

How big was Malín actually? How many inhabitants or houses did it have?

There were twenty-five houses altogether. The wealthiest farmers were Zedník, Pokorný, Vlk, and another Pokorný. Us, the Zima family, the Fuchsa family, and our neighbor Filip were, I would say, middle farmers.

Did you feel any changes around 1938? What was your experience with the establishment of the Protectorate?

In Central Bohemia, we didn’t really feel any changes. However, we had relatives in the mountains, and there it was a totally different situation. I used to go there as a child, but later, people had to have a special permit to go there, and I, as a child, didn’t have it. I only had a Kennkarte¹⁰. Every time I went there, Pepík Hnykú, who was a clerk, would take me to do the cheese delivery with him. He used to say, “Květuška [diminutive of the name Květa], we will take the car and do the cheese delivery, and we will go to the Sudetenland¹¹.” I didn’t have the permit, so I had to crouch, and Pepík could speak fluent German, so he would tell the SS officer, “Das ist meine Schwester” [This is my sister], and handed him a cheese, so it always went smoothly.

What was Malín like during the war?

Aircrafts flew over and bombarded Kolín, and bombs flew over our heads. Once we slaughtered a pig. We did it on the sly since it was illegal. We had an electric steamer, and they cut off electricity, so we couldn’t cook the meat. Mom lit the stove quickly. It was Velebníček

7 **Milan Rastislav Štefánik** (1880–1919) – a Slovakian politician, Czechoslovakian Minister of War, member of the Czechoslovak National Council and General of the French army. He organized the Czechoslovakian Legions during WWI and is seen as one of the founders of Czechoslovakia.

8 **Edvard Beneš** (1884–1948) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

9 **Legions** – Volunteer Militia – troops of volunteer soldiers that were formed during WWI, mainly in Italy, France, and Russia. They supported Czech and Slovak immigrants in their effort to create an independent Czechoslovakia.

10 **Kennkarte** – basic identity document in use during the Third Reich era, first introduced in July 1938. They were normally obtained through a police precinct and had the corresponding issuing office and official's stamps on them.

11 **Sudetenland** – a region within the Czech territory which held an ethnic-German demographic majority. After the Munich Declaration in 1938, this region was claimed by Nazi Germany.

who slaughtered the pig that time, and he said to my father, "Calm down, Mister. If someone comes, we will just say that I came to take care of the piglets' teeth, and it will be fine..." In the end we managed to finish anyway, the blood sausages and everything... and we had a jolly good feast.

Did the Germans imposed a levy?

Yes, we did. We paid in kind. Eggs, for example, but I can't remember anymore because I was just a little girl. I remember that we had to hand in eggs because once my aunt, my mother's sister, came and my mom had promised to give her some eggs, but my mom used them for paying the levy, so she had nothing to give her, and aunt scolded her. Mom said, "I'm not going to let them give me a fine just because of aunt." She came for the eggs a week later.

Were there inspections?

If some inspectors came, my father would start speaking to them in German, and it would be OK. We weren't friends with the Germans; we were Czechs, but my father was more a Slovak because he loved Štefánik. For one, Štefánik was a Protestant like we were, and second, he didn't try to persuade them to join the Legions.

Can you remember the liberation?

They shot about nine to twelve people here who are buried here in Malín. Germans shot them when they were retreating. I don't particularly like Russians either. They were too familiar at the beginning, but they were also a bit aggressive.

Do you recollect the post-war period?

After the war I became a teacher in a nursery school and stayed there until the time when I was arrested – until the communists got me – and that was it: my life was ruined. I divorced my first husband because he was a communist with every bone in his body, and I was not. Then, when they arrested me, they brought me to Kutná Hora, the same place where Havlíček Borovský¹² was imprisoned. I remember wondering to myself, 'In which of those cells could Havlíček have been locked up?'

Why were you arrested?

Because we kept an informant in our house. I barely knew him because I was working then, and when I came back he was gone. My uncle, Mr. Žďárský, brought him to us. His name was Němeček, and he said he was cooperating with America. He stayed for about two months. You know, they were so good; my family would die of hunger to feed other people. My parents had hearts of gold, and they always gave to beggars. Němeček was arrested later and so was everybody who had something to do with him. We were pro-American because we have relatives there, and perhaps that's why my father believed him. We really didn't think twice about it. We didn't know that they would make such a monster-trial out of it, and one thing that never, ever crossed our minds at all was that we could end up in prison because of him. Lots of people from Malín got arrested because of him.

12 Karel Havlíček Borovský (1821–1856) – a Czech writer, poet, critic, politician, journalist, and publisher.

Can you describe your arrest?

We were arrested on the same day, my father and me. Father was arrested in the morning and I in the afternoon, and we were both arrested at home. I did some training in Kouřim at that time, and there was a rumor that people were being arrested. We were all shaking with fear. When they came to arrest my father in the morning I was in Kouřim, but I faked being ill. I got home in the afternoon, and then my mom told me that my father had been arrested. Eventually, in the afternoon they came to take me, too. They came and said, "You'll come with us. We want to ask you some questions!" They had to show me their ID, and they took me to the district council. That was when there were lots of arrests going on in Kutná Hora, and they were starting to arrest people in Malín, too. I really didn't know at all why I was being arrested, but I had a clue that it could have been because of Němeček. They took me for questioning at the Kutná Hora district council, but I denied everything. I was arrested on February 7, 1952. My trial was in May 1952. I was sentenced to ten years, got a three-year pardon, and was released on February 7, 1959. My mom kept asking for sentence reductions during my time in jail.

Can you describe the interrogation process?

It was relatively calm. They weren't being really aggressive, and they didn't use swear words, either. They accused us of knowing Němeček. I didn't deny it because he was a husband of my schoolmate. Then they locked us up in a prison in Kutná Hora, and I remember the freezing cold weather that day. The jailor took everything away, even my coat. I had a skirt, and they gave me stockings that kept sliding off my legs. They also gave me pieces of string, and I didn't know what for. The string was to tie the stockings and hold them up. The jailor was incredibly stupid; she couldn't even spell the word "cigarettes" correctly. With me was a retribution prisoner, Ilona Hofferová, and she was trying to calm me down when I started to swear and told me that woman was a chief officer. I had a golden watch, and it was stolen. When I think about it, there were many things I never saw again. So they didn't beat me or anything in there, but after the trial they brought us to Pankrác, where it was catastrophic.

Could you describe the cells in Kutná Hora a little bit?

There were about four of us in our cell: Mrs. Königová, Hofferová, and one more. It was a dreadful place. There was a *šajzák*, a washing pot, where we went to relieve ourselves. It stank disgustingly. We had beans for lunch – that was a nightmare – and then we had potatoes, but we never got meat with them. When they were taking us to the monster-trial, my father gave the jailor sugar to give to me. He believed in sugar the same way I do. The jailor told me, "Miss, when you are eating potatoes, watch out – you have something here from your daddy." Dr. Motejl helped me in a similar way when he was employed as a doctor for female prisoners. About two days before the trial, the jailor brought me some glucose: "The doctor sends you this. He says you should eat it. It's nutritious." The jailor we had there was good. Glucose is also good for your nerves. First, they gave us white ribbons – those were for district prisoners – but then before the monster-trial, they gave us green ribbons. Mrs. Königová told me that we would have a trial at the State Court. Her husband had been executed, and she gave me a small loaf of bread before the trial started. I went to the trial thinking that I would be released. I had no idea that it would end up the way it did. I was certain that I wouldn't stay in jail for long. In the end I served seven years out of ten.

I'd like to go back to your trial. Can you remember the proceedings?

During the monster-trial, they were feeding me. It was just a bit of black slurry and a piece of bread, but my father, for example, didn't get anything at all. However, I will never forget the potato soup. It was nothing special, but we got a scone with the soup. I said, "Warder, could I send this scone to my father please?" I was allowed to, so I sent it to him. They just gave them absolutely no food at all, and my father had had a stomach operation.

I shared the cell with Mrs. Königová, as I said before. She told me, "Květuška, when you are before the court, you tell them everything." That's why I wasn't afraid of them. She gave me support that I needed so much. They tried to throw shame on America, but I told them, "What do you know about America; have you been there? It's true that I haven't been there, but my relatives live there." That's what I told them in front of the entire court hall. There were many workers from factories in the neighborhood, and the hall was completely full. I felt sorry for my father, first and foremost, but he wasn't afraid either. We just didn't want to play the inferior and the humiliated. The trial was in a local public house in Malín, the same place where theatre plays used to be put on. On the stage, all the people of the village were sitting. We were supposed to be charged by prosecutor Čížek¹³, but he renounced the job. There were twelve people to be judged. I knew almost all of them; they were people from Malín: Holec and his son, Havelka, Eliška Štípková, my father, me, the postman, whose name I've already forgotten, and I can't remember the rest, either. I remember Holec declaring, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I do not see this as a trial. This is a theater play." The trial lasted one day, and the sentences were ten years for me, twelve years for my father, the same for Holec, and twelve years for his son too, I think. The sentences were severe. Eliška Štípková got the least severe sentence because she was a sister-in-law of that informant rat Němeček, and she only got one year. Němeček wasn't put on trial with us. If he was put on trial somewhere else, I do not know, and we never saw him again after that. He was said have gotten a good position and had some kind of a hotel somewhere.

My uncle who introduced us to Němeček had a trial in Kutná Hora in Tyl's Theater. They loaded us into vans and took us to Pankrác. I sat next to my father, and he told me, "Květa, I'll give you a slice of bread because the bread in Pankrác is terrible, and you will not want to eat it." That was the last time I saw my father until my release from prison.

Can you remember your arrival at Pankrác?

When we arrived at Pankrác, we had to stand facing the wall and put our hands up. I was terrified they would shoot us. When I went to the hospital for a check-up later, I fainted there. There was a doctor or *mukl* sitting next to me with a wet towel in my face, and he was telling me not to be afraid because he was a *mukl* as well. That was my first time in prison, and I had no idea what the word *mukl* meant. Then they put me in the cell with Eliška Štípková, and we went to beat the carpets for the officers. At that time, I was stupid enough to give them a proper beating.

And where did they take you from Pankrác?

From Pankrác they sorted us into units or so-called commandos. I got transported to Jilemnice, and it was a nice commando. Although it had a wet hall, it was fairly good there. I had relatives

13 JUDr. Karel Čížek (1913–?) – a prosecutor who was famous for taking part in communist show-trials during the 1950s.

who owned a grocery shop there. We used to take a cart and do shopping for the kitchen. We always went with the jailor, of course. They always gave me butter, fruit, and vegetables, so we were fine. The jailor had a good time, too, because every week he would walk away from the shop of my relative Mr. Tuž with a case overflowing with fruits and vegetables. When they found out we were relatives, they banned me from going shopping. I didn't even thank them for helping us so much, but I was worried because they constantly tried to get me.

What kind of work were you made to do in Jilemnice?

We spun linen and put it onto spools. We only had one shift and worked about eight hours. Then we went to the camp and had something to eat there. Then it was time for lights out, and we went to sleep. We were patrolled by factory people. Later only twelve of us remained, but I must say that the staff officers were really nice to us, the real political prisoners, and we had cocoa and sweet buns. We stayed there together with the criminal prisoners, and we lived in the same block, but each group had a different room. Once, when we were walking to the factory, a bus appeared all of a sudden, and one inmate jumped under the wheels. She was killed. A day before she had come to me and asked: "Mrs. Vosátková [Mrs. Moravečková surname at that time], do you believe in life after death? For I had a dream that my husband, whom I had killed, came for me." After that she was just sitting there doing nothing, lost in thoughts. The problem was, I couldn't give her any answer, really, and the following morning this thing happened. There was chaos, and we were asked whether there was a doctor amongst us. Lída Krupičková was and said so, and she escorted her all the way to the hospital. Later, she told me, "Květa, I shouldn't have gone there with her. It was awful." During that week I had visitors, and my mom learned that a prisoner had jumped under a bus. My mom was upset because she was worried that they were treating us badly. From Jilemnice I went to Minkovice and from Minkovice to Varnsdorf and then through Pankrác to Zlín and from there directly to Želiezovce. From there I went to Pardubice in 1956 where I stayed until my release.

From Jilemnice they transported you to Minkovice, and that was perhaps a smaller commando. What do you remember about it?

In Minkovice we abraded stones, and I enjoyed that work. It was an easy job there. In Varnsdorf we wove nylon. That was in 1953. The directors came and chose big, handsome girls for the night shift, and I was one of them. During the first night shift I was very sleepy. There were machines as big as my house, and I switched them on—all of the spools—sat down on a box, and slept. All of a sudden, the overseer came and said, "You only had six spools on. Switch on the whole machine." I woke up and walked sleepily to turn on all of the spools and went to sleep again. I did very little work then. From Varnsdorf I got transported to Liberec. The prison van came, and I took all my things. In Liberec I got a two-year pardon. When we arrived, the jailor came and asked us, "Girls, what's the court you've been sentenced by? By the State Court? Do you like tripe soup? Two pots full of thick tripe soup and a half-slice of bread for everyone!" We were all caught by surprise, we were starving because they didn't give us enough food in Varnsdorf. Then the escort came, and we went off to Pankrác where I collapsed – and that's why they took an X-ray of me in the Pankrác hospital. They found out that I was catching tuberculosis, but I had no TB, just weak lungs. From Pankrác we left by bus. We had to wear civilian clothes so that nobody could see that they were transporting prison-

ers. We drove around my home, and I saw our house and tears went down my cheeks. I was saying to myself, "Mom, I wish you could give me just a piece of bread crust." Later, when my mother came to see me, she was telling me about this dream she had that I came to knock on her window and ask her for a piece of bread.

Where were you transported?

We came to Zlín, which stank unbelievably of rubber. All the food stank of rubber. We worked at the assembly line, and each of us had her own task to do. I felt sick all the time, and the foreman saw me, and I went to the doctor's. The doctor told me to stop working in the line immediately. I was happy that I didn't have to be in the stench anymore. Then they closed it down, and we got transported directly to Želiezovce¹⁴. When we arrived, they divided us into quarters. The following day there was a line-up, and we were assigned various jobs, and I was lucky. I got a job in a place called *Járek*, where the disabled worked with us. We went to work by a small handcar, and I worked in the tobacco gang. It used to be very hot there.

You said that you worked together with the disabled?

Yes, poor souls! They were mentally disabled, and if you saw how they were treated! They were treated like slaves. They got up in the morning just like us, and they got black slop. They got a piece of bread and went out to work in the scorching sun, and each of them got a line of beetroot to hoe. A caretaker was following them with a long stick in his hand, watching how everybody worked. If one of them didn't do the hoeing properly, the caretaker took the stick, and the disabled had to go back. They were so scared of the caretakers, poor souls! It was very over the top. This was what socialism looked like.

What was the arrival in Želiezovce like?

When we came to Želiezovce, it was snowing very hard, and the weather was freezing cold. I wouldn't wish this on anybody. It was snowing and raining, and we were walking through corn fields. Everything was wet. We came to our quarter, and there was a small stove to be shared by forty people. In the morning our clothes were still wet as we were putting them on. It was slavery! We got a small bucket of coal but ended up using corn for fuel anyway. The accommodation was awful because there were bedbugs all over the place, and we had to kill them every night. We lived in sheepfolds – they were a kind of wooden houses. There were large rooms that slept about forty people, and each of us had a bunk bed. There were normal houses as well. Nuns and prostitutes lived in one of the stone houses.

Can you remember the hepatitis epidemics?

First there was a typhus epidemic in Želiezovce. They were supposed to give us vaccination, and I was afraid of it. I remembered how my father told me that they got a typhus vaccination during the war as well, but he was telling me, "I always squeezed it, and there was a squirt of blood, but I was able to bear the vaccine better than the others." The doctors came first, and they were supposed to vaccinate us, but then they only left the vaccines behind and left. One ampoule was supposed to be for two or three prisoners. The woman who gave us the injec-

14 Želiezovce – a prison for women in Slovakia. Female-prisoners used to work there in agriculture.

tions was not a doctor at all; she was a kind of backstreet abortionist. There was a line-up, and I came forward and said, "Jailor, I would like to report to the Commander, because the way you give us the vaccinations here, we wouldn't even give them that way to our pigs at home." I came to see the Commander. We had to report ourselves like soldiers do. "Prisoner number such and such reports arrival." I told him I was not going to get the vaccination. He replied, "OK, I will tell the doctor to boil the needle and use a new ampoule for you." I was on cloud nine because I expected he would send me to a correction cell. As soon as she gave me the injection I squeezed the spot. Later, doctors from Pankrác arrived and said it wasn't typhus but hepatitis. We were to get *Gama globulin*, and again they had to boil the needle for me and open a new ampoule. There were prostitutes, and who knew what kind of diseases they could have had.

In Želiezovce did you get to know, for example, about the Hungarian uprising?

Well, once, when we were on our way to work, we heard distant sounds of shooting. It was close to the Hungarian border. The jailors told us to ignore it because it was from the marvel mines. However, we knew already that it was the revolution in Hungary. The following day when we were going to work, there were soldiers everywhere. We arrived at the yard, lined up, and got divided into the political and the criminal prisoners. We, the political prisoners, were put in quarantine and weren't allowed out anymore. We were issued a three-liter bottle of milk, tomatoes, peppers, better bread, and bigger food rations. We didn't work; we just caught bedbugs. And then they sent us to Pardubice. I was happy because I thought that it would be closer for my mom to come for a visit, and she wouldn't spend so much money on traveling.

How often did you mother visit you?

Mom went to see my dad as well, and she didn't have so much money either. She came to see me in Želiezovce one time. I had no contact whatsoever with my dad; we didn't even exchange letters. In the end we met only after I was released.

Was it a problem to communicate with murderers and prostitutes?

Not with the prostitutes, no, but it was with the murderers. Some of them were sadists and had no feelings. I used to study characters and people in prisons. I met all sorts of people there. In Pardubice there was a Gypsy woman who used to come to see me. She couldn't read, and she got letters from her child, so I used to read them for her. The jailors didn't like Gypsies, and were aggressive to them. They mixed us; for example, they put nuns together with prostitutes just to humiliate them.

What was your arrival like in Pardubice?

We arrived, and I got a job at the garment factory, but I didn't like it there. The quotas were too tough. Lída Krupičková assigned the easiest jobs to enable me to meet the quota, but I couldn't manage anyway. On New Year's Day there was supposed to be an announcement of who failed to meet the quotas. My name was announced, and the Commander came to see me in the garment room and was asking me why I wasn't meeting the quotas. I replied, "Commander, I came from Želiezovce, and I can't do any more." He said, "Would you like a lower

quota?" However, I never told them when I needed something from them, so I told them that it didn't matter to me. The Tesla factory in Přelouč was just being opened there. There they trained us to do potentiometers. It was better there, and then I worked slowly so as not to increase the quota.

Were there punishments for repeatedly not meeting the requirements?

Yes. For example, I wasn't allowed any parcels when my mom came to see me when I had a sanction. My mom was sad, but on the other hand, I was sometimes glad because I knew that mom had very little for herself sometimes.

What did you wear?

In Želiezovce we had skirts and white men's shirts with no collars. When it was very hot in the cell we pulled them out so we could have a bit of air circulation around our bodies, but we weren't allowed to wear bras. In Pardubice I got trousers, a coat, and a shirt, and it was all made of itchy cloth. We all had the same tog-brown or grey-brown. We also had square black grey scarves. Our underwear was provided by the prison as well. They changed it for us every week, but I used to hand wash it to keep it clean. I put it over the frame of my bed and sometimes the other inmates got angry because of that. Well, it really was an ordeal sometimes. They never changed the rest of the clothes for us. When we came to the camp, we got two blankets, a pillow, and that was it. There was a straw mattress, and that's how we made the beds.

Could you briefly describe what your daily routine was like? When was the wake-up call? What were the working hours? When did you get lunch and when did the lights go out?

In Želiezovce we woke up at six every morning and had breakfast; the first shift up was already at seven o'clock. We were divided into work groups, and we went to *Járek*. My workplace was a bit further. We picked tobacco there and put it on long bars. The bars were later hung in drying house. Then we picked tomatoes, and I used to eat them on the sly. The food wasn't great – only watery soup with a bit of hulled barley in it and bread. They brought us lunch there. We got lunch around noon, and we worked until three or four o'clock and then went back to the great yard by handcar, and there was the general line-up. The line-up was usually around six or seven o'clock, and it lasted about an hour or an hour and a half. I can't tell you precisely because we had no watches. We could only tell the time according to the sun. If somebody ran away – as, for example, Dáša Šimková¹⁵ once did – the line-up was longer because it took a long time to count us and find out if and who was missing. After the line-up we went straight to bed. We were glad that we could go to sleep. It was real slavery there! In Pankrác it looked like this: In the morning we had to empty the shit pots, and there was a revolting smell everywhere. Then we got bread and disgusting tea. At noon, some of us worked; for example, we beat the carpets, and other prisoners could sit down, but couldn't lie down. Some of them had to walk around without stopping. In Pardubice we got breakfast in the morning, went to the garment room, and did sewing there. I was never able to meet the quota 100%. We got some wages for the work we did and could treat ourselves and buy something with the money.

15 Dagmar Šimková wrote *Byly jsme tam taky (We Were There Too)*, a memoir about her experiences in prison.

We worked until two o'clock, and then we went for lunch, which we could take with us to the dorms. Around six o'clock there was the evening line-up, and we went to sleep.

Did you ever have any free time? What did you do then?

For example, we did various kinds of handiwork. In Varnsdorf we made flowers. We begged for pieces of fine wire off the electricians and wound them around a pin, and then we took the wire and wound some yarn around it. I have a flower like this at home. My mom secretly smuggled it from the prison for me. It is a bit out of shape though, because when my mom came to visit, we shook hands, and I had the flower hidden in my hand. Luckily, nobody realized it; otherwise I would be sent to solitary confinement for punishment. Or sometimes we got lemons in a parcel, so I made a piglet out of it. Or we used to cut bookmarks out of toothpaste paper boxes, and we made different things out of bread too. That's why I wasn't interested in doing board games such as *Člověče, nezlob se!* [a table game: *Man, don't get mad!*]. Some even played chess. My dad, for example, had a wallet for camp money made out of toothpaste boxes that I still keep at home.

Was it possible to borrow books from the library?

We could borrow books, but they were only socialist books, and I didn't read them. We could borrow newspaper, but only the newspaper; *Rudé Právo*. I remember reading the paper once. The thing was that after finishing our own work, we had to do another job – we had to help the builders. I used to run away to the toilets because they couldn't follow us there to retrieve us. Once a guard came though and caught me reading the paper. When a jailor came to the dorms, we had to stand up and report ourselves just as soldiers do during their military service. By that time it was shortly before my release, and I was thinking he could just bugger off. He came, and I was sitting by the window when he asked, "Don't you know what you are supposed to when an officer comes?" I got up very slowly, "I am very sorry, officer, I did not see you as I was reading the paper." He continued, "Which is your bed?" He took my blankets and threw them on the floor. Of course, we had to have our beds made the military way and when he was leaving, I said aloud, so that he could hear me, "I hope he doesn't think I am going to make my bed before the line-up!" However, I had to do a second job in the building site. We carted bricks. I used to go and take one brick, put it in the wheelbarrow, take a rest, take another brick, put it in the wheelbarrow, take a rest. The jailor shouted at me to work faster, but I ignored him.

What was the hygiene like in prison? For example, how often were you allowed to have a bath?

There was no hygiene. When we came back from work we went to the washroom, which was for about twenty people. There were troughs full of water. The washrooms were dreadful, and I wonder how I managed to not catch anything serious in that prison.

Was there a supply of toiletries, such as toothpaste or soap?

This we had to buy with the "treat" money – with the camp money. I had very little when I was working at the garment factory. In Tesla we could have up to eighty crowns, so I used to give some of it to Terežka Vejsadová who had a job stringing beads and earned about five

crowns, which was barely enough to buy the toilet paper. I gave her a bit extra so that she could buy other important toiletries. She was older, so she didn't have to buy sanitary napkins. She was like my mom. She was unhappy when I was leaving, because she was staying. Her son had emigrated abroad, and her daughter used to come to visit her. They also confiscated all their estates. Anyway, in the canteen we could buy sugar, biscuits, toilet paper, sanitary napkins. Chocolate, tinned food, and other goodies were not available.

What was the food like in Pardubice?

In Pardubice we most often had potatoes and carrots, carrots and potatoes. It was very bland. The sight of carrots used to make me sick for a couple of years after that. In Želiezovce we picked peppers and tomatoes in the fields because the food was dreadful there. The soup was watery and the piece of bread small, and we were starving all the time.

Would you be able to describe the difference between a prison and the so-called commando?

In prison a jailor came and stuck a pot of coffee or soup or some food through the door window and closed it again. Then I just sat on the straw mattress, but that was forbidden in some places. In a commando it was a bit freer; we could move around as we wanted. Despite being a stone prison, Pardubice was better in any case. It is true that the food there was also terrible, but we were warm. However, in Želiezovce we had to work in foul weather – sleet and frost.

You said that you met a retribution prisoner, Mrs. Hofferová, in the Kutná Hora prison. Did you meet other woman prisoners who were sentenced according to the Retribution Decree? What were the relations among you like?

I have to say that they wanted us to be imprisoned. Mrs. Königová, who tried to familiarize me with the realities of prison life, told me, "Watch out for Ilona Hofferová. She cooperates with the jailor and is an informant."

Did you also know in Pardubice, for example, who among you had signed the cooperation documents and given up information about people?

No, we didn't know because there were far too many of us. That's why I was always alone in the prison: I didn't trust anybody. I was alone, alone with my thoughts, and thinking about my mom and dad.

What was your release like?

Well, I wrapped all the things I owned into a blanket and had to hand in all the things I got from the prison at the sick room. When I was leaving I left my camp money to Terezka and a kilo of sugar to Johanka¹⁶. At the sick room, I got my civilian clothes. I left for home, and the girls stayed. The jailor took me to a small gate, behind which inmates unloaded coal. My father, who came to meet me there, told me, "Look, they are saluting you." My father came; he had been at home for almost a year and had been released after serving half of his sentence.

¹⁶ Hana Truncová – nicknamed Johanka by her friends. You can find our interview with her also in this book.

What was it like coming back home?

When I came back, people avoided me and turned their back on me. I lived with my parents, but an informant was sent into the village. Her name was Kučerová, and she would eavesdrop on us and send the information further up. She could do whatever she wished in the village. Once, her husband broke my arm. They planted them here when my mom was living alone. They stayed until I got married. Everybody – not only us – feared them. It was like living in a second prison. When I came back I went to the job center and stated that I was looking for a job, which would correspond with my education. So they told me, “We can offer you Mira, where you could do sewing or the state farm or the brewery.” I applied for the Mira job; I left my ID there and was supposed to pick it up two days later. However, I had had an argument with Kučerová before then, and so she made it impossible for me to get that job. So I went to work in the brewery, which was not good for me because my nose kept bleeding, and I was wet all the time. So I had to go to work in JZD¹⁷ in Sedlice. I wanted to work in the garden, but after about two weeks the administrator Mr. Medřický came and said, “I am sorry, but I cannot do anything else except send you to work in the field with the rest of the women. This work is too posh for you.” So I started to work in the fields. Once, on my way from work – that was the season for hoeing potatoes – the administrator ordered me to take a basket full of potatoes. I really appreciated it at that time, as we were quite poor. When I returned I didn’t even have a bed and had to sleep on the floor.

Did you have to report yourself after coming back?

When I came back I was sent an invitation to see the State Secret Police in order to get an ID, as I didn’t have one. The policeman told me, “Sit down here and wait for the superintendent.” He came and told me that he would like to have a word with me. “You could cooperate with us and get various privileges in return...” He was telling me all this, and I replied that I would think about it, but was saying to myself, ‘I don’t give a damn. Me, cooperating with such rubbish? You took everything away from me: my health, my property, and I will cooperate with you on the top of this all?’ I didn’t sign anything and as a consequence did not get a better job.

How did the people in the village treat you?

That varied. For example, when my father came back from prison, my mom did not have a single potato, plate or spoon. So my dad took a basket and went to see a farmer who he had once helped when his farm had caught fire. He went to him thinking that he wouldn’t want anything for free; that he would pay for everything. The farmer told him, “I’d rather give it to the pigs!” Some people behaved towards us as they would towards criminals, but on the other hand, some of them were helpful. Once my father told me to take money and go to Mr. Linek to buy carrots, lettuce, and onions, and Linek told me, “Keep the money, and off you go. Don’t tell anybody that you got it for free.” It was terrible. All of a sudden I was a beggar, and all of a sudden we had nothing. I used to go to the dairy shop wanting to buy a 200g piece of butter because it was cheaper, but then Mrs. Poláková, who owned the shop, winked at me and told me to wait a minute and gave me two pieces of butter for free. I went to the butcher’s, and

17 **Unified Cooperative Farm (JZD)** – Czechoslovakian farming organization that was modeled after the collective farms or agricultural production cooperatives in Soviet Union. Many farmers were forced to give up their land and machines to the Unified Cooperative Farms.

they had a beautiful pig's head there. Mrs. Míškovská told me then, "If you want, I could give you a pig's head like that every week with the chin fold as well." And she did so. I was happy because I was able to get a large good lunch for very little money. I came home and started to cry. We used to be a respectful family, and the communists turned us into absolute beggars.

What happened to your estates?

JZD took the fields, and at that time we were only able to keep a few hens. We had an administrator appointed by the state, and later they sold my estates for building sites – the whole of our garden. That was the worst part for my father – he couldn't bear it when they started to parcel out our garden.

Did you speak to your parents about prison?

Never. Not even with my father. We both had our own experiences. When he came out of prison, he had frostbitten feet. I told very little to my second husband. I didn't keep in touch with the girls, either, because I was afraid.

Did you take part in the events of 1968?

That was when the Russians invaded here. I was working at Skalka. Mr. Zahradník took me there, and he worked for Kopřivnice. He wasn't supposed to take me there because I was not reliable, but he took me there anyway. I was working with Mrs. Plačková. My husband repaired the house of the Bruner family from Prague, and we would put them up for the night. I went to work at five in the morning. I met Mrs. Macháčková at the cemetery wall, and she told me that the Russians had invaded. As quick as a shot, I rushed home, woke everybody up and said, "Switch on the radio – something is up." We switched on the radio and I didn't go to work that day because I was scared. We saw tanks going by. I stayed at home for two days and fortunately it was not a problem at work.

What did 1989 mean for you?

I got a pension, my mother and father were gone, and so I couldn't speak to anybody about it. I welcomed the fall of the communists, but still didn't trust the whole thing. Now they are getting more power again.

The life in prison must have been grueling. In Želiezovce the work was extremely hard, and on top of that, you were sentenced unjustly. What helped you to survive the years in prison?

What helped me most was that I was myself, and I didn't take the others into consideration. I had my mother and my father and kept thinking about them all the time. I protected my health and that was important. I didn't really make any friends and just kept imagining what it might look like at home. My mind was always at home. I would never move into some kind of hotel or nursery. This is where I belong and, as my father used to say, I will stay here until it falls on my head.

Thank you for the interview.

“Even if the bars were made from gold, they could never be a substitute for freedom. Freedom is the biggest thing in life.”



Drahomíra Stuchlíková was born in Prague on December 19, 1919. She worked as a book-keeper in a German-Czech company and later in the Czechoslovak Chamber of Commerce. According to her interview, she was arrested on May 29, 1948, for printing informative leaflets which said, “Vote with white ballots” and sentenced to thirteen years in prison on June 6, 1949. She experienced life in prison in Bartolomějská street in Prague (remand prison), prison Pankrác, prisons in Litoměřice, Znojmo, Chrastava, Pardubice, and Želiezovce (in Slovakia). She was released on May 10, 1960, and then worked as a storekeeper and matron. In 1965 she got married and gave birth to a son. She died in 2011.

Interview with Mrs. Drahomíra Stuchlíková

Interviewer: Klára Pinerová

To begin I would like to ask: where were you born, and what was your childhood like?

I was born December 19, 1919, in Karlín¹ a year after WWI. I lived there until I was six years old and then we moved to Žižkov². We unfortunately lived in Žižkov for fifty-four years. My older sister felt ashamed of Žižkov and insisted on continuing school in Karlín where she started school. I copied her and didn't want to go to school at Žižkov either, so I ended up going to school in Vinohrady at Jiřího z Poděbrad Square. I never finished there because I lost interest. I was about fourteen years old when my mother enrolled me in a family school³. I finished there in three years with two B's. Then I stepped into the real world. Later, I was employed by a private company which was Czech-German. Half the staff there was Czech, and the other half was German. The bosses were both, one Czech and one German. I really have to tell you that we had a very good standard of living at that time. Then I realized maybe my life was too good, and I started working in the Chamber of Commerce. I liked it a lot there and stayed there up until my arrest.

What kind of employment did your father and mother have?

After my father came back from the Legion⁴ in France he was employed at the anti-fraud office. There was real democracy back then. No one could just do anything they wanted. No one could just plot out that if an egg costs thirty hellers⁵ that he would be selling it for fifty, or that someone could add water to alcohol or milk. My father would check all this to make sure that everything was all right. My mother was a housewife. Then I had an older sister, but she no longer lived at home because she had her own family, and so we would only get together at Christmas time. Then I also have a younger sister who was placed in prison and spent six years there. In 1973 she got married in Germany and has been living there ever since.

What did March 15, 1939, look like in Prague⁶? What was the atmosphere at that time?

I remember that really well because there was sleet in the morning. When the Germans came over I was on Na Příkopě [street in central Prague]. They were announcing it on the radio, but I'm that kind of person who doesn't believe anything. It was horrible because in front of the Slavic House there were hoards of Germans who were enthusiastically greeting soldiers. That made me sick, and so I went home.

1 **Karlín** – a district of Prague

2 **Žižkov** – a district of Prague

3 **Family School** – a school designed for students who wanted to gain knowledge and skills useful in everyday and family life and wanted to expand and deepen general education.

4 **Legions** – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

5 **Heller** – a coin valued at 1/100 of a koruna (crown) in Czechoslovakia

6 **March 15, 1939** – the date in which Germany began the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

How did you personally get along with Germans before the Munich Agreement⁷?

We got along with Germans during the First Republic [1918–1938]. I was working in a bilingual Czech-German company, and we didn't have any problems among us. I met just one person in that company who was a real piece of work. When Hitler ordered the Germans to have kids, he quickly had one more. Anyway, he didn't denounce or report anyone. From around 1941 onwards I was in the Chamber of Commerce where I worked fully towards the Czech war effort. The work in Triola, where we were making rubber masks, was organized by the Chamber of Commerce. Since they were made from rubber we would pierce them with a pin. Eventually, a German came and scolded us, but we pretended not to understand. In the end they took the gas masks from us, and instead we had to sew underwear for German soldiers. I also have to mention that we would glue glass shields onto the gas masks. We were using acetone, and because acetone is harmful to your health they gave us an extra bun and milk – about a quarter liter of milk – in order to cope better with the harmful effects of the work.

Did you have problems getting food during the war?

People were getting special tickets, ration tickets. For that we got about one egg a month; I can't really remember how much per week. We couldn't do anything about this: it was war. We didn't have any relatives in the country that could help us, and so we had to get through it by ourselves. There were a lot of people like that. The worst thing was that they took our money. I had about 200,000 crowns on my credit book, and I don't even want to say how much my parents lost. For example, to get enough cloth for a dress was very difficult. Not everyone could afford this. It was very difficult, but finally we struggled through this.

What did the Prague Uprising⁸ look like?

I was in Prague then, in a basement vault at Žižkov. At Vítkov⁹, there was a little chalet, and one German shot at us from there. All of a sudden, a young man walked by with a bazooka, which kind of minimized the danger. The German got him and completely tore him apart. My lady friend found his arm right behind her window; it was just disgusting. Then the Russians came, and my lady friend and I wanted to go to Wenceslas Square since we thought there would be a chance to go dancing. However, it was still off-limits, so we returned home. We didn't go out until May 9. Prague was horribly demolished; cobblestones were torn out from the sidewalks because of the barricades that were built everywhere. Trees were in bloom as usual, as if nothing was really happening. There was a man from our building who worked at the Old Town Hall, and he got stuck inside on Saturday. He came back home after everything was over. Everyone rushed out to welcome him, and he couldn't resist and fainted. He was at the Town Hall for five days, and all the strain on his nerves finally caught up with him.

7 **The Munich Agreement** – an international treaty signed in Munich on September 29, 1938, wherein representatives of four countries – Neville Chamberlain (Great Britain), Édouard Daladier (France), Adolf Hitler (Germany) and Benito Mussolini (Italy) – agreed that Czechoslovakia must give up the Sudetenland to Germany. Representatives of Czechoslovakia were present but not invited to partake in the deal. Up until today this agreement is a painful and controversial topic in Czech history.

8 **Prague Uprising** – on May 5, 1945, people in Prague took up arms against the German occupiers in an attempt to liberate the capital. After three days and more than two thousand deaths, a ceasefire was negotiated, only for the country to be 'liberated' by the advancing Red Army.

9 **Vítkov** – an extended hill on the right bank of the Vltava River which forms a border between the Prague districts of Karlín and Žižkov.

The time just after the war mainly revealed how greedy we were. During the uprising they had brought a full bucket of smoked foods to the cellar. I would walk daily along the street in front of the butcher's shop, and all of a sudden people came with a message that they had looted him because he was German. I didn't have a clue that a guy named Hromada could be German. They said that the food would be split up among people in the cellar. Then they took everything somewhere, and I can just tell you that they didn't even let us smell the meat. I really lost my faith in people.

How did you live through February 1948?

Of course I was brought up in an anti-communist family. When someone mentioned the word communism or communist, my parents were like red cloth to a bull. We lived in Žižkov, and there were tons of communists. In our house there were also some people who had a daughter and a son who were about my age. We didn't want to meet them. In short, when the year 1948 came, I didn't want it.

Why were you arrested?

In the year 1948 there were elections, and someone threw leaflets into our mailbox, on which was written, "Vote with white ballots". At that time I didn't have anything better to do than to bring the leaflets to work. The stance written was that people shouldn't vote, but instead they should just throw in blank white ballots. I liked the idea at that time, and I gave it to others to read. I never thought that it could have such consequences. Firstly, I didn't think someone could be arrested for leaflets. At the court I also told them that during the First Czechoslovak Republic there was the slogan "Vote for one, don't vote for five" and nobody was arrested, so I didn't think this could be a crime. Of course, we were gripped by those leaflets and started to copy them. Someone denounced us of course; the President of the Chamber of Commerce Mr. Jech found out about it and called the State Secret Police on us. It was incredibly quick.

What did your arrest look like?

Mr. Jech called the State Secret Police on us. They came and took us to four on Bartolomějská street¹⁰. I was arrested between May 29 and 30, 1948. Nobody can imagine what would happen at Number 4 at the time. We were crammed into horrible dark prison cells. In the corner there was a little wooden closet, which I thought was a telephone booth. It was a metal or iron toilet. For walks we went out onto a little square, three by three meters. From Number 4 [Bartolomějská] they transferred me to Pankrác, where I stayed for twenty-one months. I was there with various people. I remember the arrival to Pankrác very well. Before check-in, they made me stand by a wall. To either side of me there were Gypsy women. They were all dirty, and later I found out it was from blood. Then they took me to my cell. That was also surreal because from the prison square there was a big iron gate, and the way that I was rushing in, well, I didn't think that it would be connected underneath. I stumbled and flew into the square; I almost spread like a frog on the floor. That was a beautiful entrée...

¹⁰ Bartolomějská – a remand prison in Prague.

What did Pankrác look like?

I quite liked it at Pankrác; I didn't miss any work. Girls were advising me to sign-in for a job, so at first they put me in a place where they manufactured bags. From there I was kicked out because I didn't get along with the *čůzák*¹¹. After that I was in laundry, then printing works, and finally I ended up in a dispatch cell. That was an *eincell*¹² but there were seven of us in there. We were supposed to make hemp rope. We blocked a toilet with the rope twice. Once we made a ball, which I took out afterwards and threw behind the old, non-functioning printing works. On the next day, we had a walk. When we got out to the square I thought I would go nuts. One of the dogs that was running around was playing with the ball. Anyways, I finally threw a second ball there as well because I had nothing else to do with it. Then we were supposed to glue flags together in the cell. That was also charming because they gave us a box of flags and skewers and told us to glue. As they didn't give us any glue, we concluded we couldn't do anything. So we put everything under a bed. Then a *čůzák* came and said, "Take out what you have done." We answered we didn't have anything as we didn't get any glue, so they gave us a stone vessel full of glue. Again, we pushed that under the bed because they didn't give us a single brush. When he came up again we said we unfortunately didn't have anything since we didn't have a brush. So he took everything from us and we figured he wouldn't ever make us do it – that he would lose his nerve. We never glued anything after that.

How did the investigators behave towards you? Did any of you endure physical violence?

Well, first of all, nobody would try that on me, and secondly, they were not that cruel at that time – yet. Yes, we heard shouts from next door a couple times, and knew they were beating someone, but from my point of view, that would happen sporadically. All that rapidly increased in 1949. Although they were on a first-name basis with us, threatening us, calling us names, they never physically attacked me.

You mentioned your younger sister was also arrested. For what reason?

She was held as a precaution before the funeral of President Beneš. At that time I was cleaning at Pankrác, and mother came to tell me. Somehow, inconspicuously, she told me in the corridor. After the funeral they let my sister go back home. Well, they were really worried that people would be rioting, and so they held various people as hostages. Then she was tried with me and convicted for six years.

Did you ever meet again in prison?

We met just once. She had a lesser punishment than me, and so she could get on something called commando. She went to Varnsdorf to an Elite factory, where nylons were made. I was sentenced to be in a normal prison, but once when I went to Chrastava, they allowed me to see her on a visit. I came over there in the afternoon, maybe more the evening, and early in the morning I had to leave again. Anyways, I was happy I could sit down with her for that moment, and we chatted a little. Then she visited me when she was released. I can even tell you that two of my friends visited me. Each of them just once, but I was glad anyways, since they didn't

11 *Čůzák* or *Čůza* – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

12 *Eincell* – a cell for one person.

throw me overboard. One friend kept sending me letters and also a picture of her son. I was lucky in this way since this meant that some people were unafraid to come and see me. It was real heroism to be unworried about being seen with a convicted person.

When did you have a court date?

I had a court date on June 6, 1949. I received a notice only two days before the process. When I wanted to give the notice to my mother, my own lawyer jumped up and tore it out of my hands, saying I wasn't supposed to have it. She was appointed to me by the court, but she still demanded money from my parents. Dr. Turečková had a husband who was a chairman in the Chamber of Law, and so she had the high privilege of taking money. My parents paid her something, but afterwards they opposed. She didn't defend me at all. She came up to the court, had blond hair, a light blue dress, and came there as a star. She didn't get me ready for the situation or how to behave at court. The only thing she said was a comment on my hair-style and that I shouldn't have it because it could make jurors angry. Then she asked what dress I would be wearing at court. That was all she told me for the duration of the whole process. When they asked me afterwards whether or not I felt guilty, I didn't know what to answer. Finally, I said I felt partly guilty. At that time I counted on getting twenty years. When I finally got thirteen, I was quite happy. I was in prison for twelve of them. But I did not wonder why I was given that sentence. If I was in their shoes, I would not have given freedom to a woman like me either. Today I must laugh about it, because at that time I really fought against them, and one of my lady friends kept telling me, "Please, don't look at them like that, or they will never let us go home!"

Did you think you would really have to serve all of that time or did you think that you might be released early?

At that time, nobody really believed that we would have to serve the whole sentence. Even once a judge came and called us over in Litoměřice, one after another. He asked each of us when we thought we would go home. We all regretfully said we didn't know. None of us knew if we would have to serve the whole sentence. Any one of us could have died the next day.

Were you ever in solitary confinement?

I was in solitary confinement once at a judicial prison, because I had sent home a scornful letter about prison. I got a month of correction for the letter, and out of that once or twice a week in a dark room. I was starved and had to sleep on a floor. When I had a normal day, I got water for washing and a broom to sweep. In the evening they gave me a straw mattress and one blanket. Once I was also given a bucket with water to wash the floor. I didn't really want to do it, but finally I managed it. In the afternoon the guards were changing and another *čůzák* came and started yelling that I hadn't washed the floor properly. That was understandable, because I hadn't really given it much effort. I thought about it, and then when I was given another bucket and water, I made the whole floor completely wet. He came at four o'clock, and the floor was still wet, so no smudges were visible on it. He just caught his breath and left. It was terrible to sleep on a wet floor, but I risked it anyways. It made me so happy to know I took the wind out of his sails.

What was interesting was that all the *čůzáks* were driven crazy by my singing. I remember that when we were in Želiezovice, where we worked so hard, we were supposed to put down a ton of root beets. After a couple of years, my friend wrote in a letter to me how she still remembered me, and how I had started singing. She said that if that didn't happen, she would never have been able to bear it.

What came next after the court?

After the court I went to Litoměřice, where I stayed for nine months. In Litoměřice we ended up enjoying it, despite going in there with so much fear and worry. Vlasta Charvátová¹³ traveled with us. She with some group of people shot and wounded one of the guards in Litoměřice. They wanted to free some of the political prisoners there. Vlasta stayed at the gatehouse, and all of a sudden this person showed up there, and she shot him. She was lucky she got his shoulder. Vlasta ended up apologizing to him. He was a nice person and forgave her.

They gave us various jobs to do, but all in all, they weren't successful. For example, they wanted us to strip feathers. The girls would start to work immediately, but I told them, "Girls, have you gone crazy? Never in my life have I learned how to strip feathers." So they all stopped, and when they were stripped, they were making puffs for slippers, stuffing for their pillows, and so on. When the *čůza* came in the afternoon, I took one piece of feather into my hand and said, "And now please tell me, what shall I do with this feather?" She took it and from one side ripped it as well from the other side and gave me back the feather in one hand and the quill in the other. The girls couldn't stop laughing. After nine months, I went to Znojmo. That was also surreal because they transported us in an *anton*¹⁴ whose door didn't work and kept opening. We knocked on the driver's and *čůzák's* door twice. Twice the driver came to close it, and on the third time he said we would have to hold it. So we held our door until we were in Znojmo.

You didn't think to run away?

No, because when you have parents at home, you are thinking that this wouldn't help them at all. I had to leave these thoughts aside; it wasn't possible. Imagine this: in Znojmo we had another big laugh. There was a head guard, some Mária, and she read out loud our names from the list. One girl's name was Ordová-Cvetkovičová. Mirka always put her hand up twice for this name. But then, when the head wanted to change us into other clothes, she counted us and it didn't match. There were ten of us and she had eleven names on her list. For God's sake, she couldn't figure it out. We kept saying, "Mirka, tell her you have got two names," but she had such a sense of humor she kept putting her hand up for both names. Finally, we made her say it. That time we had fun. In jail there were moments when one had fun, and sometimes it was just the opposite and life was difficult. So in Litoměřice and Znojmo I was in normal prison cells. I didn't get to work anywhere and was just in the prison. Then I went to Česká Lípa. In Česká Lípa it was good because the head guard of the prison was quite humane. From there I went to Liberec, where I stayed for a couple days, and from this prison they divided us into different commandos, and I went to Chrastava, like I already mentioned to you. We had really awful food there because one guard wanted to save money and kept telling us that we would

13 Vlasta Charvátová (1925) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

14 *Anton* – a closed police van for the transport of prisoners.

get everything back for Christmas. So she would give us boiled pork all the time. I wouldn't eat boiled pork, even if I was standing underneath the gallows. I would rather tell an executioner, "Please, hang me up already, and the boiled pork will be eaten by a dog." I tried it warm, cold, salted, with mustard, but when I see boiled pork, I get nauseous. Then it was discovered that she stole everything she could, and we didn't get anything at Christmas. In jail they were stealing from us. I had violet lipstick, and when I was in Litoměřice, one *čůza* had the same one. Of course they didn't give me my purse back, so I found out that she must have simply taken it. From this commando, I went to Pardubice. At that time the prison in Pardubice was just starting out and was supposed to be a complex for the worst crimes. In the beginning there were only political prisoners. There were sewing places and a laundry, and we also went to work in the garden. So that was fine, although harassment was also quite bad there. I stayed there about two years. Then I went to Želiezovce.

Dagmar Šimková also writes about Želiezovce. Could you also tell me a bit about it?

When Dagmar Kočová once told me about that place, since she had been there, I couldn't imagine it. The truth is that there were large pieces of land. For example, you might see a little village on the horizon and think that it was a couple of steps away, but it would take half a day to get there. That was just terrible, especially for me, who never tried to go quickly anyway. Girls would always go in the front, and I would still be trudging somewhere in the middle. Finally, it all ended when I strained my spine. From then on I would suffer back pain for about twenty years. I brought a nice little gift to Želiezovce. All of us, and there were three hundred of us, got jaundice. At the end I got out of it pretty well, but there are girls who are having troubles with that even today. In regards to the jaundice, it was me again who, of course, came down with it first. During that time we went to collect corn from the fields. I felt a pain on my right hip, by my gall bladder, and I had a higher body temperature. That was why I decided I wouldn't go to work. The doctor had also had just about enough of me and told me to bring urine to be evaluated. A little later she flew in, told me to pack my things, and so I went to quarantine since I had it on three crosses¹⁵. Soon after that there were others coming in. The jaundice epidemic started in 1956, at the same time when there was a riot in Hungary. *Čůzáks* were nervous since we were practically on the border. You saw mountains, and that was already Hungary. The authorities knew the rioting could easily cross from Hungary to us, and so they had their hearts in their mouths. Right at that time we got jaundice. We all occupied a whole block of wooden houses.

Where did you go after Želiezovce?

Then I traveled to Ruzyně for about a month to do translations.¹⁶ That was a bit of variety and change. We had only two or three guards there, and others could get in to see us. Those of us from Prague were enthusiastic because we finally had visitors and could receive parcels. There was a more relaxed environment. We weren't locked in cells, could move freely, and, for example, have a small chat after work. There were about twenty of us working there.

¹⁵ **Three crosses** – a pattern of symbols used to mark dead bodies. Here it suggests that Mrs. Stuchlíková was seriously ill.

¹⁶ Mrs. Stuchlíková worked at the Technical Institute of Ministry of Interior, where prisoners were used for their expertise in construction and engineering, as well as chemical and electrical engineers, designers, and draughtsmen.

Men would translate some secret stuff. We got just concepts which we would rewrite on copy stencils. Everything was highly confidential. Soon it was over, though, and we had to get back to Želiezovce.

Where did they take you from Ruzyně?

From there they took us back to Želiezovce, and later they sent me to Bratislava. We knitted sweaters there. Never in my life was I good at knitting, and I wasn't able to imagine that I would someday knit a whole sweater. In the end I managed somehow, and from Bratislava they took me back to Pardubice, where they released me. I traveled the whole country like this. With all that you must also count up the overnight breaks where we stayed in Il'ava, because it wasn't possible to manage a whole trip in one haul. I had been in many prisons by then.

Was there any difference in the behavior of male and female guards?

Well, not really; they were cast in the same mold. Men were not recognizable as real men to me. It was a *čůzák* [male guard] to me, and that was it. In Pardubice I was in correction once, and in the corridor there was a water supply where we could wash ourselves. A *čůza* [female guard] let me there once while talking to a man at the same time. He wanted to get in and have a look at me. I told myself, "That isn't a man. It's just a *čůzák*." So I took my clothes off and washed myself. He can please himself – that wasn't the issue. For us the main concern was the *Sultán* [Bohumil Mikovec]¹⁷, the Commander of the prison of Pardubice. On the other hand, girls were often making fun of *čůzáks*.

And in what way?

Well for example, they decided they would re-educate us. So they started giving us some lectures. The girls would always put their hands up and ask about something. For example, something about Masaryk [the first President of Czechoslovakia]. Then the *čůzák* said, "Well, I don't know that – I must ask about it, I will tell you next time." The next time he didn't show up, of course. You know, there were many stories running around about the way they spoke. For instance, instead of "tin foil" they would say, "tin loaf." Once, when I was in Chrastava on commando, one of them hinted for us to sign a socialist commitment¹⁸ with the promise that they would send us home earlier. When he was done with his speech, Bohuška and I put our hands up and said, "Mr. warder, we can't sign it. We are not provided with all the human rights from court. Our signature has no weight." And so we broke it down.

Were the criminal prisoners more susceptible to re-education or to signing various work commitments?

Some of them were, of course. I think that some woman who had kids at home were more liable to this. One of my lady friends, who I'm still friends with today – and I still reproach and blame her for it – signed the cooperation agreement. She simply wanted to get home, because both of her parents were sick and her son, who was in the army, had gotten a very serious

17 **Bohumil Mikovec** (1919–?) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

18 **Socialist Commitments** – contracts wherein prisoners obliged themselves to work extra hours or on Sundays and national holidays in order to receive various privileges, i.e. to write more letters home or to get more parcels. They were also promised an earlier release.

jaundice infection. She knew she couldn't help them out while in jail. Even today she has had troubles with that though, because nobody ever asks her "Why? Why did she sign?"

How did you get through visits of your friends and relatives and how long did they last?

The visits were a chapter in and of itself because it always depended on the *čůzák* who was present at the visit. It happened to me once that my father came to Litoměřice; and we welcomed each other; and I asked about mother; and the *čůzák* ordered the visit to end right there. When the *čůzák* was full of spite, he didn't give you the pleasure of having a visitor. Once in Pardubice, I couldn't get nuts and candies that were in a parcel, it was simply forbidden at that time. And so they took it out and stole it. It always depended on their moods, how well they slept. We were dependent on all of that. We were always looking forward to having a visit, but when they left, we were so sad... you knew you had a long time before you would see them again. Sometimes I told myself that the people who visited had it worse. In front of the gates the visitor had to beg and plead because the guards would also harass them. Visitors worried about whether the parcel would be delivered and how long the visit would take and so on.

How often did you have visits?

According to the prison order, it was allowed once a month – but if you did something bad, they could stop or shorten it. When I was on the commando, visits were more relaxed, and sometimes a parcel could be handed over. At Pankrác the parcel was properly checked. Well, when you think about it deeply, when they were giving you a parcel at the beginning of prison, we had to take it away from their own mouths since there was still a ticket system¹⁹. So we didn't really care for the parcels much.

In which prison did you experience the worst hunger?

I was starving the most in Bartolomějská prison, because they had tin pots there and when they gave you black slops in the morning, it smelled like the previous day's goulash, and when you were served something different at noon, it smelled like the black slops again, which they called noble coffee. At Pankrác I once again got back to normal. On weekends, we would get an egg for lunch and bread for supper but they didn't fuss about us. Anyway, when we would go to work – for example to the printing works – we would then get one bratwurst and a bun. But nowhere else did we get anything better.

What did the institution clothes look like?

It was like what a household provided. In Litoměřice it took fourteen days before we were changed into the institution's clothes. In the end we were given rags from German soldiers. We struck a blow when we tore the uniforms apart, wherever it was possible, and we set out on May 1 for walk. Then they gave us some better clothes. Winter stuff was made from furry, hairy

¹⁹ **Ticket System** – The form of the food service, in which state authorities determine the types and quantities of products which are issued regularly or one-off vouchers for various categories of consumer goods. With a rationing ticket system the state tries to satisfy basic needs of the population while goods are scarce (especially during the war and postwar periods). A side effect of the rationing ticket system is the forming of an illegal black market. A rationing ticket system is often combined with free legal selling at higher prices than the rationed goods. In the Czech lands there was rationing ticket system during WWI, immediately after its ending, and in the years 1939–1953 (removed by monetary reform).

cloth, and summer clothes were made with stripes. I was glad we were getting clothes, because my parents couldn't provide them all the time.

Was it possible to borrow books?

Yes, it was. At Pankrác it was written, "Whoever damages it, pays for it, and will be strictly punished." We had quite old books there, but in Pardubice it was better. On the other hand, when a better book arrived, it was desired by everyone, so we had to wait until someone finished it. You could borrow about three books per month.

Were there ever any conflicts which arose among you?

Well, there were some of course. There were some distractions in Pardubice; for example, you could go out to the square²⁰, but you could never avoid being in a cell with someone you didn't get along with. For instance, there was a Slovakian girl who was really nasty to me. I understood her though, because the prison was getting into her head and on her nerves. But it still didn't give her the right to spoil the life of others around her. The worst were the sisters who always quarreled. Also, I wasn't always nice, but I tried hard. Conflicts would begin from small things. Conflicts would never come out of politics because those would fall apart. There were girls from all political parties and various religious sides. It could always happen that you said something and insulted somebody. I like to call it a submarine syndrome.

Do you remember a hunger strike in Pardubice in 1955?

I also took part in that at the time, but I wasn't an instigator. They still put me in a hole, though. I wanted to continue with the hunger strike there, but they told me they had agreed to something and everything was over. I think it began due to sanitary towels because some of the girls reacted poorly to them. I don't know whether they wanted to increase the allowance or be able to buy them with their own money. I really don't remember that.

What was hygiene like in prisons? How often could you wash yourself for example?

It was quite alright in Pardubice. On each floor there was a big bathroom with a big tin trunk. There ten girls could wash at once. In Želiezovice there were French toilets²¹ and there were mice and rats. In Želiezovice it was like the Middle Ages. Terežka Procházková was always saying, "When I see a mouse on the square I tell myself, 'Yay, a little sparrow.' And when I see a rat, 'See, a pigeon.'" In this way she was consoling herself to not be afraid. You know, when you go to a toilet and there is a rat watching you, it is not funny.

Some girls tried to keep up hygiene. They would come from the fields, load everything into a container, wash it, hang it up, and in the morning they went to work in clean clothes again. We tried to wash and shower. In Pardubice it was more civilized. We went to showers there with warm water once a week.

20 So called **Wenceslas Square** – big space in the prison of Pardubice where female-prisoners were gathered and proceeded the roll calls.

21 **French toilet** – special toilet system when the toilet does not have a porcelain bowl but instead only a hole in the floor and two steps for feet.

How were you released?

I was released on amnesty.²² Initially we were supposed to go home on May 9, but because one *čůza* needed help with ironing, I was released on May 10. I got 375 Crowns [\$20 dollars today] as earnings for twelve years. I had a blouse and a borrowed skirt. Everything else I had owned was stolen. They stole my book of English and clothes. In Pardubice they bought us train tickets, and we went home.

Did you have troubles finding a job?

I must tell you, I was really lucky, because our girls always helped me. After discharge I went to the work office to hand in my papers and then I walked around the town. I met one lady friend who asked me what I was doing. At that time I really didn't know what I should do. She told me she was just on her way to the Žižkov storage area since they were hiring. We went there together and were both hired. I would pull pallets there, in which there were loads of chocolate, even though I was pregnant. After delivery I didn't go back to it. After another three years I was looking for a job, but I was so simple-minded that I always told everybody I had been in prison. Of course they never gave jobs to convicts back then. Then another lady friend spoke to me on a tram, asking, "What are you up to?" I told her I did nothing. "And would you like to go to my work? I'm giving it up." She was a storekeeper in a big factory, but only formally on a paper. There I got a questionnaire and where they asked me what I did in the past. That time I wrote that I was sewed clothes for a firm in Hradec Králové that never existed. That was good, but if I wrote down I was in a criminal, it would never work. Eventually everybody would know anyway, but that didn't matter anymore. I stayed on until they built a new factory in Stodůlky. I didn't want to commute from Karlín to Stodůlky, so I wandered around in the streets again. I met a lady friend and she asked, "What are you up to?" "Nothing, looking for a job." She told me to go to her husband to be a housekeeper, and I did that until I went to retire. My girls always helped me.

How did your old friends behave to you after you came back?

My two best friends, who also visited me once in prison, stayed with me forever. I never tried to get in touch with the others again. I didn't have much to talk about with them and had no inclination to meet them. It was like I was in another world. I was only able to speak to people who were arrested like me. It didn't matter whether it was a man or woman. Finally, I married a *mukl* who was also in prison for eleven years. He had so many friends, and so did I. At Easter and Christmas I kept writing and sending so many postcards, it seemed impossible. While we were at our cottage, we never had one free Saturday or Sunday alone since someone would always come for a visit.

How did you perceive the year 1968?

I was with my son at the cottage when my mother-in-law came and told us that the Russians had come. A week before that, our relatives from Vienna had come over, telling us the Russians would occupy our country. I got really furious then and said, "If they will occupy us, that means they will occupy you as well. Just remember how it was during Hitler's era." He got really mad

22 President Antonín Novotný Amnesty – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

at me. Curtly, he said that in Vienna, they had known that much earlier than we did. We had a cottage on the Sázava River, where the tanks went through and made a huge noise. We just watched what was happening. I would have never allowed it. I always thought it was impossible. Then I saw the after-effects, how they were shooting at people on Vinohradská Street. Don't ever tell me they were our brothers.

After the August 21, 1968 arrival of the Warsaw Pact troops²³, did you have any problems at work?

No, I formed my own principle for my time in prison: I will never deny it. Also: I will never initiate talking about it. However, I had to break this rule once. I was at a cottage with my son and the neighbors from next door had a little girl, who was going to kindergarten. She asked, "Mrs. Stuchlíková, were you in prison?" That was the first time that I denied it because I told to myself, that kid doesn't need to know anything about it. I was mad at her parents, though, because they should be more careful when talking in front of kids. I also didn't want to admit it because of my son – so he wouldn't have problems because of it. He knew about his dad because he knew his dad's friends. Finally, we had it all out in the open in 1989.

How do you recall the year 1989 in your memories?

I wasn't in Prague at that time, so I didn't know much about it. I didn't go back to Prague before the Confederation [of Political Prisoners]²⁴ started to be formed. I couldn't care about it that much because my husband was very ill.

Do you have any health problems from the experience in the prisons?

In Želiezovce I strained my back after the first month, and I suffered from that for another twenty years. Other girls had problems mostly from the jaundice, which I have told you about already.

When were you rehabilitated?

I was trying to do that beginning in 1968. I had a Judge named Bohdana Smolíková, or something like that. In her speech she made a murderess out of me, because I had one accomplice who was sentenced for one year. I hardly knew him, but during the twelve years I was in prison, he died. She blamed me for his death. So the rehabilitation ended with another fiasco. Then I was rehabilitated in 1989 without any problems.

Would you be able to forgive the communists for all the injustice?

You know, the thing I minded the most was living behind bars. When someone complains that we were badly treated there, I am able to forgive them all that. Even if the bars were

23 **The Warsaw Pact** (formally, the Treaty of Friendship, Co-Operation, and Mutual Assistance) – a collective defense treaty among eight communist states of Central and Eastern Europe in existence during the Cold War. The Warsaw Pact was the military complement to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CoMEcon), the regional economic organization for the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe.

24 **The Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic (KPV ČR)** – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

made of gold, they could never be a substitute for freedom. Freedom is the biggest thing in life.

What helped you to live through the years you were in prison?

I think it was anger. I'm not a person who would cry out – but when injustice is done to me, then I get very angry. Finally, in prison there is life, as well; you have some fun, but there are also terrible things happening there. We had to live through everything. Don't forget to put this in. There are about twenty of us who were in prison and whose husbands were in prison, and we don't have the pension money and will never get it.

Thank you very much for the interview.

“It gave me confidence, and from a political standpoint, it gave me anti-communist sentiments.”



Hana Truncová was born into a trading family in Teplice on August 28, 1924. She was the product of a Czech-German marriage. She graduated from a business academy in June 1945, was employed part-time in a construction company, and helped her father with the administration of his trade. Later she started working in the Teplice spa. She assisted her fiancé Otakar Trunec with border crossings and printing anti-communist leaflets from May 1949. She was also accused of transmitting the secret messages to foreign intelligence services. She was arrested on June 6, 1951 and sentenced to thirteen years in prison. She was placed in prisons Ústí nad Labem, Litoměřice, Pankrác, Kladno, Jilemnice, Varnsdorf, and the prison of Pardubice. She was conditionally released on January 21, 1960. She is still currently living an active life and constantly participates in various forums at schools and other social events.¹

¹ Archival sources: Národní archiv (NA) [National Archive], Fond: Správa sboru nápravných zařízení (SSNV) [Fund: Management of Correctional Facility Corps], personal prison file of Hana John; Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Services Archive], investigation file V-867 Ústí nad Labem.

Interview with Mrs. Hana Truncová

Interviewer: Klára Pinerová

Can you tell us about your parents, childhood and youth?

Of course, with pleasure. I was born in Teplice² into a trade family. My father's ancestors came from the area of the Křivoklát Forests and moved to the border area sometime in the 19th Century. I have a sister, and I must say that we had a very nice childhood. We had a big garden and many friends. All of my friends came from Czech, German, or Jewish background. The town of Teplice had the same structure – one-third was Czech, one-third German, and one-third Jewish. You can see the evidence of this in Teplice cemeteries. During the First Republic [1918–1938] I lived in a border area. We also stayed there during the war. We were lucky to have a little shortwave radio at home. At 10 p.m. I used to listen to the *Calling from London*³ with my father. It was very risky because we lived in a terraced house – and since the radio stood by the wall, my father had to be careful to isolate the sound so that none of our neighbors would know that we were listening to that radio program. It could have cost us our lives.

Did you witness the post-war transfers⁴?

Yes, in those days they drove families out of their houses. The fathers were not usually at home, so mothers and children were basically just uprooted from their kitchens. That was the beginning of the transfer in June 1945. Those people were not even allowed to take thirty kilograms of their personal belongings which was allowed later on; they just had to go. They were kicked out of their homes. Partly, I am not so surprised; it was a kind of revenge. People were excited and did not think reasonably or humanely. Human relationships were gradually disappearing. I lost many friends from school due to the transfers. Also, my family lost many good friends who had nothing to do with Hitler. I used to know some Czech families who returned to the border area after 1945, but they could not live there so they went back inland.

The Czech-German border areas got resettled during the post-war period. Most of the houses, farms, flats, land, factories, valuables, and accounts suddenly did not belong to anybody and were being given away. People who went there and were able to tolerate owning someone else's property got it.

How did you spend February 1948?

I had a part-time job in a building company in Teplice from June 1945 until that February. It was a part-time job because I also helped my father with administrative work for his business. We had quite a large joiner's carpentry workshop and lived on a busy street. Hundreds of people used to walk past our house on their way to work. It was in February 1948 when my mom

2 **Teplice** – a town in Northern Bohemia.

3 **Calling from London** – during WWII the BBC radio station broadcasted three fifteen-minute news programs in the Czech language. Listening to the foreign radio in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was punishable under the sentence of the death penalty.

4 **Post-war Transfers** – the post-WWII removal of the German people out of the Czechoslovak border area into Germany and Austria. Between two and three million people were removed between 1945 and 1946.

opened the window at 10 a. m. and was very surprised to see many people walking home from work. I stayed at work. I worked in a building company, and my office was on the ground floor. There were about twenty-five employees in the company, and many of them would stand on their tiptoes by the window to see whether I was sitting at my table. I think one of them wagged his finger at me. My boss helped me to stay there and continue working, but unfortunately it was my sister who was dismissed from work. She used to work in a tent and canvas factory. That sacking prompted her to apply for legal emigration from Czechoslovakia.

She worked as an organist in a parish church in Novosedlice. The head of the parish was Dr. Johan Theis, an Austrian who was not driven out, but a man who wanted to move to Austria nonetheless. Thanks to him, my sister had contacts for all the offices in Prague, and she did the same thing as him. She applied for emigration, and she did not accept the Czechoslovak citizenship which had been recently given to people during communism. She was given permission to emigrate in the autumn of 1950. The permission was valid until the end of March 1951. She moved to Austria, to the Russian zone, where she got help from our father's business partner. He lent her an identification card of another woman who looked a bit like my sister. Using that ID card she got to the Western zone and later to Western Germany where she stayed.

Did you have any problems due to your sister's emigration?

The problems started after I was arrested. The Czechoslovak State Secret Police would threaten me during the questioning by saying, "Your sister is in Austria in the Russian zone, and we will bring her here." At that time I did not know if she managed to escape from there or not. I was very scared because they were able to arrest anyone they wanted, put him in a car, and drive him back to Czechoslovakia. It would not have been the first or the last case, and it was very easy for them to arrest people in the Russian zone.

As you have already mentioned being arrested and questioned, I would like to ask, why did they arrest you? What activities did you do?

I longed for freedom, you know. I was a child from the border area, and I remember that while skiing in the Krušné Hory [Ore Mountains] we could easily cross the borders. The custom officer only asked, "How long will you stay there, kids? Where will you go? Come back afterwards." I was used to a life full of freedom in the borders. When I saw all those changes after the war – no tourism, no opportunities, no culture, no books, magazines or newspapers – I hated it. It was all very chauvinistic, and I did not like it. I longed to live in a different political system, and that is why I was brave enough to do something against the regime. We had contacts with the people at the border crossings; there was one man who took people from Eastern Germany, from Zinwald, our Czechoslovak Cínovec. I did that for quite a lot of money, because he also had to make his living. I used to send him some people who had to escape from the country; for example, if they had to run away after being threatened with arrest. So, suddenly my family and I became part of the group who helped people to cross the borders. I do not know if one of those people we helped was a police informer, but I think we must have been under observation because soon we realized that something had started happening around us.

So you were arrested for illegally taking people across the borders?

Apart from helping people cross the borders, we also printed leaflets. There were no computers in those days, so we wrote the leaflets on good quality typewriters where we could make more copies. Sometimes we printed ten copies at once. The leaflets were then distributed in different ways. At that time I had my part-time job and a really nice boss. He did not have a clue about my plans and activities. He used to take us for trips; we distributed our leaflets there, and he never found out.

We also put the leaflets in peoples' mailboxes. The net had already started closing around us. Then I started to work in a spa in Teplice and had a great boss again – Mr. Sova. I wrote a diary in German stenography in those times. Yet, I could feel it with my sixth sense that the problems were coming. I brought my diaries to work and put them in an old folder. We used to go for lunch with spa guests in the canteen. One day my boss came in and told me not to come back to work anymore. The State Secret Police was already in the office, looking through my bag, typewriter, and everything else that was accessible. Luckily they did not check the old folders. I knew I had to do something with the diaries and could not take them back home. I had one single colleague, his name was Emil Topinka, and I asked him to save those diaries for me. He took them and hid them for a long time. When we were already sentenced, he risked bringing them to my future husband's mother, Mrs. Marie Truncová. She was scared to have them in her home, so she buried them somewhere in the shed.

Did you find them in the end?

Yes, I did, but I must tell you I have completely lost them today. For example, the names are not written in stenography, and I do not remember them or cannot even imagine most of those people today.

How did your arrest happen?

I was arrested at my office in the Imperial Spa. The Emperor used to stay there during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. That day I could see a black tatraplan [type of car] coming – I was born at 11 o'clock and arrested at the same time. They performed a house search and took me to Ústí nad Labem.⁵ My mother experienced many more house searches after my father was arrested.⁶ Male prison officers were not allowed to examine me, so a female one came to do it. When I saw her I could not believe my eyes, and she felt the same, because we knew each other by sight. She used to work for that building company where I had my part time job. She joined the State Secret Police after that, and then there she was to examine me. She let me keep a gold chain and a little gold crucifix. She had to take the other things I had. I did not see my earrings, valuable rings, or watch again. It had to go. And the chain with the crucifix had to go soon, as well. We had to wear male shirts with no collars so our necks were uncovered. I took it off in my solitary cell, but there was nowhere to put it. There was no chance. The officers always checked the only pocket you had and your hands. I would have had to swallow it.

⁵ Mrs. Truncová was transferred to the prison of the regional headquarters of the State Secret Police Ústí nad Labem, which operated in the years 1950–1954.

⁶ Her father Jan John was arrested on July 18, 1951.

What did the cells in Ústí nad Labem look like?

They were little cells under the pavement with no ventilation. Only when a prison officer opened the door could you smell the mustiness from the corridor. Everything was underground; you got down there by elevator, and there were prison bars everywhere. There were only solitary cells in Ústí nad Labem – no hygiene, no showers, and no hot or cold water in the cell. There was a so-called French toilet embedded in the floor, but no water. There was not even a jug, so you had nothing to drink. The air was dry, so dry and not fresh. The cell was about three steps by three steps big and there was a big wooden bunk bed which could not be folded and was full of bedbugs. I wasn't allowed to lie down on the bed during the day, only at night. There were no blankets, so you had to lie on the bed with hands next to your body, and the bedbugs came out of the bed. That was horrible. The prison officer opened the door to the corridor in the morning, and we took turns with our morning hygiene. There was no toothbrush, and I did not comb my hair for about three months. There was one basin with cold water in the corridor and only one towel hanging next to it. You could see blood stains from all the prisoners on the towel. I am very sensitive when it comes to hygiene, but I must admit that at that time I did not mind the dirty towel, because I knew that some of my close friends or relatives were using it as well.

Did you know about any of your close friends or relatives, for example your Father or future husband, being in prison too?

My fiancé [Otakar Trunec] was arrested before me⁷, and I used to bring him clean clothes before my arrest, so I knew about him. I found out that some other people were there, as well, because I heard some people whistling. We all liked and used to use one tune by Beethoven, and I could hear that tune in the prison, so I knew there had to be someone from our group. Years later I found out that my future husband had engraved some message for me on an aluminum dish because he thought that the dishes went around the prison and I might have been given food in that one. Yet, I was a naive prisoner and did not search for secret messages. The prison officers realized that he was doing that, and he had to clean all the dishes. After that, the regime of tin spoons and tin dishes started and lasted for many years. It was a big punishment for me, even bigger than correction, because we were given neither a knife to cut our food nor a fork. There was only that spoon and the dish. For years we washed the dishes in cold water because there wasn't any hot water in the prison. For some time we had our own dish, but then it changed, and we had to take them to the kitchen and pick them up from there as well.

Did any prison officers help you?

When I didn't give evidence to the State Secret Police, I was sometimes taken to the prison in Litoměřice. One officer there helped me. He was an older man who probably also worked there before the war. That generation was later swapped for newly-educated staff. Although I did not know that something like a hunger-strike existed in prisons, I stopped eating. Over time I think they might have put something into my food. I was so mentally and physically exhausted that I started to be able to perceive everything with my nose. I used smell more than

⁷ Otakar Trunec was arrested on May 19, 1951.

sight. There was a tip-up table in the cell, which I was allowed to use only when they gave me that bit of food. I could smell some disgusting odor rather than a beautiful smell of wood from that table. So I stopped eating. That old prison officer noticed this and, even though he was not supposed to, he came to my cell and told me to eat and not to lose energy. I do not remember if I asked him or if it was he who noticed, but he brought me a comb. It was a dirty comb from some other prisoner, but it did not matter, I cleaned it.

How did the interrogators behave towards you?

Their behavior was horrible. Their brutality and arrogance was horrendous. For example, the way they spoke with us; we were not allowed to mention our family members. We could not say mother or sister. We had to say the whole name, which made it sound like we were talking about a stranger. Their brutality was simply terrible. They used to take me up by elevator to be questioned. I could see the Střekov Rock with some white slogan on it, probably, "Hello from the Communist Party." The window was usually open during the interrogation, and I could see that rock. I can tell you that more than once I was thinking about jumping out of that window, but one has the self-preservation instinct. They put handcuffs on our hands and moved us from Ústí nad Labem to Prague, Pankrác prison by a paddy wagon, which had only small windows, so we got in through the back door. It was a long journey, you know, and some of us needed the toilet. We were literally peeing under the machine gun. At the end of the day we were not shy anymore, so we did not mind them watching us. Before Prague we had to change from a wagon to a tatraplan car, and they blindfolded us. In Pankrác we were put into a holding where we could wear our civilian clothes. When they arrested us, I thought that it would be for a fairly long time, but I was optimistic and did not expect it to last for so long. Apart from the suit which I was wearing, I took a warm black coat. I was really happy that I did, and I used it as a blanket – especially in Pankrác since there were not enough of them.

Did you experience any confrontation?

They confronted me with one man – a priest, František Blaise. The interrogators shouted at me, "So you say that your mother did not know that you were helping people crossing the borders!" I wanted to protect my mother, because if they had arrested her, my grandma would have stayed alone, so I had to deny everything. They told me, "You may change your mind." I was blindfolded and they did not take the cloth off my eyes, but I knew that they would beat František Blaise. He took a real beating. He confirmed everything, and maybe he did not recognize me, but I still recognized his voice. My mother stayed at home even though her life was quite tough, but she was there with grandma, which made things easier.

How was your trial?

First I thought that everything would be solved by the court. I imagined that I would have to swear on some crucifix, but all the crucifixes were already gone. I was such a naïve prisoner. Our trial was open to the members of our families. I could see my mother, my future husband's parents, and the wives of my accomplices. There were eleven of us on trial, but I was the only woman. The trial took place on November 27 and 28, 1951. Communists arrested their own communists that night – the Jewish group of Slánský, Goldstücker, London, and the others. They told us the sentences on the first day, but the fact that they arrested that Jewish group

caused the sentences on the next day to be more lenient. So our group got fifteen years. I got thirteen, then others got twelve, eleven, ten, seven, and one got five years. After the trial, before they took us underground, I looked back at my father and the people I knew. The police officer told me off for doing that, but I said, "I will always be part of my family, whenever and wherever!" He reported me. My punishment started the next day. I got ten nights on a hard bed and half-portions of meals in solitary confinement in Pankrác.⁸

What was solitary confinement in Pankrác like?

There was a wooden bunk bed...a plank and gap, plank and gap with no mattress on it and bedbugs everywhere. Every evening you had to report your name, number, and so on. The officer asked me, "Do you have it with or without a lid?" At first I did not know what was going on. There was that toilet embedded in the floor, and I think there might have been rats. At the end the officer gave me the lid, so I covered the toilet and fell asleep. I did not finish the punishment. Two or three days before the end I was taken away and moved to Kladno. They probably needed some extra prisoners. We never knew where we were going, but the sign on the bus always said "tour." We left on December 6, 1951, on Saint Nicolas Day.

What happened in Kladno?

In Kladno I worked at a steelworks in a smelting plant. There were cranes with some liquid alloy moving above our heads and big pots with some boiling hot stuff. It looked like hell. It stank very badly; even a slice of bread you had in your pocket got stinky. I worked on a machine where there were some long poles, and I had to estimate whether or not the poles were straight after they had come through some other machine. The civilians were not nice to us there; they were brutal, vulgar, and spat on the ground when they saw us. The prison officers did not have to take care of us so much because the proper communist workers did their jobs for them. I got a really bad migraine in January. I felt so bad that even a police officer took pity on me and took me outside to get some fresh air. Then they changed my position. I had to dig out metal chips using a pickaxe. I worked together with another prisoner, Mrs. Stará. We had to dig the chips out and put them in carts.

When did you have your first visit?

I had it in Kladno. The visits took place by a big wide table. It was all very strictly observed. My grandma came. She was a tough and brave woman, and she brought me a homemade pie, but the prison officers did not want me to have it, so she said, "Eat that pie." So I ate the whole pie in front of the officers' eyes. She also brought some photographs from which I stole one for myself. It was a little photo from the last New Year's party in our house. In the prison we used to wear jogging pants with an elastic band around the waist, which was very suitable for hiding things. I showed that photo to one of my friends, but I am sure she did not report me. I only had a few friends there, but they were good ones. I think someone else must have seen it and told an officer. They came to search my cell, but I hid the photo very well, so they did not find it.

⁸ Mrs. Truncová was judged with other nine people – Otakar Trunec (her fiancé), Jan John (her father), Vladimír Heinzl, František Blaise, Jan Vránek, František Kalousek, Antonín Štědrónský, František Kubeš and Václav Černý. The biggest sentence was given to Otakar Trunec (fifteen years), the second biggest one to Hana Truncová.

Soon after that in February 1952, they took us to Jilemnice⁹. No accommodation was ready for us. It was only a small prison with two or three little cells. It was only made for escorts, not for residing in. Later we lived in a factory which had already been closed down. There were bars on the windows and a kitchen on the ground floor. Every day we walked under surveillance. We worked in a Technolen company, which was about fifteen minutes away from where we were staying. We spun flax there. So, I was in Jilemnice from February 1952. I stayed there over Christmas; and in January 1953 they moved us to a different workplace where we worked with hemp; and then they moved us to Varnsdorf¹⁰. That was a labor camp where we worked only at night because the civilians did not want to do the night shifts. Most of us ruined our vision there from working at night. We were in Varnsdorf when Stalin and Gottwald¹¹ died.

What were the prison officers' reactions to those events?

We took a different way to work and somehow felt that the female prison officers were scared of us and did not know what was going to happen.

And did you know that Stalin and Gottwald had died?

Of course we knew. The Czechoslovak Army practiced their parades and marches under our windows and shouted the news to us. We whispered the news to each other on the way to work. For this reason they decided to concentrate all people sentenced to ten or more years to one place and they sent us quickly to Pardubice. I arrived there on May 19, 1953. The weather was hot in those days, and we were all thirsty. They told us to stand on the small yard facing the wall; the sun was shining strongly on us. The Commander of the Pardubice prison came and told us that none of us could leave and that we would all serve our sentences. All of us were sentenced to ten, fifteen, or eighteen years.

Could you please describe the prison in Pardubice?

There were masonry buildings A and B, which were built during the reign of Maria Teresa, and a big administration building by the pavement at the edge of the prison. The prison looks totally different today. The A building cracked during a detonation in Semtín¹². We lived there for a little longer. The building was supported by wooden columns, but they were afraid we would die there and built new quarters – blocks C and D and block E next to B. The C and D blocks were full of rats after one week. They were very wet and mildewed inside, and there was frost in the winter. They stopped using the A building and moved us. Before those new buildings were finished, they emptied the big storehouses of the prison, put the straw mattresses on the floor, and moved us in. There were sixty of us, and we had only one toilet, which was the most private place of anywhere in there. The hall was very messy because there was one mattress right next to another. We could hide the cabbage we stole from the gardens right next to our mattress. The years went by in the Pardubice prison. Not only was it necessary to adapt ourselves to the regime, but also to make our own little private space. When I am

9 A labor unit for women in Jilemnice which operated until 1953.

10 A labor unit for women in Varnsdorf which operated until 1953. Women used to work there for the factory Elite in the textile industry.

11 **Klement Gottwald** (1896–1953) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

12 **Semtín** – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

thinking about it now, there was less than one square meter per person. There were twelve double-beds in each cell; it was a very small space, but we did not get on each other's nerves. We used to exchange things, and for example, I got a little stool, which was like a treasure to me. I also got a little wash-bowl which was thrown out during each search, but I always found it and brought it back. Each of us had our little hiding place, our little secret, and our life. Each of us had to somehow escape from reality in our own way. We had to learn to live a double life, to make our plans and dreams.

What were you thinking about?

I was thinking about my future life. I planned a family and was also thinking about things that had happened. In my imagination I walked on trips, travelled, and remembered my life. I would say that a prisoner relives the life he has already lived. You remember everything from childhood, and you remember people who were important to you. It is not that you would judge your life since you cannot change anything, but in prison you appreciate the fact that you were able to live your life and enjoy it. I regard that as a beginning of humility towards life and towards higher values like family and friendship. I survived in prison thanks to memories of my life, without getting stuck in the past. You can't do that; you must have your daily routine and daily life. There were different events happening around us – we had visitors, letters – and each of us lived our lives inside. There were things happening in our homes, like a big loss or pain in our families, and we were not able to help – to go to a funeral or visit our ill relatives – and so we comforted each other and made ourselves happy. That helped a lot.

Did this fraternity work only among political prisoners or also among criminal ones?

There were only a few criminal prisoners among us. From time to time they moved and mixed us, so murderers also appeared among us. I shared a quarter with one Slovakian murderer, or there was a small illiterate Gypsy in our cell and she was allowed to have a child's reader, and that was a big thing. We did not even have papers or pens. I would say that there was strong solidarity among us, the political prisoners. The criminal prisoners tried to assimilate. I did not experience that, but the women who were not granted amnesty in 1960¹³ and stayed longer became a minority, and I can tell you they went through hell.

I lived together with a murderer who adapted herself in all the ways. When any of us had visitors and brought something back to the cell, she would divide it into parts and put one part on each mattress. The murderer did the same. She was jealous of her husband and killed him, but the whole family used to visit her. She always got sweets and shared them with us. I was not able to eat it because she touched it with her hands – hands that killed a man. I pretended that I had eaten it and liked it. We had to get on well with each other. That was a kind of unwritten prison law. You simply had to adapt. We were all in the same boat.

Did you meet nuns in Pardubice?

They were there, but they separated them from us for some time. That was the biggest mistake they could have made. They did it on purpose because they wanted the nuns to be separated from us. The nuns were full of discipline and humility, so they were thought to be

13 President Antonín Novotný Amnesty – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

a danger to the other prisoners. Politically prominent prisoners were isolated as well. That is how the two parties of *Hrad* [Castle] and *Vatikán* [Vatican] originated¹⁴. Later those isolated prisoners were mixed and moved back to normal cells.

Could you please tell us something about the hunger strike in Pardubice in 1955?

It was very interesting because the hunger strike spread like a game of telephone. There was a new female prison officer in those days. She was not introduced to us, so we did not know her name, but everybody called her *Elsa Koch*¹⁵ – a prison officer from the concentration camp of WWII. We were on hunger strike because of her. In the end, she was removed, and that was the end of the hunger strike. We were on strike because of the brutal treatment of the prisoners. Those of us who took part in the hunger strike were forbidden to get letters or visits for three months.

Would you be able to remember the Hammarskjöld event, when women from *Hrad* sent twelve letters to the General Secretary of the United Nations?

That was the time women from *Hrad* [Castle] asked for paper and pens, because we were not allowed to have them, and sent those letters. I don't think that the letters were ever sent. No visitors came after that – never mind international ones.¹⁶ To answer the question about the number of political prisoners; there were only two. They counted in Fráňa Zemínová¹⁷, who was a National Socialist¹⁸, and I think the other one was Antonie Kleinerová¹⁹, who was a National Socialist, too. We did not even exist to those in power.

Did you, the women who did not take part in sending those twelve letters, feel strange? Did you actually know about that?

No, we did not know anything in that camp, because the women from *Hrad* [Castle] were isolated at that time, and so we were not in touch with them. They even had extra walks, but later the news spread around the camp very quickly.

What did the visits and correspondence with your relatives mean to you?

Over the course of time I would say – even though it might sound like self-praise – that we were all very brave. We simply lied. We were not allowed to talk about many things, so when we met our visitors we usually took delight in their civilian clothes and voice, because we could not shake their hands. The bravery of our visitors was very important too. My brave grandmother or mother used to visit me a lot. And I must say that none of them ever cried. You

14 A special departments called *Hrad* [Castle] and *Vatikán* [Vatican] – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

15 *Elsa Koch* – *Ilse Koch* (1906–1967) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

16 The letters have never been sent. They were put into the prisoners personal files of the authors and are now accessible in the National Archive in Prague.

17 *Fráňa Zemínová* (1882–1962) – a Member of Parliament who represented the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party from 1918 to 1939. In Fall 1949, she was arrested at 68 years old and tried in a show trial with Milada Horáková. She was sentenced to twenty years and released in 1960.

18 Mrs. Truncová means Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. Do not confuse with NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party).

19 *Antonie Kleinerová* (1901–1982) – a politician who represented the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party as a Member of Parliament after WWII. In 1949, she was sentenced in a trial with Milada Horáková and given a life sentence. She was pardoned in 1960.

could not say any names, most importantly the first names, so we usually talked about flowers, plants, and domestic animals. And letters? We were not allowed to have paper or a pen, but we were allowed the letters. They gave us A5 size paper with the camp's letterhead. We called all the letters essays, because it was usual to start writing about your fantasies or write a whole letter about a bird. On the other hand, it was also important what the writers told you. It was actually better when they did not tell us much because we were absolutely powerless and unable to help.

I got letters from my family and my fiancé. Those were love letters, which were censored twice. First in the prison where they were sent from, and then in the prison they were sent to. Talking about Pardubice, I must mention a big wooden box. We were supposed to put letters which we had already read in there, but the prison officers had no chance to keep up with it because the letters had no numbers or anything. They went through censorship and were opened when we got them. Then we had three days to read them and had to put them into the wooden box. I never put any letter from my fiancé in there. I just could not do it. I had them hidden on my body or behind a beam. It felt like reading a very old calendar because the things written in the letter were already things of the past, but they were handwritten, and I could still feel a kind of trickle coming out of it.

What were the relationships among the female prisoners like?

I think it was easier for us than for those people outside. We were there together. There were only a few criminals; most of us were political prisoners, and I swear we never argued. We sometimes had different opinions on things, but we always managed to discuss them and convince each other successfully or not, but we never argued. Even the fact that we called each other "little girl" when we did not know names proves a lot. We all had very good relationships.

What was the life in the prison in Pardubice like?

We were constantly at risk there. It was forbidden to go to a different cell or block. Sometimes we wanted to talk, let the others read a letter, or were doing some craftwork and needed instructions. Many beautiful things originated there. We did everything secretly. For example, we boiled horse's bone until it was white, then secretly got a knife from somewhere and kept carving for weeks. Unfortunately, they were suddenly taken from us. The prison officers probably took some of those things as souvenirs. There were bracelets, embroidery, etc. and they were all gone. Each of us could do a different craft. Then we would give our products to each other at some special occasions, for example at Christmas. Not only soup or biscuits from the prison shop²⁰ but also handmade things worked as nice and precious gifts. We always hid our presents in different places and lost them during searches.

Many prisoners, not only men, but also women, remember a so-called *prison university*.

Would you be able to recall that as well?

Yes, those were walks in the yard. We would make groups according to our own preference. We used to walk in our groups. Each of us knew different things, and there were also women

20 **Prison Shop** – small shop where prisoners could buy basic hygienic items for prison money and a limited selection of goodies.

who were lecturers at universities. Some of us were deeply religious and were able to say long prayers, which I would have had to read from a prayer book. So we usually joined the group which would teach you something or where you talked about things, which made you forget about the prison. We used to walk around pretending that we were talking, but one of us usually gave a lecture on various topics. When we came out of the prison we used to say, "The prison was actually my university." I was always interested in psychology so I secretly studied characters and the behavior of other people. It was a great opportunity to share a cell or a walk with people who were interested in something or wanted to pass on their knowledge. This was how we got knowledge, which was precious and helped you forget about daily life in the prison. One woman asked me once to describe a day in the prison. It was not easy at all to do. Someone who has never been there would probably say that the life there is very monotonous. There was a regimen, which you had to follow from dawn to dusk. That is true, but you had time for your ideas, and that time cannot be taken away anyone. You basically lived a double life. The days there were not monotonous, because there were constant transports, searches, letters being delivered, and so on.

What about the hygienic conditions in Pardubice?

They were horrible from the beginning to the end. We got used to the cold water after some time. We dealt with water like ladies in Africa. Once we exchanged a wooden dish and then each of us grabbed it from one side. Those things were forbidden but tolerated. We asked for hot water in the kitchen, and then used that one load of water to wash our faces, hair, clothes, and then the floor. There was one kind of soap for everything. The wash room was horrible; it was dirty and mildewed. We were strictly forbidden to wash or dry our clothes. New Commander²¹ arrived one day, and we stated our demands. We wanted to wash our clothes and finally we were allowed to do it.

Do you remember any cultural activities?

They started showing films. I do not remember which year it was. But we never knew what was going to be shown, and that was the purpose. The films were voluntary, so when we went to watch them, they had time to search our cells.

I remember that once somebody told us: "There will be a nice movie, certainly a fairy tale *A Proud Princess*." And it really was. However, when we came back to our cells, they were in a mess, and all our things were jumbled – sugar, straw from the mattresses, everything on one big pile. They also showed a Soviet film a couple of times, but I do not remember its name. I saw it more than once, but always had to finish it because they did not let us out.

Do you remember the day when you got released?

I was released before the amnesty in 1960. The communists knew that changes were coming so they started releasing people in 1959. At the end of 1959 they called me into the administration building. There they asked me some questions, but I was not satisfactory. I think they would have released me, but I did not answer in the right way. So I went back to the prison and had my ninth Christmas in the prison. My family applied for my release, but I never asked for

21 Mrs. Truncová probably means **Jaroslav Huňáček** (1924–?) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

it. They called eight of us again in January 1960. I did not answer the questions any differently. They decided to release me on probation. I still had four years to go, but the probation lasted for eight years, and that was very convenient for them. Nobody wanted to give you a job, but you had to work, so you had to accept some inferior position. We did not know about money or means of transport; we did not know that the third class did not exist in trains anymore. We felt like we had fallen from the sky. One censor²² took us to the train station. We called him *Čáp* [Stork]. I did not have any civilian clothes. I had to borrow them from Vlasta Brhelová. I looked like a scarecrow. The censor bought us the tickets and told us the times of our trains. We were like children.

How was it when you returned home?

I came to Teplice early in the morning. My mother worked at Hotel Thermia. I asked one dispatcher to call the hotel and ask if my mother was at work. He called and found out that she was there. I walked through Teplice, a hilly town, and as I walked up Leninova Street, I had problems catching my breath. I gathered all my courage and entered the hotel. My mother took a day off and went home with me. My father was not at home, but my grandmother gave me a warm welcome.

When were your Father and fiancée released?

My father was released in 1955, and my fiancé was granted amnesty in 1960. I never believed in that amnesty. Some prisoners were kept alive thanks to the vision of amnesty, but I never hoped for it, even though I was such an optimist.

How was it coming back to normal civil life?

Coming back to civil life was very difficult even though I had a good family background. It was a bit easier thanks to my mother, who told me to stay at home for some time. I got a new identification card and did not go outside the house. It was not easy at all to rejoin society. Nobody would believe me, but I can tell you that I missed the prison – I mean, the people there – because there was that support and assurance. I did not know what to talk about with other people. I think that the mindset of the prisoner cannot be changed from day to day. You cannot suddenly think and talk about normal things. Many times I remembered the words of my prison mate Žofie Slováčková. She used to say, “Do you know what I would like? When we are all released, I would like us to live in big villages or small towns all together – all the prisoners together.” She was right. It probably would not work that way, but living somewhere with each other would have been good. It would have been lovely to live in mutual help and friendship.

When you look back to the time in the prison, could you tell me what it gave you?

It gave me confidence, and from a political standpoint, it gave me anti-communist sentiments. I will never, ever support their party. I cannot understand why some young people support them and their program. I know that they lie.

22 Censor – a guard responsible for the censorship of letters.

Have you ever forgiven the communists for all the injustice they did to you?

Once I gave a lecture in the hall of a grammar school in northern Bohemia together with Archbishop Karel Otčenášek. I let him start, and he started as a true Christian with a speech about forgiveness. I knew that he had experienced a very hard time in prison. Then it was my turn to talk, and the first thing I said was that I felt like a rebel standing there next to him. I told the students that nobody ever said sorry to me. The Archbishop said that we should forgive but should not forget. Those are very important things. Personally, I have never forgiven them because they stole a big part of my life. I had my plans and ideas, and I lost them, and they can't be given back. I wanted to live a free life, to travel, and do things to make myself happy. And they spoiled it.

Thank you very much for this interview.

“Jáchymov was the suffering of a nation that can never be forgotten.”



Augustin (Gustav) Bubník was born on November 21, 1928, to a butcher's family in Prague. In the years of 1946–1948 he studied secondary business school in Prague. He played ice-hockey as one of the youngest members of the Czechoslovak national team, won 1948 Silver Medal from the winter Olympic Games in St. Moritz, Switzerland and 1949 Gold Medal from the World Championship in ice-hockey in Stockholm, Sweden. In 1950 he was accused of planning to emigrate from Czechoslovakia and sentenced to fourteen years of prison. He was released in 1955. He continued his career as a player mostly in a number of second league Czechoslovak teams after his release and eventually became a coach. He served as the Head Coach of the National Team of Finland between 1966–1969 and wished to continue, though his contract was not prolonged by the Czechoslovak authorities. In 1998–2002 he was elected Member of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. He is an active member of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic, tours around Czech schools for lecturing, and is currently living in Prague 4.

Interview with Mr. Augustin Bubník

Interviewer: Tomáš Bouška

First let me ask you about your childhood and place of birth.

I was born on November 21, 1928, in Prague, so in the zodiac calendar I was actually born in the last week of Scorpio. Scorpions have always been proud fighters and are also able to get together and do the best thing in every situation. According to my mom and dad, when I was born in 1928, it was a terribly frosty weather. Even while they were taking me to my baptism, they thought we would freeze. So I was probably predisposed to frost and ice hockey. During my childhood it was already proven true. My father was a butcher and worked in a slaughterhouse. My mom was a shop assistant at a butcher's. They both came from Southern Bohemia to Prague, and we all lived in Holešovice in Prague 7. My mom was a big Sokol¹ fan, so she used to take my sister, who was two years my junior, and me to the Sokol training area at Libeňský bridge. There was an ice rink created each winter. That was where we actually started to learn to ice skate. Then I found out that there was ice near our house, at Štvanice Island, where you could ice skate and play ice hockey.

When did you start to play in the major league hockey games?

After the war, the major leagues were the Olympic games in 1948, where we managed to tie Canada with a score 0-0. For Canada, it was a shock. Up until that time they had kept coming to Europe and beating Czechoslovakia. The first match against Czechoslovakia in 1911 was 30-0, and then we were only losing by twenty and later a ten goal difference. Canada was coming to Europe for a World Olympics, and it was a vacation for them because they were beating everyone around. It was a shock for them when we ended up 0-0. After the end of the Olympic Games, there were conflicts between the captain Vladimír Zábrodský and the head coach Matěj Buckna. Coach accused Zábrodský of establishing the wrong tactics – that we should have played offensively, not defensively. Buckna kept saying that each of the players had a big chance and an opportunity to score a goal; however, so did the Canadians. Thank heavens we had a great goalkeeper, Mr. Modrý [Bohumil], and the match ended 0-0. We got an invitation to Canada to measure our strength against some Canadian teams at home. At that time there were only six professional hockey teams playing in Canada.

What constituted your “seditious” activity?

In that post-war time they were flaunting us as the most popular European hockey team from LTC Prague². Every New Year we played in Switzerland in a tournament called the Spengler's Cup. Right after the Olympics in 1948, the whole team got into a conflict with Czech immigrants

1 **Sokol** – The Sokol movement (from the Slavic word for falcon) is a youth sport movement and gymnastics organization first founded in Prague in the Czech region of Austria-Hungary in 1862 by Miroslav Tyrš and Jindřich Fügner. Primarily a fitness training center, the Sokol, through lectures, discussions, and group outings provided what Tyrš viewed as physical, moral, and intellectual training for the nation. This training extended to men of all classes, and eventually to women.

2 **Lawn Tennis Club Praha (LTC Praha)** – famous Prague tennis and later ice-hockey association (1903–1950).

from LTC Prague who were already living in exile³ in Switzerland. The people in exile asked Mr. Zábrodský, as a speaker of the team, to organize our stay there. That would mean the whole team would stay abroad, playing under the name of the Czechoslovakian national team-in-exile. We would play in Europe, especially in England, and in turn would advertise the image of this team. At first, Mr. Zábrodský promised everything. Then they didn't give him twice the money as they had promised for each player, and so he refused the whole thing. There was even a vote, where eight of the players were for returning and six for staying. In that moment, one of the Zábrodský brothers and Doctor Fáma, who was a lawyer, stayed in Switzerland. He was twenty-six or maybe twenty-eight years old then, but he knew well that he couldn't come back to the country. They were spokesmen for this organization, and that was why they knew there was no returning for them. We went back, and that was the beginning of everything.

Did the repercussions start soon after you returned to Prague?

Not yet. In 1949 we became World Champions in Sweden. All of a sudden we beat Canada 3-2! That was the first victory for Czechoslovakia against Canada. The score was 3-2, and if I remember well, Konopásek scored the first, I scored the second, and I think the third was Roziňák. Grand total, we won 3-2, which dethroned Canada. When we came back, the government welcomed us at the train station in Prague. There was the Prime Minister Zápotocký and other ministers. They greeted and congratulated us in a private government lounge in the railway station. The train station was full of people.

But in 1950 they didn't let us go to the next World Championship in Great Britain. They wanted us to proclaim that we would forego participation since Czechoslovakian reporters didn't get visas to travel with the delegation. In the meantime my sister, who worked at a state office here in Prague, got in touch with friends from the British consulate and photocopied the problematic visas. The visas were available. All the reporters had to do was pick them up on Saturday, but they never came.

So we all got together immediately at *U Herlíků*. That was a little pub by the National Theater in Prague, and the owner was the brother of a Sparta⁴ player, Zdeněk Ujčík. It was a pub where we, civilians, and soldiers could meet up. We drank and ate well there. I remember, we dropped our luggage at home on the way from the airport, and by 5 p. m. we started to hang out. There were already some people inside. There was a bagpiper who also played the harmonica. The whole time, we sang various songs about sports or Prague. You know – memories. And then, when our merry-making was at its peak, and it was revealed why we didn't fly to the championship; we all felt pretty bold. I can sincerely admit we swore a lot, and from time to time, we would also run out into the little square and yell, "Death to communists!" or "We will not let you cut our wings, we will reveal the truth!" In that moment we heard the radio reporter Edmund Koukal explain the reason the hockey team didn't leave for the championship. He said exactly what he was told to say: the hockey team gave up participation because the reporters didn't get visas. So we called Mr. Laufer immediately, saying, "Come here, we will tell you the truth." No, he didn't come. We called Koukal right after the commentary to come to us, and he answered,

3 **Exile** – the expulsion of a man from his home country due to deportation, revoked citizenship, political, national, race, or religious persecution. Czechoslovaks who emigrated during communist times lost their citizenship status and were treated as criminals.

4 **Sparta Club** – one of the major football & sports club in Prague.

“Guys, I will not come.” When merry-making was at its peak and we were already very drunk, we started to sing some songs about the ex-football player Vlasta Kopecký. It was a Slavia⁵ song. Instead of Vlasta Kopecký we sang Venca [Czech name Václav] Kopecký, who was a Minister of Education and Sport. When that hit its climax, I was walking by with Roziňák and suddenly two men got up from one of the tables and caught us. They told us we had to go with them.

What are your memories, and what comes to mind when I mention *Domeček*⁶ at Hradčany?

The timeframe that I lived there was from April 15 to the beginning of May. I was transported to holding at Pankrác when they finished the investigation. That was the worst time in my life. I was a young kid, having fun with all those things, thinking that nothing bad could happen to me. Maybe we would get a punishment for the disturbance we caused in the pub, but everything that happened afterwards – all that investigation into the whole case – and everything that was rolled onto us was really cruel. Of course, the worst times were those when we were in the hands of Pergl⁷, the boss of *Domeček*. The most terrible thing was when they took us to the general staff at Dejvice. It didn't matter whether it was in the morning, noon, evening, or at night: everything depended on to what extent the investigators were in a mood to talk to us. The worst was his abuse and treatment in the *Domeček*. The cruelest was a dungeon cell under the staircase where he put me and the other boys once he got the command, though I spent the most time there. It was dark, and there was no daylight, no bulb. It was a hard-packed cell, wet and closed. A man was like a mouse in a hole there, adrift until they brought coffee or a piece of bread, if anything.

Those were horrible things. From the moment we went into the *Domeček* he used violence, a truncheon, and a cat o' nine tails whip with little bullets. He would hit a person with that from the front, from the back. I fell down many times, and he behaved like a beast that would only be satisfied by that cruelty. Of course, his expressions and everything made you worry about your own life. Many times he led me to the interrogation pointing a gun at me. I didn't know whether it was full and whether the safety was on, but he said, “Make another step and I will shoot you like a dog, you seditious bastard” or “Will you speak or not?” The worst was when the investigators didn't get what they wanted out of me. When I couldn't confess to what they suspected me of, then the nights and days were bad. The truth is that they had to give us some laxative in the coffee, because we were starving. I remember Tonda Španinger saying once, “If I could catch a bird sitting on the ledge, I would eat it.” It was that brutal over there. So in that *Domeček* there were six of us; six soldiers. The guards weren't men; they were beasts who were our age, maybe a little older. They kept walking in corridors, kicking the doors, and we had to either do push-ups or knee-bends or run around... briefly, they always wanted to crush us so the investigators would get us in such a state that they would be able to do anything with us. I remember getting to Pergl's office, and I saw various instruments hanging on the walls...

5 **Slavia Club** – another major sports club in Prague.

6 **Domeček** – small 30-cell building on Kapucínská Street in Prague-Hradčany, called *Domeček* (Czech: “little house”, pronounced “domacheček”) was the prison where mainly Czechoslovak soldiers were kept for interrogation. Originally a military prison of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the building was later used by the Gestapo and then the communists. The tortures and cruel beatings which happened there are infamous.

7 **František Pergl** – alias *Dry linden* or *Black penicillin*, this staff captain was a caretaker of of the military prison on Kapucínská street in Prague (*Domeček*). Due to his service in the prewar Czechoslovakian army, Pergl was already known for his brutality. He followed every interrogator's command to persecute prisoners, and he himself made up various styles of torture.

Once they gave me a metal belt around my head and kept pulling it tighter and tighter, so I thought it would squash my head. They tied your arms together so you couldn't defend yourself or fight back and, they did whatever they needed. I actually lost thirty kilos (66 pounds) while I was there. I came in with a weight of eighty kilograms (176 pounds), and when I was left I was nearly fifty kilos (110 pounds)... They still wanted to prove that I was guilty – that I was the head initiator and traitor, and that it was me who persuaded the others to stay abroad. I always wanted a confrontation. When the investigator declared that Josef Jirka said this and that, showing me his papers, I said, "No, I want you to put us face to face." Even once, when we were going together by car with Jirka to the investigation process, I said to him, "What the hell were you saying in there? That isn't the truth at all." He was absolutely psychologically damaged. They could and did anything they wanted. We would have signed anything. So they took us to the office to be confronted. In the car, when I said I didn't tell him anything, he started crying and totally broke down. I knew it, and I believe that Pergl not only terrorized us, but also high ranking soldiers of the foreign army and generals. Pergl really scourged all of us. He wasn't a human being – he was a hyena, reigning there, and he did exactly what they wanted him to. He was getting people ready for the investigation process. When all that was over, I was really happy I got to Pankrác, and I was waiting to go through the investigation there.

How long did the *Domeček* situation last?

It was from March 15. They took me into custody on the March 13, then they took me to the Fifth Department by Saint Nicholas Church two days later, the one at Malá Strana. Then Lietenant Hůlka came to pick me up. In addition to being in the army gym club in Chuchle, he was also a member of the OBZ⁸. Also this *Dry Linden* Pergl was there. From Saint Nicholas they took me to the *Domeček*. So I was there from March 15. By the time I was traveling back, a flower called *golden rain* was in bloom. I remember it was May Day, because I heard the big celebrations on the Ring Square. I was there until the beginning of May, when they took me over, so it lasted seven, maybe eight, weeks.

The six friends, can you name them?

Who were at that *Domeček*? Of course I can; it was me, Kobranov, Stock, Hainý, Španinger, and Jirka, all six of us who were on the national team and who were nominated for the World Championships in London. In fact, we were all soldiers. Some in the basic service, some who had already played hockey for two years for the army sports club. We represented the army, and we had the basement in Chuchle Station. We lived in a villa and commuted to the stadium at Štvanice to train and play. So there were these six soldiers, but some of us left *Domeček* at different times. Not all went as late as I did. I think that I was one of the last ones to be moved to Pankrác.

Nevertheless you were one of the youngest ones.

Unfortunately, and of course I was really a naive young boy. Today I can see that. I didn't have a clue what was spreading and what communism was.

⁸ OBZ – the postwar Czechoslovak military intelligence service. It was meant to protect the army against both internal and external threats such as enemy spies and collaborators. It lead investigations against Nazi collaborators and traitors and thanks to the support of NKVD, worked on the production of fabricated evidences and show trials against the inconvenient officers and opposers of communism.

How old were you at that time?

In March of 1950 I was twenty-one and a half. I wasn't even supposed to start my military service yet. I went as a basic soldier because my best friend Vofka [Vladimír] Kobranov went as well, and we played two years before that on the national team. So he talked me into it. I went into the military service a year earlier than I had to. I wanted to be in the military service so that we both could play for the army sports club.

Out of you six, was there anyone who didn't confess?

For sure Jirka confessed to everything that they knew on him. For sure Hainý confessed. He even got only one year of punishment because he confessed that he had plans to stay abroad. He was a really smart and intelligent kid. He was also doing track and field events and was connected with Václav Mudra. Mudra became the biggest chief of the OBZ after 1948 because he was an athlete, but they did sports together in Slavia. So it was possible that Mudra helped him get somewhat off the hook or out of the whole thing. So for sure Jirka confessed everything that he did, what he smuggled, and everything else. Španinger didn't have to confess about anything since he was in the whole case by chance. He wasn't even in Switzerland with us, where we voted whether to stay there or not. Stock was also supposed to fly with the national team for the first time in his life; and, from the paper, I later found out that even Stock said those things that he didn't have to talk about. So they got him on everything that they wanted. Vofka Kobranov didn't confess for sure, and neither did I.

Just out of interest, how did you vote in Switzerland?

In Switzerland the whole thing finally collapsed when the pro-immigration group didn't convince the whole team to stay and play as the Czechoslovakian team-in-exile. The main initiator and speaker was the captain of the team, Vladimír Záborský, who put the whole thing together. In the morning a few days earlier he said the team had voted: eight players were in favor of returning, and six were for immigration. So the decision rested on him, on how he would decide. If he had decided to stay, I am sure the other eight players would have stayed as well. Maybe some of them would have returned, because at that time it was really hard. As a person who wasn't even twenty-one years old yet, parents had to give supervision. That meant that if we stayed abroad, our parents would be arrested, and the whole family would be liquidated. The other ones who were older, like Konopásek, Roziňák, Trousílek, and the others, lived either alone or had their own families for they were just older than us twenty-year-old kids.

Were you for returning or for exile?

I was for returning, because I didn't want to get my parents into such trouble.

When you moved from *Domeček* to Pankrác, what did they sentence you for?

When we got to Pankrác I was in a cell with two other prisoners who were also waiting for their hearings. That wasn't a solitary cell. There were no more beatings or fear that they would come up with further accusations. For me, the worst was the investigation when they wanted to beat out a confession that I was giving messages to a Mr. Bowe. He was the boss of the American Embassy here in Prague who would give out the entrance visas to Germany; to all four zones, whether it was the American, British, French, or Russian zone. That was the man

Mr. Modrý introduced me to. He would come to hockey games, and he played golf. His wife played golf, and I really started a friendship with them. They used this as a pretense, that this Mr. Bowe would inform me, and that I, in turn, would give him other messages or information as to what was happening in the army. Yet, in my unit nothing was happening. We played hockey. When I would tell them this, they didn't want to believe it, and they still insisted upon a confession about the content of the messages I would give him. He was supposed to be the main initiator – a person who would persuade the whole team to immigrate, which wasn't true at all. I later found out that in twenty-four hours he had been deported out of the country because he was accused of espionage. So, when we arrived to Pankrác it was already a little different there. For me it was terrible what I was learning there. Other prisoners were giving me advice on how things go there, like when breakfast and lunch were brought. We would go for a walk once a day out on the square between the blocks of Pankrác prison for half an hour. A man could learn some things there and would be given advice from other prisoners. The worst was when they told me one early morning that something was about to happen. I actually showed up right before the execution of Milada Horáková⁹. Of course, the other prisoners had known those who were there for a couple weeks or months and had already learned the prison routine. The breakfast lasted longer than usual, so we watched out the windows onto the square to see whether something was happening, but Horáková was executed off in a corner. It was terrible for me to see that.

We also used to watch through a little half window that we tilted down. We were not allowed to do that, but a man could look into the reflection and see that square. The awful part was the view of people called *řetězáři* [chainers]. *Řetězáři* were the people who had tried to escape. There were also people called *provazáři* [ropers]. *Provazáři* were people on death row. The other prisoners, I don't remember their names, were counting them. They knew how many there were. When one all of a sudden went missing, they would say, "Oh well, so another one had been taken away, hung, or sentenced." These *provazáři* were normally down in the cellars – dungeons where they would await execution. *Řetězáři* were people who had escaped from labor camps who actually had leg-irons that chained them to the wall. That really existed. In that cell the prisoner couldn't move. He could just sit on a little chair and not do anything else. When he needed to defecate, he was to use a little bucket. When they would go on their daily walk, they had to hold their chains behind them because the leg-irons had protrusions, so they had to walk with their legs wide apart, otherwise they would trip and fall. I can tell you, that was a terrible sight for me, a twenty-year-old kid, to see that something like that existed.

What happened after that?

That's how I lived through that time until I had a court hearing in October. Before that they would call, come to meet us, and then continue calling us until we got two lawyers for representation. Roziňák and I had a man named Lindner, who was a really tough lawyer. When he read everything, all the papers, he said, "They can't sentence you for anything. You can just get something for the disturbance in the pub. Maybe you will get a year or two. They will sentence you and put you into a military prison. Yet, other paragraphs that are here like spy-

9 Dr. Milada Horáková (1901–1950) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

ing, high treason, disrupting the socialist state, they cannot prove because there is no proof, and it's all just fiction." Finally, there was a hearing. The first day we all thought that through all the contact with our families and our lawyers, our wives and kids would be in that big hall. Court was held in that huge hall, as Horáková and all those other cases had been. We thought that we would see our relatives somewhere, but when they dragged us through the corridors no one was there. We came to the reception hall and there was also no one waiting. The first one to be called in was Mr. Modrý, who testified for almost half a day. In the afternoon it was me. I was the next one. Our trial lasted for two days actually. We were very surprised that the court wasn't a civil court. There were twelve of us; six civilians and six soldiers. We learned from the papers that we didn't have a civilian court, but instead had a military court. They also labeled the process top secret so that people who had nothing to do with that case could not be present in that hall. Whether it was associate lawyers or the master of the court, we saw just one person that I remember really well. It was the communist editor, Václav Švadlena, who was writing for the newspaper *Rudé právo*¹⁰. He was the only one who had free access to this whole process.

What was your perception of the whole court process?

We thought it would be easy and we would be acquitted of those charges. When we saw that the head judge would be dealing with our charges we still thought we would get some leniency. The second day Bóža [Bohumil] Modrý and I were sitting there the whole day, and the others were testifying, Roziňák, Konopásek, Macelis, Jirka, Stock, Španinger, and the pub owner Ujčík, who got three years for not stopping the disturbance. When we were waiting for the final sentence, we were all standing.

What were the final verdicts?

We heard the speech of the judge as we were all acquitted from the death penalty, but we were each given sentences: Modrý, fifteen years; me, fourteen years; Konopásek, twelve years; Roziňák and Kobranov, both ten years. Then it was six years for Jirka, I think; three years for Červený; two for Macelis. Hainý got a year, and Španinger got nine months. The pub owner Ujčík got three years. All of a sudden we were standing there completely depressed because we were standing up against something that couldn't be recalled. Of course after we consulted with our lawyers the five of us who were given the harshest sentences for high treason and spying immediately appealed to the Supreme Court¹¹. The five of us who had fifteen, fourteen, twelve, and ten years appealed to the Supreme Court. We were put back into our cells, and I remember such a funny story. When I came back to the cell, two of my cellmates were already both sentenced. One of them had twenty years, and the other had maybe eighteen years, so we came and they asked, "So how much did you get?" and I said, "Fourteen". "Man that's nothing, you'll sit that on a razor blade," they said. I answered, "What? On a razor blade? Fourteen years on a razor blade – that's not possible." They said, "That's how it's said here, when a person isn't hanged and he can walk away from the sentence and go on living."

¹⁰ *Rudé právo* – see the list of key words at the end of the book.

¹¹ **Supreme Court of the Czechoslovak Republic** – the highest court, which makes final decisions and against which there were no further appeals possible in communist Czechoslovakia.

What happened next after the court verdict?

We were waiting for a long time in the court department, and then sometime in October or November they chased us out and loaded us onto a bus. The whole escort was maybe around thirty people. We were together, and I remember I was tied to the arm of big Červený, our goalie. They put us on the bus. The bus was surrounded by police cars. We left without knowing where we were going – whether it was a prison or a camp. Our cellmates had informed us that you can either go to another prison or a camp. All of a sudden we appeared at the prison Bory¹². When we arrived there it was just terrible. During the welcome “ceremony” as we were walking in the corridors to the main square ... I think it was B corridor ... a big fiasco started. There was a guard who started yelling at us and calling us names. Some prisoners were even making fun of them, and Červený [Zlatomír, here also mentioned as Zlatka] was also making fun of them; he was quite a joker. They hit us with nightsticks there, and we had to line up; it was Trepka¹³ or Brabec¹⁴ and the other guards making us do that. During that terrible ordeal we had to take our clothes off in exchange for a sack in which we found prison clothes and other items. The fun was; for example, I had pants up to my neck until they took them away from me and switched them with someone else. They put us in those stripes, and after a little while someone else took us away. By the way, right after we got there, they took us upstairs into a room and took a picture of each of us. First they took our pictures in civilian clothes, and then I got my prison number. After that they took us downstairs, and barbers came and shaved us bald.

During everything, very funny stories were made up. I remember that when they were giving us the stripes, Červený, who was a big joker, was asking, “Who sewed your clothes? They don’t even sell such a suit at Bárta’s shop.” That was the most popular tailor on Na Příkopě Street [central shopping street in Prague] where the rich people had their clothes made. Of course he was hit in a second and punished. Another funny thing was when they shaved our heads. On my head I had a big laceration, and you could see a scar. So Zlatka didn’t forget to make another joke: “Well, your head is sewed up together nicely. Everyone will like you,” and he was smacked. The guards were slapping us here and there. So they took our pictures in civilian clothes, dressed us up, and took our pictures in stripes. I have all these pictures, and when I look at them I have to laugh. Then they put us into the dungeons where we were either in solitary cells or in pairs. There, real prison life started, and we had to conform to everything. When a guard kicked your door and demanded something, you had to do it.

What was your first experience with forced labor like?

Every morning they always threw a bag of dirty goose feathers into our cell. After that, another bag; we were in pairs. We had to strip the feathers; we had to learn to tear off the quill from the little feather and put this into a special bag. The rate of output was very high, and so was the bad smell from the feathers they brought. We had to strip all the stuff they brought.

12 **Plzeň-Bory prison** – a prison situated in the western region of Bohemia. Under communism it was one of the strictest prisons primarily delegated for political prisoners.

13 **Václav Trepka** (1919–?) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

14 **Václav Brabec** (1920–?) – a Chief of Disciplinary Department in Plzeň-Bory prison. He worked as a worker during the WWII. And was imprisoned for his illegal activity in 1943. He joined the Corps of Prison Guards in 1947 and worked in Plzeň-Bory prison. He became Chief of the Disciplinary Department (correction) in 1950 and revoked from his duty for alcoholism in 1952. He was known for his brutality towards prisoners.

I don't remember exactly, but at one time it was about 33 dkg [7.3 pounds], and then they increased it to 60 dkg [13.2 pounds]. A man from Bory described that in a book of memoirs.

If you didn't do it, then you didn't get food. Work over there was really hard for people who had never done it before in their lives, or whose fingers were numb and couldn't work. Some of us were working and got so good at it that we were able to help a cellmate. When I saw I had about 60 dkg done and the guards hadn't come to collect it yet, I would quickly help my cellmate. They always took it away and never weighed it in front of you. So you didn't really know whether you met the quota or not. You didn't have a clue whether you would get a quarter of bread or soup or just some peas and barley or something else that they served. One simply didn't know and depended on the mercy or disfavor of the guards – whether they would admit it or not and whether they would feed you or not. Although it was a cruel time over there, and we lived through hard days and months, there came a day when they took us out of the dungeons and moved us from B block to another department. I think it was D.

How did it look like over there?

There were bigger cells – five of them, with ten pallets that were called beds. As we found out later, this department was called *Kremlin*¹⁵, and there were about fifty prisoners, or ten people in each cell. There were a couple of cutters; that means a couple of iron bars. For each of these bars, a different guard had a key. So one guard couldn't get through it alone; there always had to be two or three of them.

In that dim light there were people who we could call “the best of the Czech nation” – not only generals, but also politicians, priests, and officers of the Eastern and Western armies; the pilots who made up a British squadron; and the majors of Brno, Lenora¹⁶ and other towns where they were taking people across the border. Among these ten people, life was different and specific in certain ways. Before that you were just with one person and didn't get to see the others unless it was during the compulsory walks. We went to walk between the houses because the prison in Bory was built in the shape of a star, so I could see that there were others walking there too, possibly a friend or just a familiar face. We also went to have a shower once a week, and that was it. When we got to the new department, to the *Kremlin*, it had changed; there was a different way of living. We would get food; there was a corridor of servicemen who would bring us food. Breakfast in the morning was a quarter of bread and coffee, and then lunch was served in a tin cup.

Do you have any positive memories from this time?

I later recognized that I was in a completely different prison system in the *Kremlin*. As a young boy who didn't have a clue what was happening around the world, I learned a lot there. It was my first university. The people opened my eyes. The former General Chief of Staff would tell us about the Western Front. Pravomil Raichl¹⁷, who was my cellmate and something of a mentor,

15 *Kremlin* – the Kremlin here ironically refers to a historic fortified complex in the heart of Moscow which serves as the official residence of the President of Russia.

16 *Lenora* – a small town by Prachatice, Southern Bohemia.

17 **Pravomil Raichl** (1921–2002) – an army officer who fled from occupied Czechoslovakia to the USSR in 1939, where he was arrested and sent to Gulag camps. He was released thanks to entering the Czechoslovak exile army battalion in the USSR where he fought at the Dukla battles, got multiple battle wounds, and arrived back to Czechoslovakia in 1945 as Lieutenant. He was sentenced to death in 1948 (later changed for life imprisonment), but managed to escape from Leopoldov (Slovakia) in early 1952 and successfully fled through Czechoslovakia and East Germany to West Germany and then the United States.

kept telling me about Russia. How he escaped from a Gulag¹⁸ where there was so much starvation that when someone died, others ate his body...when I heard this, my eyes were popping out of my head. Priests talked about what was done to them before the court. I was there together with one General Paleček, the Head of the Paratroopers on the Western Front who was sentenced to life imprisonment. There were a lot of generals and also Mr. Podsedník, a Mayor of Brno who was sentenced because he was a National Socialist¹⁹. Next there was Červenka, a Mayor of Lenora in the Šumava district, who had stories about helping and leading people and big shots over the borders to Germany. There was also a member of the People's Party, Mr. Herold, who told us what had happened in Parliament after 1945: how they had arguments and then would go to drink together, no matter which party they were from. I was gaining knowledge there, and they taught me everything – and in these cells we worked, too. We couldn't go out to work, although those who had lower sentences could leave the prison and go to workshops. We were not allowed to go out, but they brought us various projects to work on, whether there were flags we had to glue on wooden sticks or snap fasteners brought from Koh-i-Noor²⁰. There was a quota for everything. We would also clean silverware, which they stole from different chateaus and castles and brought to us in a decrepit state. We had to clean each piece with ammonia and a white chalk until it was nice and shiny. They even gave us sewing machines, and we had to learn how to sew cables from cloth or leather. We worked with leather a lot there. We were making straps and parts for textile machines working with hemp; we had to bead rolls. Everything was subject to a quota and everyone had to fulfill the quota as getting food depended on it. So there were ten people who were already a group that would quickly work as a team. The most beautiful thing was on Saturday afternoons...I can no longer remember if it was at three or five o'clock... but they locked down all the bars, and we knew that nothing would happen and no one would be dragged through an inspection until Monday morning. Always on Saturday or Sunday afternoon, one person from each cell would have homework to prepare a seminar topic he wanted to talk about. It was a little university there but big training for a man. We were still waiting for the final word from the Supreme Court. We were still living with high hopes that the punishment would be reduced and that we might get only a year or two instead of fourteen years. So there was hope living in each of us that we would be released from prison.

When did it come, the result from the Supreme Court?

It was terrible that it was autumn and we were still in these dungeons, the five of us who appealed were still sitting in the *Kremlin*. In each dungeon there was one of us; Bóža Modrý, Kobranov, Roziňák, Konopásek, and me. We all went through that. It was close to the ice rink in Plzeň, so we heard each goal. They were playing hockey there, and we were in the *Kremlin*, sentenced to so many years. From that point of view, it was horrible to find out that it's the end of your sports career. I was just twenty, and I thought I would have to spend fourteen years

18 **Gulag** – was the government agency that administered the main Soviet forced labor camp systems during the Stalin era, from the 1930s until the 1950s. The first such camps were created in 1918 and the term is widely used to describe any forced labor camp in the USSR. The word gulag (as well as concentration camp) is used in the narratives of the Czechoslovak political prisoners to describe the types of camps they went through in the 1950s.

19 Mr. Bubník means Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. Do not confuse with NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party).

20 **Koh-i-Noor Hardmuth Inc.** – a Czech producer of writing and stationary products.

there. I would come out at age thirty-four and only be able to go and dig potatoes and not play hockey.

When did the statement finally arrive?

That hope was still living in us when all of a sudden they announced that the appellate court would be on December 22, 1950. So, we were waiting to see what would happen. They came for us, and, dressed in prison clothes, they put us in an *anton*²¹. In front of us and behind us there were cars with machine guns, and we were still hoping that at least at this court we would see our parents and our children.

You hadn't seen them until that time?

We hadn't seen anyone at all, absolutely not. They took us to that court again and I remember it as though it had happened earlier today. The chairman of the court was Dr. Kruk. Then they called us in. All five of us were standing there. First, a plaintiff spoke, and then our lawyers were speaking and pointing out the facts – that nothing had been proven. They were insisting that there was reasonable suspicion, but they had no proof, and therefore there was nothing that they could sentence us for. Our lawyers were telling us that, and we still believed it. But the prosecutor was a real bastard. He kept reading various protocols, even a statement from a woman who was a caretaker of a house we were living in where my father had a shop, a butcher's shop in Podbaba²². My father had looked after this caretaker throughout the whole war; he gave her things to help her out. Because she was a secret communist confidante, this lady wrote that I was the last root of a Golden Prague Youth and must be cut off. I rolled my eyes when I heard what people from my building had written about me, what people who knew me and knew that I was a famous person had written about me. So the plaintiff put the worst on us again, regardless of proof or confirmation from the court that our high sentences would stand, but we still hoped. I remember how Dr. Kruk looked as though it was today, how his hands were shaking, sweat running down, and he was completely flabbergasted. This guy was certainly doing something that was against his will. His voice was shaking when he stated that all of the sentences were upheld by the Supreme Court.

What ran through your head at that moment?

I remember that even at that moment, even Modrý, who still continued to play the hero, said, "Well guys, the cage door just closed, and we're inside. No one will help us now." The Supreme Court confirmed the sentences of the State Court²³, and we knew that we couldn't do anything except live through that time or wait for a Presidential pardon or else to be released on a two-thirds or one-half punishment for good behavior and satisfactory work. All prisoners fooled themselves into thinking that they wouldn't be there for their whole sentence and that they would get out earlier. That also happened later, when I got put in camps in the Jáchymov area or the Příbram area. In every prisoner there was a little light of hope that their day of freedom would pop up. There would have to be a rebellion or a war, and then we all would be released,

21 *Anton* – see the list of key words at the end of the book.

22 *Podbaba* – a local name for a Prague-Dejvice neighbourhood.

23 **The State Court** – a court established in 1948 as a main court for sentencing people for their anti-communist activities. It was dismissed in 1952.

or else we would be released on a condition reversed by the court or something similar. When we got back from the Supreme Court on the December 22, just two days before Christmas Day, I remember that our parents, sisters, and fellows' children were there in front of Pankrác Hall, and none of them had been let in during the process.

Did you have a chance to see any of your relatives during this time before the final court decision?

No, but I have a little memory in my head from when we were travelling to Prague. They took us in an *anton* police van all tied up together to the rail station in Plzeň. A wagon was there with a section reserved for us and surrounded by police so no one could enter. This was how we went to Prague, and when we got to the main Prague station, the train stopped on the first platform. They took us out from the wagon to a special government room, which still exists, and from there waited for another *anton* to take us to Pankrác. This car backed up right to the entrance, and we went from the room to the car and then straight to Pankrác. Of course we went straight in so that no one could see us. While we were sitting in the government salon, we were allowed to speak even though there were State Secret Police around. We looked at each other and said, "So guys, can you remember this? One year ago, another train took us to the first platform. The government welcomed us. Zápotocký²⁴, all the ministers, and all of Prague were at our feet, and today they took us to the same salon." I remember that so well, but I can't remember who said it. So we thought that not even a year later, we were something completely different for the nation. We returned the same way, to the salon, from the salon, to the train, by train back to Plzen, then into the same *anton* and back to Bory. We got back to the dungeons and continued to work as I've already described.

How did the daily routine of a political prisoner look like in a prison?

I was lucky; out of the fifty people who were transported there, I was the youngest one. Right at the time, one of the prisoners who was on hall duty left, so Commander Trepka had me do that job in his place. I didn't really know what the position was, but they took me out, and I found out that my boss was Army General Paleček, one of the greatest war heroes. He was a really good man who taught me all about the duties of prison. All of a sudden I was serving food, pouring soup, and together we were putting food onto tin plates and putting them into the little windows where the prisoners would take them from us. This way I knew about everything that was happening there. Paleček taught me various tricks, for example how to take *moták*²⁵ from one dungeon to another. When we were pouring out the piss and shit, disinfecting the bucket, and putting it back into the cell, guards were usually away so we could put in a piece of paper which had a message. When soup was poured in, and if I was holding a *moták*, I blinked my eye and dropped it in for the one I was giving it to. Then he knew he had a message. That was amazing for me. I was also being sent to pick food from Central, so I witnessed the daily life of prison. That was nice, and I can tell you at that time I cheered up a little, even though I had fourteen years without knowing how my life would go on.

24 **Antonín Zápotocký** (1884–1957) – the president of Czechoslovakia at that time (1948–1953 Czechoslovak Prime Minister and 1953–1957 fifth Czechoslovak President).

25 **Moták** – see the list of key words at the end of the book.

How did you get to Jáchymov²⁶?

I can't tell you exactly when it was, but it happened within a year, sometime in 1951. Suddenly they started transporting us, probably canceling *Kremlin*, because some prisoners were taken to Leopoldov²⁷. Others went somewhere else, and some of us were taken to Jáchymov. We came to Vykmanov by Ostrov upon Ohře, where there was the main gathering camp, and from there they divided us into different camps. In a short amount of time I was right next to this camp. This camp was called L and also a camp of death. This was where the uranium ore was broken down, split up, put into barrels, and sent to Russia. That was really a death camp. Whoever was there for a long time had really bad health problems from the dust and radiation. Some people didn't even stay there for a month, and some people stayed two or three months, some a half year, and some had health problems for the rest of their lives because of blood decay, muscle decay, or bone decay and so on. That was the worst camp. I was there for a short time, maybe a week or two weeks, and I didn't get to the crushing department. I was doing just helping around. Then another transport came and they took me up to Jáchymov, and there I went through many different camps. One of the worst one was called Nikolaj, up above Jáchymov. There were German retribution prisoners who had been sentenced in 1945. There was always a Commander and a main camp functionary [a prisoner]. Together they organized a sort of little trip, either at night or during the day. They went into our blocks. They chased everyone outside, where people had to stand in the frost sometimes; meanwhile, in the cells the guards made a huge mess. If we had food in the lockers, they stepped on it and threw it out. That was just a nightmare.

Which camps were you kept at?

If I remember well, the first camp was Nikolaj; then I went to Twelve; from there to Prokop; from there to Ležnice; from Ležnice back to Ten, and then back to Twelve. I returned there because they thought I might be in danger of running away. Once I worked with a group that later tried to escape. I was even considered a "runaway" for a short time, because at one point I was transporting stone on small wagons from mining holes to the lift that took the stone up. One Sunday, this group didn't take me on the shift, and in the evening they tried to escape. I can tell that this was my holy luck, or maybe my bad luck, because I couldn't participate. For a long time they had agreed that they would try to escape, and one guard even helped them. The worst was that they were caught and shot. When they brought them back to camp, they just threw them into the camp like they were nothing, and everyone had to walk around them. A warning to anyone who had their head down or made a cross. If you did, you were hit right away and almost knocked out. It was something horrible to see my friends shot dead. It was almost the whole of Kukul's group that tried to escape. I worked with them a couple of shifts, and from this camp they took me to Ruzyně²⁸. I can tell you that at Ruzyně I went through something similar to the *Domeček*. They wanted to shake or beat it out of me that I knew about the escape but didn't want to tell the State Secret Police. I knew a little bit, but I didn't

26 **Jáchymov** – originally a spa town close to Karlovy Vary, near the Czechoslovak border with Germany. Penal labor camps for prisoners were often laboring in or near uranium mines surrounding Jáchymov; political prisoners tend to call these penal labor camps "concentration" camps. Historians rather prefer "penal labor camps," since "concentration camp" is a term connected mainly with the victims of Nazi camps.

27 **Leopoldov** – prison in Slovakia.

28 **Ruzyně** – see the list of key words at the end of the book.

have a clue that the group had been decided for a long time. Kukul wrote a book²⁹ later about the escape. When I met him, he signed the book and wrote me a message in it, "We escaped without you, thank God!" They actually escaped without me and saved my life this way, because if I had gone with them they probably would have shot me like the others. So, then I was at Ruzyně in Prague.

What memories do you have of the prison in Prague – Ruzyně?

I was in Ruzyně for about a half year, and they still tried to get what I knew about the escape out of me. Again, they tried to trap me. It was at my lowest point, and I didn't think I was going to get out from the bottom. Once I even heard The Internationale³⁰ being sung down in the dungeon. There were people yelling and singing The Internationale song, and the guards were beating them. I heard them weeping ... and it was Slánský and company³¹. Down there in the dungeons was Slánský's entire group who were eventually sentenced to death.

They assigned a priest to me, and I didn't know whether he was a real priest, but he continued to insist he was. They knew psychologically I was doing really badly. The priest wanted me to write a *moták* to my parents so that they would have news of me. There were a couple of months where no one knew anything about me; where I was, if I was living, or if they already shot me. The priest made me write a *moták*, especially to my sister who still worked in the office of Martin Bowe. Again they wanted to prove that I was connected to this office even though Mr. Bowe wasn't there anymore and someone else had taken over. The priest kept saying that he had good connections through one of the guards and that they would give it to my sister. So, I wrote a little message on a piece of paper that he gave me, but I did it very carefully. I told them to say hello to uncle this-and-that even though the uncle had been dead for a while. I believed she would understand that the letter wasn't a true one. Later I found out that this priest was an imposter for sure and a confidante of the State Secret Police and was assigned to me to trap me. When he gave the message to my sister out in the street, they arrested her and wanted to make her work for the State Secret Police. Anyway, she didn't really have time to read what was on the *moták*, and they released her after about three days. She continued to work at the office for some time. So they were trying to pull such tricks on me, because they were trying to get me in trouble and get me extra years in prison. When they caught someone during an attempted escape or being connected with civilians, they held a new court hearing and they gave you five extra years. So I kind of saved myself this way, because it was revealed that everything that I wrote on the *moták* was false.

From Ruzyně you returned to Jáchymov?

Of course. They took me back to pit number twelve, but only for a short time. I was unlucky in that my clothes were marked. We had pants, and on those pants were white stripes. Who-

29 KUKAL, Karel. *Deset křížů [Ten Crosses]*. Rychnov nad Kněžnou, 2003.

30 **The Internationale** – is a widely-sung left-wing anthem. It has been one of the most recognizable and popular songs of the socialist movement since the late 19th century, when the Second International (now the Socialist International) adopted it as its official anthem.

31 **Slánský Trials** – political processes launched against all strata of Czechoslovak society, including the prominent representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. From 1950 onwards, the State Secret Police concentrated on "searching for the enemy, even among its own." The leading investigated communist was Rudolf Slánský, the General Secretary of the Communist Party. He was accused of espionage, high-treason, and sabotage, which he confirmed after torture. He was hanged along with ten other Party officials on December 3, 1952, in Pankrác prison.

ever had one stripe was all right, but two meant that they were a dangerous person whom the guards kept a special eye on. I had an extra circle on my back as a symbol that indicated I was not allowed to stop. This also meant that I was a dangerous person who gathered others and organized them into a group. So for the whole time I was working in the Jáchymov camps, whenever there were Christmas, May Day celebrations, or whatever different holidays, they put me in correction as soon as I got out from the pit, wet and dirty. Correction was separate housing that was a part of the camp, a dungeon really, and that was where I would spend my holidays. I couldn't move around the camp because in a moment my friends came up to me, and quickly we became a group of two or three, and a siren started to wail, indicating we were not allowed to get together. They still expected that we were getting ready to escape. I was labeled like this until the end of my stay in the labor camps.

Do you remember the prison number you had in Jáchymov?

I even have them written down. My first number was 1257, but then for others I would have to look into the letters my parents were writing to me. They always had to write my prison number and Bory or Karlovy Vary. So I had about three or four different numbers, but my first number was 1257.

Did you ever come across homosexuality in the camps?

No, never. At these camps there was something different. There were groups of people who were interested in culture, theater, and who learned languages. We mainly focused on sports. We got together with friends from Brno, Ostrava, and Slovakia. Volleyball was played there – of course, only when the work was finished and the staff of the camp let us. We also played football, a match of Bohemia versus Moravia, and that was always a big event, because many people came to watch. Right before I was released they even let us build a small ice rink at Camp Bytíz where we could play ice-hockey. Bytíz was my preferred camp, and I spent almost two years there. I even remember finding a letter which I had written to my parents to send me ice skates, and we also smuggled in pieces of wood to create barriers for the rink. That was in 1955, and right after that I was released so I “unfortunately” didn't play hockey in the prison camp.

Could you summarize what comes to mind when you hear the name Jáchymov?

A huge amount of suffering for the best people of Czechoslovakia, people who followed their convictions and beliefs, took place here. They were people who knew what communism was and fought against it. I think that Jáchymov was the suffering of a nation that can never be forgotten.

Mr. Bubník, I think this was very comprehensive and thank you very much for the series of recordings we have done together.

I am really happy I can talk about it like this, because out of our group of twelve there is only Mr. Konopásek, who doesn't really remember the stories anymore, and me left. Thank God “Uncle Alzheimer”, who I keep chasing away, hasn't visited me yet.

“Find your goal in life and go and get it until the very Last breath.”



Zdeněk Kovařík was born on February 24, 1931, in Hradec Králové. He had three siblings, and his father worked as bus driver. He belongs to the youngest survivors of the communist persecution. In 1950, he was imprisoned as a student of the College of Industry in Pardubice at the age of eighteen. He was an active Scout sympathizing with National Socialists who opposed the communists. Within his Scout group he distributed anti-communist leaflets and attacked a local unit of the Communist Party. He was accused of high treason in a show trial called “Group JU1” and sentenced to nine years of prison. He had to work in the uranium labor camps in Jáchymov until 1955 when he was pardoned. He spent two and half years in the labor Camp L, also called liquidation camp, and two years in the labor camp Nikolaj. He is an active member of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic and is currently living in Pardubice.

Interview with Mr. Zdeněk Kovařík

Interviewer: Tomáš Bouška

At the beginning of our interview I would like to ask you about your childhood.

I was born in 1931 in Hradec Králové¹, where I lived for practically my entire life. There were four of us kids, and I was the oldest, while my youngest brother was eight years younger. As for my youth, I can say that I had really wonderful parents and a great childhood. Like I said, I had three siblings, and we all had some duties since my parents didn't really have it that easy. My father was a laborer who worked as a city bus driver in Hradec Králové. He had to work hard to feed four children. Fortunately, I had a good advantage because I was quite independent but still didn't act out against my parents. I was also – well, I don't want to praise myself, but I was quite hard working, which allowed me plenty of time for hobbies and fun.

Can you remember the 1938 mobilization or the beginning of the war?

After the German invasion I could already remember such moments as when my father got home from two mobilizations – one in June and another in September 1938². He came, and he was angry and sorry at the same time, not knowing whether he should cry or take a shotgun and return to the borders to start shooting someone there. That was something like our first introduction to what it's like to find out that you are helpless. I started to understand that a person should never give up easily and that one always has something to fight for. At that time, already in 1939, I wanted to join Scouts³. Unfortunately, after the Germans arrived, Scouting was prohibited, so it only remained a wish inspired by my friendships with those who used to go to Scouts. We were really lucky that we were such a nice group of boys. During the war the Gestapo locked up one whole family in a house in Hradec. Since they did this during the night, we only found out what they had done with the people later on. Then it became something like an inner resistance to things happening around us. Next door to us lived Karel Kodeš, who was a couple years older than me—he was probably eighteen at that time. Later he immigrated, and after the war had ended, I found out that he had become a member of a flying squadron but had been shot down over the Bay of Biscay. These are the kind of memories that have always motivated me through hard times, and when I think of them they inspire me to do something.

1 **Hradec Králové** – town, a county seat in northeastern Bohemia.

2 In May 1938, Czechoslovak military intelligence became aware that the German army was moving in towards Saxony and Silesia along the Czechoslovakian border in imminent preparations for an attack. In response, President Beneš partially mobilized troops. Meanwhile, Hitler was holding negotiations with Chamberlain about the fate of Czechoslovakia. Without the consent or consultation of Beneš, the British and French governments agreed to appease Nazi demands, reaching a decision on September 21, 1938. The Czechoslovakian government issued a decree of general mobilization two days later. By September 28, 1938, the signing of the Munich Agreement ended this attempt at resistance.

3 **Scouting** or the **Scout Movement** – is a movement that aims to support in their physical, mental and spiritual development, that they may play constructive roles in society, with a strong focus on the outdoors and survival skills. Although established in 1911, the Scouting had been prohibited by the Nazis and communists. Many Scouts, alumni, and Troop Leaders were punished or even killed for their acts of civil disobedience.

What was life like after the War?

Right after the important days of May 1945, I quickly joined the Scouts. I joined a good group again, which was led by a couple of young Scouts. The whole group was called “War Twins”. Later on, these guys got state honors for their Anti-German occupation activities. One of them was even shot during their partisan activity. His name was Karel Šimek, and he died tragically in 1945 when he was shot by Germans while cutting the telephone connection from Hradec to the airport. So these older Scouts who had such incredible experiences during the war were teaching us how to do these things. It was kind of enlightening to learn that you can always do something to affect what is happening around you. It was these Scouting activities which finally led to me being put in prison, but this is a different topic.

Were you lucky enough to finish school after WWII?

Directly after the war I started an apprenticeship and trained to become a telephone mechanic. Right in 1950 I began going to school and started at the College of Industry in Pardubice⁴. One month after that I was arrested, so I was locked up as a student—with only a high school education.

What did you think about 1948? How did you accept the change of a regime?

It was tragic because I leaned toward the National Socialists⁵. At school we had a really great teacher who was introducing us to quite a few different political ideas. I didn’t like some things that the communists were doing at all, and I had a really big aversion towards them. I remember how we were searching for a campsite in 1946 when the elections⁶ were being held. I remember how the communists prepared the figures and hung them on the square in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem – and how they marked them with the voting numbers of the National Socialists and the People’s Party. They made eight or ten gallows, and there they hung these figures, which meant that they were basically burning effigies of these political candidates. So a normal person could not agree with this stuff. It goes without saying that when we were establishing a Confederation of Political Prisoners⁷ in the 1990’s we were receiving similar letters. Of course, I mean threats.

What was your incarceration like, and what were you actually arrested for?

The reason I was arrested was something I found out much later. As a part of the Scout troop we wrote threatening letters to, and once even destroyed, the Propaganda Office of the Communist Party in Hradec Králové. We hid a small bomb there and then detonated it. It broke the door, the shopping window, and all the posters hanging there. No one was injured, nothing was burned, but it was the night before May 1, 1950. It was a demonstration against what was happening here.

4 **Pardubice** – a town approximately 26 kilometers to the south of Hradec Králové.

5 Mr. Kovařík means Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. Do not confuse with the German NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party).

6 **1946 Parliamentary Elections** – the first Post- WWII – elections which were won by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

7 **The Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic (KPV ČR)** – see the list of the key words at the end of the book.

So what exactly did your arrest look like?

I came home from school, and the same day I was supposed to say goodbye to a close friend who was about to join the army. We participated in sports together and from 1948 participated in regional, county, and national tournaments three times in what was called Zborov's Race. From the regional we moved on to the national championship. Zborov's Race had various army disciplines, including sprinting, swimming, and others. One of our friends was entering the army to join the paratroopers.

On September 29, 1950, I came home from school in Pardubice. About 7 p.m., a guy came up to me and said, "I need to talk to you. We are interested in some things." I lived in Slezské, a suburb in the outskirts of Pardubice, and there was a small park about a hundred meters from our house. He told me we would meet over there even though I had absolutely no knowledge about what was going on. He told me, "I am from school, and I will need some parts for radios and those sorts of things." I just replied that I don't do things like that. I still didn't have a clue about what was going on, so when he saw that he wouldn't get anything out of me, he gave a sign and all of a sudden there were some fifteen men before me saying, "We are arresting you. We are arresting you," and that was it. Then they came home with me and searched my house. My parents were frightened, as were my three siblings. By 11 p.m. they had transported me to the prison in Hradec Králové, not saying a word to my parents, just mentioning that they would ask me a few questions and that I would return the next day. I came back after five years.

What exactly were they looking for during the house search?

They were searching for anything. I was just working on a radio. I wanted to make a radio connected to an LP player because such stuff was not available on the market, but they thought it was the construction of a radio transmitter. I sympathized with Americans, and in 1946 I received a bulletin from the American Embassy. It wasn't anything politically against communism – just a bulletin distributed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But this was also evidence and so we [the Scouts group] were sentenced for Americanism. They searched for anything that they could use to sentence us. At 11 o'clock they transported me to the prison and there I waited for three days without knowing what was going on. They wrote some papers about me and then let me be for three days.

After three days they blindfolded my eyes and took me to the Ulrichovo Square, where the offices of the State Secret Police were. That was my first hearing, and it lasted from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. They were still trying to convince me to tell them something, but I kept saying, "I don't know anything. I don't know about anything." I wasn't admitting anything so they ended the hearing at night before taking me back to the jail. On the second and third days it looked the same, and on the third day they just told me, "Hey, don't be ridiculous—here are the reports. We locked up the others, and they've already told us everything that you were doing."

Did you know the people that were written up in the reports that they showed you?

I knew them because we did one silly thing—we agreed on establishing an official Scouts troop. Unfortunately, another guy, Zbyněk Škaloud who wanted to escape across the border in 1949 joined our group as well. They caught him and punished him with a half year of imprisonment for attempting to cross the border. He was showing off that he had friends he could write

to who could come and get him out of prison. He was already somewhere by Jáchymov – in Vykmanov on Camp C. He probably told this to someone who was already cooperating with the State Secret Police. This person had to have given them our names and so they came and arrested us all. This was after the bombing of the communist's building. That was the biggest thing we did, and the policemen called it Noisemaker. They had been wondering who had done that for about a year and half before this “good boy” told them.

What happened when they brought your colleagues' reports and showed you?

I read the reports to find out that my accomplice Ctirad Andráš was also named and another compliant Lubka Škaloud, as well. I thought to myself, 'Oh, good. There are three of us.' They practically threw out the things that were no longer deniable. So I just told them I agreed, signed it, and that was the end. But then they weren't okay with it, and they called me back in two weeks later. These interrogations took place in a prison in Hradec [Králové]. My cell there was only a short distance from the interrogation room. It was about ten meters away, so I could hear all the interrogations taking place. At night there was either some sort of crying or beating. It wasn't anything nice at night when, all of a sudden, you hear some horrible screaming. First there would be some investigators yelling, and then there was the prisoner crying because they were beating him.

This is where they brought me and told me that I hadn't told them everything. I denied that and I said that I had. So they turned me to the wall, and I had to squat and hold my arms out straight. On my arms they put a ruler, and I looked in front of me and on the wall I saw dried blood. So I thought to myself, 'Well this is where all the fun ends. This is where it gets tough.' I repeated this to myself about three times. Sometimes they hit me over my arms with that ruler with the strengthened side, but they didn't get anything else out of me. So they let me be, and all of sudden in January after the New Year they called me up for more investigations again. There they told me again, "You didn't tell us everything." Everything was again the same. Later we found out that Zbyněk Škaloud started to make things up and let his fantasy get out of hand and started to give them names. I don't know whether he wanted to please them or what. That meant that he helped get others arrested, including Květa Pilmanová, who was a friend of ours, Radek Brož, Karel Havránek, Jirka Pašta, and Bohouš Marek.

Do you know whether he did it on purpose or by mistake?

I really think he did it on purpose. Later I found out that he was a real covert. He liked to show off and, because he talked too much, he practically got eight other people arrested.

How did you make it through your trial? Did you have a clue that you could get such a high sentence?

On March 14 and 15, 1951, we stood in front of the court. It was a monstrous trial. It was a public proceeding where they invited all the young students from the schools and the factories. It was held in a court hall in Hradec [Králové], and we were accused of being a frightening danger to society. They were judging us for being Scouts, because even though Scouting was prohibited, we had continued to do it. The outcome was decided right at the beginning since they were accusing us of high treason, espionage, and I don't know what else; about six of the charges were very serious. They called us Group JU1, and I don't know why it was

JU, but maybe from Junák Group and the first one. There were nine of us. Lubka Škaloud got the highest sentence – fourteen years. Then there was Zbyněk Škaloud who got twelve years. I got the third highest sentence at eleven years. Then behind in a row was Ctirad Andrýs and all these people who are dead now: Ctirad Andrýs, ten years; Radek Brož, nine years; Bohouš Marek, seven years; Pašta, seven years; Havránek, four years; and Květa Pilmanová, who had her eighteenth birthday on the day of trial, got one year.

Were your parents present?

My parents were there. There was my mother, my father, and even my girlfriend who I was dating at the time. This young lady waited for me until my release, and we have live together up until today.

What happened after your trial?

After the trial things happened very quickly because we stayed in Hradec [Králové] for a couple of days before being transferred to the court prison Pankrác in Prague. After that we went to Jáchymov, where I arrived sometime around March 25. That means that about ten days after my trial I was already at the Jáchymov labor camp Bratrství [Brotherhood], which was the head camp at that time. We stayed there that night, and then they took us away again. Three of our group went to Camp L⁸, where the uranium ore⁹ was being processed. There we were given prisoners' clothes. The majority of people working over there were young. It wasn't very easy work – it was really hard, and not very good for your health.

What kind of job was it and what was your daily routine like?

It was at a so-called uranium ore processing plant called OTK. This workplace was located in Horní Ždár in a village called Vykmanov. Right next to that there was one old camp called C, and we were at the new camp, which was L. It was also called the liquidation labor camp, which was quite an accurate name. When I came in March 1951 there was only one building standing there... well actually two buildings; one was for accommodation of priests, and the other was for the other prisoners. There was a kitchen, canteen, infirmary, doctor's office, and other equipment that was necessary at every camp like this. What was interesting was that there were no showers. If we didn't ask for a shower at the workplace, which was right next to it, then we practically didn't have a place to shower. In spite of these bad conditions, we were still able to maintain our hygiene and keep ourselves clean so that we could live through all this.

A little later, in the fall of 1951, another building was erected since the whole labor camp had grown larger. They started taking all the uranium ore from all the other mines across Czechoslovakia at that time. We had to construct this other building during the afternoons—meaning after our morning shifts—as an unpaid job. Of course we didn't get anything for it—rather, it was an infringement on our free time. The number of occupants had increased from 150 to 300. The materials that we mined were taken to Russia to the place called Čierna pri Čope.

8 **Camp L** – also called liquidation camp. Camp L included the infamous *Red Tower of Death* where prisoners came into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

9 By uranium ore we mean pitchblende mined in the Jáchymov district for the scientific and military purposes of former USSR.

There was a train called *Věrtuška* which was entirely filled up. When we came there in 1951 there were only two trains leaving per month. After the production increased there were trains leaving every week. By the time that I left in 1953 there would be one train every two or three days. One fully loaded train contained somewhere between twenty-five and thirty wagons, each weighting twenty-five and thirty tons each. There was a lot of material. This was highly refined ore. I bring this up because there were two kinds of material. One was heavily radioactive and was being processed on grinders in the place we called the *Red Tower of Death*¹⁰. Then there was the second sort of material, which was of a lower quality, and this was freely transported, loaded, and enclosed in wagons which were originally intended for cattle transport. It all was a heavily-guarded commodity and would always have an escort. In the front and back part of the train there was an armored escort, and there would be about eight people in each who would guard the train through the whole country.

What exactly did you do?

Actually, I went through all of the positions, not counting those where they were working on chemical samples. I would also unload material from the trucks, because at that time the trucks didn't have hydraulic lifts, which meant that everything had to be loaded and unloaded manually. The minimum we had to unload was four trucks, but I also had to load up twelve trailers, and these held one ton of material each. This wasn't any fun, and I would always thank God that I was young enough to survive all this. This was the outside workplace. There was a second workplace where we worked on the high-quality ore which was transported in small boxes. These boxes weighed between forty and ninety kilograms [88–198 pounds], measured about forty-five centimeters, and each one had a lid. At the beginning they were sealing them, but they later didn't have time for that, so after a while they just had latches so the box wouldn't open. These boxes were measured according to how much radioactivity each had before being loaded into larger containers. One container was from one shaft. We were taking these small boxes from one shaft for four days until we filled one container. In that box there were between 45–60 tons of material. When the box was filled to meet the required tonnage, the material was put onto a long conveyor belt. This belt was about fifty meters long and about eighty centimeters wide. The container was narrow, and we had to load everything manually. We didn't get any gloves, so all of our knuckles were scraped. On this belt, the material ran into the first grinder. There was a net above the grinder; the smaller material sifted through while the bigger pieces continued on into the grinder. There, they were crushed into smaller pieces which then ran along the second conveyor belt that was once again forty to fifty meters long. It ran into a tower where everything was sorted and sifted through another net, but this net was finer so it only let even smaller pieces through while the larger pieces (about five centimeters in size) went through the grinder until they were crushed into pieces of about five millimeters. From here everything was taken out, put into a bunker, and from the bunker onto the trailer which was taken to the last floor of the tower.

This tower was about twenty-seven meters high and is still standing today. That was where the material was taken out on separating machines and sifted for the last time. When there

¹⁰ *The Red Tower of Death* – uranium-processing tower which still stands close to Jáchymov in northwestern Bohemia. It was proclaimed an official National Cultural Monument but has not been made accessible for wide public yet (at least not by 2015).

was a bigger piece left, it would again go back into the grinder. So this was how everything would run until the granulated material was no larger than five millimeters. This final product was then taken back into the bottom floor of the bunker, where the barrels would then be filled. The barrels were about fifty centimeters high and wide. Their openings were fifteen centimeters wide, and into these we had to squeeze sixty kilograms of granulated material from each shaft. It's important to say that some materials from some of the shafts—from Slavkov, for instance—were lighter. So to squeeze in sixty kilos was quite a challenge. Material from Příbram was heavy, so loading that was an easier job. There would be six people who would stand while a seventh was loading the barrel; meanwhile, the other six used tamping irons to pack everything in tighter. Then the barrel was weighed before being moved to the place where it would be sealed. On every barrel's seal you could find a stamp with the information on its original shaft, total weight, and some other specialized markings. Then everything was placed into storage. This storage was very long – 150–200 meters on each side. A stamping machine stood in the middle, and then the barrels would be taken...well, actually, kicked... from one side of the storage facility to the other. There were about 300 barrels to stack on top of each other. Finally, when the train came, we would open the door and roll the barrels into the wagon. As I already mentioned, this train was called *Věrtuška*. So that was the process of the tower.

Were there any other ways the uranium ore was processed?

When I was speaking about the square there was something we called the *Poor Grinder* or *Grinder No. 3*. Big pieces of material would be crushed there again and processed, but this process was slow. It was ground, separated, and then put into the bunkers. From there it was manually shoveled into wagons. The highest quality uranium ore that the camp processed went through Grinder No. 2. That was almost clean uranium. That was one of the worst working places since everything had to be processed manually, and from the onset there would be about forty boxes in need of unloading. These were all unloaded onto a big pile, and from there the material would be manually thrown onto the net. Everything that was left on the net had to be picked up and manually thrown into the grinder. The soft granulate was already moving on the conveyer belt, and everything would again be ground down to pieces less than five millimeters. We had to do this process about seven times before it was over. Everything had to be mixed well together so there would be a steady composition of the quality of the uranium ore. So the whole process was done seven times – and this grinding produced a lot of dust. On one side there was a grinder, and right next to that – five meters away – we were working and assembling the materials together. There was no ventilation, and we didn't have any respirators or masks. We didn't have anything like that, so we left each day grey or red depending on the uranium ore that was being processed. When we were processing material from mines in Příbram, the tower would produce dust, of course, and this dust was red since all the material from Příbram was mainly red in color. When we were processing another type of uranium ore from Slavkov, the color was gray-green – and that was a weird color. Finally, when the ore was from Jáchymov the color was gray-blue or dark gray. When we were processing material from Lužnice, we would also know exactly which two concrete shafts were working. After this first half-year we had perfectly mastered everything having to do with the ore.

Do you remember any names of the guards or people who were checking on you there?

There were mainly nicknames since we didn't know their real names, but the Commander on L was Píbil [Miroslav], who later served as Major in Pardubice. I, for example, found out that I knew one guard in L. I was asking myself, 'Where the heck do I know this guy from?' It turned out to be Josef Kulek, one of the Scouts! He used to be a member of the group "War Twins", and later he joined the State Secret Police. He started talking to us and suggested that we could be friends and that if we needed something he could work on it for us. I just told him, "Josef, just let it be, and don't even talk about that. Here is the fence...and you are on one side, and I'm on the other. The fence is barbed-wire, so you always have to keep your eyes on this." Anyway, he probably got back at me a little because in 1951 I was incarcerated... and I don't know why, but during Christmas they took forty-seven people from Camp L and isolated us in prison. I was one of the twelve who were put into confinement in Camp L, and the remaining prisoners were taken to the nearest camp, Camp C, for punishment. I was there from December 20 to January 12. The reason for my imprisonment is something I never found out.

Could you describe your imprisonment in more detail?

The cell was a small wooden shed, and it had two rooms which looked like rabbit hutches. They were about 1.3 meters wide by 2.5 meters long and 1.75 meters high. I was 1.77 meters so I always had to bend when I stood up. They put six of us there and gave us two blankets for the night. We put one blanket underneath, and we slept head to legs, head to legs. This is how the six of us stayed until January 12. In the mornings, we would each get one pot of decaffeinated coffee and one slice of bread. It was a very small slice of bread. At noon we would get soup, but the soup was really watered-down; again with a small piece of bread and the same thing for supper. We couldn't wash, and instead of a toilet, we had a small pail. We did everything in that. This pail would be hung on the door for the night – otherwise we wouldn't have been able to lie down. The worst thing was when the guard would rush in at night and open the door until all the contents of the pail would splash out. That was miserable. It's hard to describe it. I don't believe that many people would believe the stuff I'm saying and instead say to themselves, "This man is making it up." But this would really happen.

Have you ever met Josef Kulek after your release?

Yes, I met him when I was a civilian. About a year after I came back, he wanted to talk to me, but I told him, "We have nothing to talk about together." I met him in 1978 or 1979...I don't know exactly. I was working for the sugar refinery in České Meziříčí. I worked there as a designer and builder. We were implementing new technologies when all of a sudden someone was standing above me, and I told myself 'I know this man.' And it was Mr. Kulek. A year later the State Secret Police called me and asked what I did; how I did it; was I behaving myself, and so on. So he didn't leave me alone until the last moment of his life.

How long did you stay at Camp L and when were you transferred?

I stayed in Camp L for two and a half years – and for the last two years I was in Camp Nikolaj in the Eduard mine. This was a special rarity among camps, because from Camp Nikolaj on mine Eduard you would walk through a special corridor for about a half to three quarters of a kilometer on a local public road. In the morning we got up, and they would turn the lights on

throughout the whole corridor when we left for the morning shift. They would tie us together with a steel cable...about 300 people. They locked it in the back. This was a farce, and we called it a "Russian Bus". The worst was in the winter, when we would walk at 4 a.m. across forty centimeters of fresh snow. That was nothing to cheer about. Sometimes it also happened that someone would slip, and the others would slowly walk over. On those occasions guards would start yelling, "Stop." Other similar stories would happen there.

So this was the way you walked to the Eduard mine?

Precisely. One day we would go there only to be told that we would be going down into the mine, and on another day I would have to go down the shaft and work like a normal miner... even though there were no instructions, and they hadn't shown us how to mine. Then I was told that I would clean the gutters. So I would clean the gutters where the water was overflowing. Then I worked as a mine carpenter – I would repair the chimneys, stepladders, and so on. Then I worked with the bricklayers assembling the chimneys. Then my friend Husník [Antonín] told me, "Come with me – we will work as breakers." That was the pinnacle of the mining experience. While other breakers were breaking horizontally, we would break into the ceiling. We didn't want to get any uranium, but there were quotas, so we would go and steal some ore from where the civilians worked. There, we would steal a small box of uranium stones, grind it, and then sprinkle it back on. The measurements would show that we did a good job right away. So we met the quota, benefited from it, and not only did we break stone, but we even had some ore. Yet, up in the grinder they couldn't benefit from any of this because it was wasted rock.

You told me that after two and half years you were transferred from Camp L to Nikolaj. Did they tell you any reason why?

No, they would never give reasons to anybody. I know that many of my co-prisoners switched from four to eight camps or prisons during five years of imprisonment. It depended on where they needed to place them. In the end – meaning, in the second half of the 1950s – they were also dividing us according to professions. In Opava, for example, they built offices for project engineers, and so some of us who had studied in various technical schools were taken there to start working for the Ministry of Interior. Also, if someone tried to escape, he would be transferred somewhere else or into a normal prison.

Can you remember any communists who were in prison with you?

There was a guy named Pepík Just, and he worked at one of the ministries. He was a member of a subgroup in the process with Slánský¹¹. I also met Gustav Husák¹², who briefly went through Jáchymov and stayed for about three days. The Slovaks wanted to lynch him, but I told them that this didn't make any sense and that trouble would only come from it. And he left quickly anyways.

11 **The Slánský Trials** – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

12 **Gustav Husák** (1913–1991) – President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from 1975–1989. In 1950 he was accused alongside V. Clementis, L. Novomeský, and many others for "bourgeois nationalism". In February 1951 he was locked up and in 1954 sentenced for life imprisonment. Husák was among the very few who refused to confess – a factor which most likely saved his life. Internally, he remained a believer in communism. He was pardoned by President A. Novotný in 1960, and fully rehabilitated in 1963. In 1969 he became a leader of the Slovakian Communist Party. By May 1971, he became General Secretary of the Party and in 1975, the President of Czechoslovakia.

How were you finally released? Originally you were sentenced for seven years, but you went home in 1955. How did that happen?

According to the decree of the President Zápotocký¹³. In 1953, I received a written announcement that my sentence was being lowered to five years from the original eleven. My prison mates and even the guards were advising me to ask about a probationary conditional release. I refused to do that because if I agreed to do that I would have to cooperate with the State Secret Police and communists. I radically refused to do this from the first day.

How many times did you see your parents when you were in prison?

Well, I remember that there were three visits for the whole duration of my stay – two in Camp L and one in Nikolaj. There weren't any more.

In four and half years?

Yes, in four and a half years. I theoretically was able to ask for a visit once every six months. Every time I would ask, though, I would be placed in a cell or else they would make up some disciplinary punishment. After the first few months at Nikolaj, it took a while before my work efficiency shot up to 100% and prisoners under 100% were automatically denied the opportunity to write letters, have visits, and so on. So visits and letters were something like a reward for a good job. In Camp L, right before Christmas, the Commander *Šlachtecký* [his own name Miroslav Píbil] brought a whole amount of huge letters on a tray. It was snowing and a big wind was blowing. The wind blew, and all the letters started flying towards the fence that separated the camp from the surrounding, and he said, "If you want your letters, go and get them," but there was a threat that if we did the guards would start to shoot. So this was one of the ways they had of suppressing the number of messages we received from home. However, I did have an illegal connection with home through Štěpánka Baloušková. When I wrote a letter, within two weeks – sometimes earlier – my parents knew what I wrote. They got the letter and would send an answer back. So I had pretty good information about what was going on at home; similarly, my parents knew about me. I was a friend with the future General Husník. We were together for two or three years at both camps. He had some experience because during the war he was in prison as well and knew how to get in touch with civilians. Thanks to Štěpánka Baloušková, whose husband was a Brigadier Captain Baloušek, who Husník knew before our prison terms, we had contact to the outside. One of the civilian employees working in the camp mediated between us, and both she and Štěpánka then sent the messages further inland. Within this group, Štěpánka was mediating mail for up to forty-seven people. Husník and I coordinated it. We were distributing and gathering letters. The civil employees in both camps helped with it.

How exactly did this secret postal system work?

We had to write on the thinnest kind of paper so that the maximum number of papers could be taken at one time. Then we had to collect them all in a certain way and tell certain people whose turn it was. There had to be some kind of order to it, because we couldn't receive thirty letters at once. Each week there could be five to eight letters coming in. The letters were sent

13 Antonín Zápotocký (1884–1957) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

to Prague and from there distributed to Bohemia and Moravia. It wasn't just letters, because through the civilians we had the opportunity to buy some food, which was scarce. Families were also sending us normal civilian money and packages with the most basic necessities, which meant mainly clothing and shoes since these things were absent in prison.

How exactly did you contact civilian employees there?

Husník had the main contact in Camp L with the storekeeper lady. I only knew her by sight; I never even talked to her. It was easier on Nikolaj. Husník got in touch with civilian geologists and surveyors. These people were able to freely move in the mines, and so we were able to have contact with them. I knew the civilian geologist Míla Novotný, who has already died. The other one was Mirek Mikšovský. Up until today we are friends. When I was released we kept going on holiday together to our cottage in Říčky for twenty-five years. So it's a friendship that has lasted until now.

When looking at your family relations or the aspects of your imprisonment, how did your family view it? How did they manage when they had a nineteen-year old son behind bars?

It wasn't easy because my mom was a cleaning lady at the Regional National Committee¹⁴, and right after I was locked up she was fired, and they didn't want to give her a job anywhere after that. My father was a driver at the transport company, driving buses and trams. He was also fired a month later. He had to go through the new recruitment process. The worst situation happened for my siblings, two sisters and a brother, who couldn't go to proper schools. All three of them had to go to trade schools. At that time my brother used to go to a normal secondary school, and there was one teacher, Mrs. Višňáková, who was terribly malicious. I know that once he had to stand on a platform for the whole hour. She would always turn to him and say, "So this is the brother of the national traitor and spy."

Do you have any "souvenirs" or things from the time you were in prison? For example, are there any pieces of silver or other things that you sent to your family?

Yes, some of it remains. Husník and I were actually making things like that. Not just for us, but for other prisoners. I have two beautiful things my prison mate Bohouš Šesták carved for me. One of them is a fully carved chessboard and pieces. The figures are about two centimeters high, and the queen is about four centimeters. Then I also have a triangular ashtray. On this there is a carving of a symbolic Scout lily. And finally, I have a little figure of a man. The Triangle is the sign of life; the figure of the man means us *mukls*; and the lily is the symbol of the Scouts' ideology, for which we were in prison. I was also putting pictures into Plexiglas. I put in photographs of my family, which I later sent home. My sister still has one picture like that. We were also carving various objects from bones, or we would make little hearts from Plexiglas and various other objects. I made tons of things for my prison mates. It was a hobby to relax... and it was also a petty clockmaker's job, because everything was so tiny and small. For example, there would be a little cross preserved in one of those hearts, or someone would chew bread

¹⁴ **Regional National Committee** – the designation of National Committees that realized the administration in Czechoslovakia during the years 1949–1990.

and then make it into sandals and a sleigh. There were various ideas on what to do or create. I still have a lighter that the *mukls* made.

When you first heard your sentence – that you were potentially going to prison for eleven years – what helped you struggle through that time when you didn't know that you could go home in 1955?

[Light laugh] It was our general belief that we would not sit there, hoping that something would happen and all that we started in this world would not fade away – especially after the execution of Dr. Horáková¹⁵ or General Píka¹⁶. We didn't believe that this political situation would be a permanent state of play, or that it would last for forty years as it did. This gave us motivation. And we hoped that we would get out earlier and not really have to sit out the whole sentence. Many people were released on probation although they were in prison for ten or thirteen years, but there were a couple people with fifteen or twenty years who sat out their sentences to the end.

How did your rehabilitation and compensation turn out?

Immediately in 1989 we established the Confederation of Political Prisoners. I had first-hand information since I was one of the founding members and the head of one of the branch offices. When they started talking about rehabilitation in 1990, we immediately prepared everything for rehabilitation and informed our members of the Confederation, as well as the offices in Hradec, about the conditions of rehabilitation. There were about 350 people. In Hradec [Králové] everything went all right. I personally got all the compensation that I was supposed to get.

What comes to mind when you hear the name Jáchymov?

A chill runs down my spine. Everything is fixed in my head. Unfortunately I sometimes have dreams that I am in a prison in Jáchymov. It's an overwhelming experience that I cannot erase from my memory or subconscious. Especially now, for example, that I found out one of my friends that I met there has leukemia and is practically fighting with death. These are the red threads that line my memory. He used to be a young person, but today he is written off because he has leukemia from the radioactivity.

Did you also leave with some permanent health problems or were you lucky enough to avoid them?

I had a few smaller injuries – broken fingers and ripped-off nails. That often happened at the workplace in Camp L while we were handling barrels. Then I had two injuries in Nikolaj, and one of them was really quite a misery. I was carrying something when the ladder broke from underneath me and I fell down. I flew and landed on my back four meters below, and I cut my elbow and twisted my shoulder. I crawled down the tower, and there I gave a message for Husník that I was injured. In the infirmary they gave me first aid, put stitches in, and on Monday I was working again, even though my wound was seven centimeters long and very deep. So this is just an idea of how they took care of the working people in Jáchymov.

15 Dr. Milada Horáková (1901–1950) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

16 General Heliodor Píka (1887–1949) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

What did you think of the regime change in 1989?

I was happy that it was the end. From November 17, I was a little naive when I heard how many people ended their memberships in the Communist Party. I thought that giving up the membership would solve everything. I later saw many people who used to be members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia are now in government or now have political functions. We weren't happy about this at all, and we knew that things should be improved. So we did everything we could to pass the Lustration Law¹⁷. This is our problem even today, because we can see that this law is not being followed, and people are getting around it in bad and nasty ways. We cannot accept it when we see ex-State Secret Police and informants sitting in the main leading positions of the state and elected positions. If the candidates invite us to give a public speech, whether for local, parliament, or European parliament elections, we always have to make sure these people were never a part of the party nor cooperated with the State Secret Police. If they had something to do with the communists, we would not talk to them and we will not talk to them. At least in Hradec Králové, we don't.

Is there anything you would like to tell to the young generation of today?

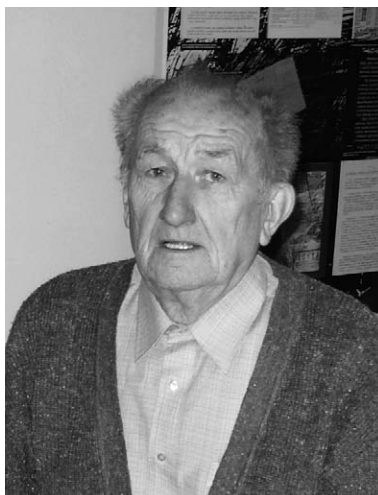
Find your goal in life and go and get it until the very last breath. Nothing else. Let your health and perseverance help you.

Thank you very much for the interview, and I wish you a lot of health and success.

Thank you, too, and I hope young people will understand this, because we do it for them. We don't want to cry because we have struggled until now. We will have to struggle until the end of our lives. But if we can, we want to give them the information, because no one will give it to them later on. They can get such genuine information from us. A film can be very much distorted, and it doesn't represent reality in its true nature. Some movies were done very well, but they were missing the thought process – the inner feelings that only we can provide. Like the feeling of family solidarity, because in civilian life, the family was sometimes affected more than we were, in our minds. They weren't locked up, but they had financial and health problems – problems in how to make a living. If we had not had this family solidarity, I don't know whether we would have survived in prison.

¹⁷ **Lustration Law** – A set of laws passed in the early 1990s which were intended to prevent the infiltration of the upper echelons of the state administration by people who had been compromised through serving or cooperating with communist power in the years 1948–1989.

“It is like if someone does something bad to you, you forgive, but you do not forget. That’s how I feel about Jáchymov.”



Jozef Kycka was born on February 23, 1928, in Opatov, Slovakia. In his teenage years he happened to meet several people who repeatedly reported about the criminal character of the Soviet regime, and he became a passive opposer of the communist ideology. He worked as a civil employee in the uranium mines in Jáchymov beginning in 1948 (prior to the massive enlargement of the prisoners’ labor camps). For not reporting his ex-schoolmate, then a collaborator of the French intelligence agency, he was arrested in April 1952 and sentenced to eighteen years of prison in October of the same year. He was imprisoned in Jáchymov camps and forced to mine in the same mines where he previously worked as a free man. He was released based on the Presidential amnesty in 1960. He lived his whole life in Ostrov upon Ohře near Jáchymov and after 1989 became an active member of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic. He died in 2008.

Interview with Mr. Jozef Kycka

Interviewer: Tomáš Bouška

First I would like to ask you something about your childhood. When and where were you born?

I was born on February 23, 1928, in Opatová, Slovakia, in the southern region of Levice. My father occasionally worked for farmers or for those people who owned land. I lived there until September 1928 when my whole family moved to the United States where my father found a job in a battery factory in Cleveland, Ohio. After about three years we returned together with my mom and older brother to settle some property disputes in Slovakia. They were resolved in 1937, and we were supposed to move back to the United States. I don't really remember things too well, but I do know there were two different shipping companies, Brehmen and Lloyd, and one of them was facing bankruptcy. Another agent came to us and offered another company that we could travel with. Finally, it took all too long, and we couldn't travel through Hamburg anymore because it was 1938. We were then supposed to leave from Turkey, through the Suez Canal, around Africa, and then back to America. That all finally didn't happen, so we stayed here. My brother joined the army of the Slovak State¹ and was sent to a fast-proceeding division on the Eastern Front in Russia. While they were retreating, he was separated from his unit, and we were given a statement that he had been killed, but I couldn't believe it. I attended the grammar school in Trnava because the Hungarians had occupied Levice. In our village there was one lady who was a nun in Trnava, and she offered us a place to live in Trnava in the orphanage as boarders, and I would also be able to attend school there. So we attended grammar school in Trnava until 1944, until the Slovak National Uprising².

Do you remember the events of the Slovak National Uprising and how the Soviet Army reacted?

It didn't happen close to us. Things happened so quickly on the night of August 28 [1944]. It was broadcasted on the radio, and by August 29 the Germans had already occupied our country. We were liberated by the Soviet Army on December 20, 1944. We were occupied by the Soviet Army until the end of March 1945 when they finally retook Budapest. It was during those three months that we really learned about their brotherly love. We learned from the Second Army from Ukraine, which was led by Malinovsky, and these people were mostly from Gulags. We couldn't believe the things they were saying to us. They picked sixteen year-old boys to help them, including me. I shouldn't really say they chose us, rather they ordered us, saying, "Tomorrow, you start." I had to go work in a bakery for three months. There were

1 **Slovak State** – officially called the Slovak Republic was a client state of Nazi Germany which existed between March 14, 1939 and April 4, 1945. It controlled the majority of the territory of present-day Slovakia, but without its current southern and eastern parts, which then formed part of Hungary.

2 **Slovak National Uprising** – organized by the Slovak resistance movement during WWII. It was launched on August 29, 1944 from Banská Bystrica in an attempt to resist German troops that began occupation of the Slovak territory and to overthrow the collaborationist government of Jozef Tiso. Although the rebel forces were defeated by Nazi Germany, guerrilla warfare continued until the Soviet Army, Czechoslovak Army and Romanian Army liberated Slovakia in 1945.

prisoners working with us and also soldiers who had a special insignia on their uniforms. This meant they were the elite guard. The Commander of this part of the front lived in our house. Every two weeks or once a month they held a trial. They always sentenced someone to death and executed them in our yard behind the water well. Once my grandma was going outside to throw out potato peels, and she witnessed them shooting someone in the back of the neck.

Did you have the chance to talk to any Gulag prisoners about their past?

These Cossacks told us some unbelievable stories. For example, one group was running around the labor camp and yelling that if they didn't meet the quotas, they would get death as a punishment. They were reporting themselves and asking for death. I didn't understand why. I told myself that it wasn't possible. There were many cases where a prisoner would tell you he didn't even know why he was there. Then his neighbor would come into the Gulag, and he would confess to the first guy that he had informed against the first guy and so on. Then the next guy would come into the Gulag and say he had informed on the neighbor. I was always imagining that the Gulags or exile was something like exile during the era of the Tsar, but after hearing their stories I found out that these Gulags were liquidation camps where whole families were separated. Wives were sent to one place, kids to another, and these people would live there in utter misery and starve to death. They even had to build their own dugouts and live in them. I don't know how they did this when it was negative forty degrees Celsius. We were not even able to imagine it. We suspected that they were only saying these things to get a drink or wine because when they were sober, they didn't want to talk about it at all. Only joining the army saved them.

Who exactly told you these stories?

These stories were told to us by Cossacks who were quartered in our house and worked with us in the bakery. In the bakery we helped to mix dough, make bread, deliver it, and so on. The bakers told us about it. There was a guy who told us he was a priest, and we thought he was a priest, but later when we understood Russian better we found out he was a prince, Sokolovsky. He was a Captain Second Class in the Navy, and since 1921 he had been in the Gulags in Siberia. He went through many Gulags, and he said that his ability to bake saved his life. He would always bake some pastries for the commanders and would be saved. He was already sixty, maybe sixty-seven. He was nearly deaf because a mine had exploded close to him or something like that.

All this happened before communism took over in 1948. Did you have any notion of what communism meant?

I did, because of an old postman living nearby. He was a democrat, and I used to visit him. We talked, and he explained what democracy meant and gave me three books. These books were called "October Revolution" and were written by Trotsky. They weren't comedies or novels, but chronological accounts, for example: "Town Carycin, November 7, 7 p. m. or 8 p. m. A professor and his family were executed behind the town garages"; or "Leningrad, 8 p. m., someone threw a doctor and his family into the Neva from the bridge." There were more stories like these that happened in other towns and at different hours. The officials who did these things were also described in the books.

You told me that your brother was reported missing and killed at the Russian Front. Did you find out later what happened to him?

After the war, my brother came home. He told us that when he had been captured near Odessa and had to march to Yekaterinodar. When Svoboda³ decided to organize his own army, my brother decided to join it. He didn't talk about things much, but when we drank a bit he started to open up and told me about some horrible things.

What was Slovakia like after the war? Did you finish school?

After the war I went back to the high school in Levice. I got into some trouble there. A friend of mine, Palán, broke his leg, and we wanted to go visit him in the hospital. I didn't want to look disrespectful so I wore a tie and my friend Stano [diminutive form of the first name Standa] did as well. There were two other girls going with us. When we arrived at school, a professor came in and pointed his finger at Standa and I, hit us, and asked why we were dressed like that. We replied that we were going to visit our friend in the hospital, but he didn't believe us. He said, "It's March 14⁴ today, and this used to be the Slovak national holiday." He escorted us to the director's office, and they called our parents to school. I was suspended from school because I had a "bad report," and I was forbidden to study at any high school in Czechoslovakia. I had to go to work in the heavy industry in Ostrava. Harassment of democrats began as early as 1947. I was in Ostrava during the February events⁵. The workers were given shotguns and stationed around the gates and important sites around town.

You didn't stay long in the north of Moravia, did you?

No. I left after that February when a friend of mine had escaped across the border. He left a suitcase at my place telling me he was going to visit an uncle in Prague to see about a job. His uncle was a head doctor. My friend was caught trying to cross the border and was in prison in Cheb for two weeks. From there I got a letter with his apology for not telling me anything and for betraying me. He also promised he would explain everything after he was released. He never came back. He was released, and he later escaped.

So he successfully crossed the border then?

Yes. Policemen came to my boarding house a month later asking me where he was. I just told them that he was in Prague and that he left a suitcase at my place. I took the suitcase out, and it was locked. They opened it and went through it. They took the suitcase with them and me along as well. When I was released I had to sign a paper promising that I wouldn't tell anyone about what happened or what they asked me about. At that time I noticed someone was following me. So I went home to Slovakia, and my brother, who then worked at Jáchymov, was there by chance. The prisoners had already begun working in Jáchymov in 1945 or 1946.⁶ They recruited bachelors to be guards. So my brother told me, "Hey, come to Jáchymov. There are Russians, and no one will be watching you there." So I went. In the fall or maybe in the end of summer in 1945, sixty Russian soldiers and their Commander came to Jáchymov and guarded

3 **Ludvík Svoboda** (1895–1979) see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

4 **March 14, 1939** – the Slovak Republic was formed. This date was a national holiday from 1939 to 1945.

5 **The Communist Coup in February 1948 in former Czechoslovakia** – please see the Historical Overview of this book.

6 There were German Prisoners of War working in Jáchymov mines in 1946.

some of the camps. The names of the camps were Svornost [Concord], Rovnost [Equality], and Bratrství [Brotherhood]. While they were there, they didn't let anyone else in except for those people who were supposed to work there. Then sometime in October they signed a mining agreement with the Soviets. So when I came to Jáchymov, I got a really great job from a lady named Pusíková in lab number 1. I worked with the high quality uranium ore. I measured the ore and did not do much else. I arrived there in June 1948.

What was your and your brother's experience like? You had to meet political prisoners there, is that right?

There weren't many of them there yet. They started coming in 1949, and they practically took turns after the German prisoners. I was in Horní Slavkov when the prisoners started arriving. There were a couple of political prisoners among them, but they never talked about it. If you asked what they were sentenced for, you would typically get the answer that they were caught reading political magazines in someone's apartment. They were making fun of it and didn't want to talk more about it until they got to know you a little better. Then I met a couple boys from Slovakia. There was a guy named Kanys. There were more of them, and they told me what was going on, what they were sentenced for, and how things looked. So I learned a little bit more with each conversation.

You were working in a lab the entire time you were there?

Later I worked as a technical controller. When the trailers for active uranium arrived, the content wasn't high, but I was supposed to go and check it. I did it really simply by explaining, "Guys, you are just fighting against yourselves. If you threw the big stones that don't contain any uranium away, but on the smaller ones that are obviously rich with the ore you put a paper A meaning they should be sent for the active trailer, you have a much bigger chance to earn more money. If there is no uranium ore on your delivery they will dump it out, but if there is some, you will get fifty crowns per kilogram!" So they simply started doing this. [Laughing] One day a friend who had emigrated appeared. We grew up together. I asked him, "What are you doing here?" He replied, "Well, I came back. Where do you work?" He showed me his identification, and it said that he worked in the mine of Ludvík Svoboda in Ostrava, but under a fake name. I told him, "Hey, play this game with someone else." So he told me what he was doing there, and he slept over two or three times. In Jáchymov they created a forbidden zone, and everyone who lived in Jáchymov had to have this information in their ID. This friend of mine was locked up in our village. He was arrested because he wanted to see his mother. He stayed at the home of an old woman who used to be a countess. Her property had been confiscated. They let her stay and live in a monastery. I imagine that she died in the monastery that night. Since her lights were on, the men who were coming home from the pub were curious to see what she was doing. They threw a couple small stones in and, because there was no reaction, they went inside. They wanted to ransack the house, but a policeman arrived at that moment. My friend was locked in another room there and couldn't escape because there were bars on the window. Anyway, he had a letter for me just with the message that he would go to Mariánské Lázně near Karlovy Vary and would like to meet me. He was asking me if I could come to the train station. All in all, this letter was quite innocent. Now, I am guessing because

I never saw it. Then I was followed for about a month. My friend was locked up in March, and I was locked up one month later.

What was your arrest like?

I was arrested on April 25, 1952. They certainly had been keeping their eyes on me. I had been transferred from Slavkov to Rovnost. They probably put me there so they could watch me, because of the two collaborators they had. At the end of the afternoon shift that day, I came out of the shaft. We came to the gate, and they couldn't find my ID. The gatekeeper told me, "Come in." So I went in, and then someone put their fingers into my back saying, "In the name of the Czechoslovak Republic keep your arms at your side. You are being arrested." Then they dragged me outside, and in front of the gate there was a Tatra police car with policemen standing next to it. A whole convoy of cars started moving, and they took me down to Jáchymov to a place called Lužice, which was a spa house. There they put me into a cell, which already had four people inside. There was something like a bed made from wooden boards, and on top of that were straw and a blanket. There were two East Germans from Johannegeorgenstadt and two Czech boys and myself. I stayed there for twenty-one days. They took my pictures from both the front and side, and they started investigating and interrogating me. They knew about my friend, and I couldn't deny that. I said, "He was here once. He came to see me from Ostrava, and over there he worked in a mine of Ludvík Svoboda. He showed me his ID, and ever since I haven't seen him." I imagine he said the same thing! We could not see each other in order to make this deal in advance. We were just lucky. Then they took me to Klatovy to the investigation department that they called Jestráb [falcon]. This was Jáchymov's counter-espionage unit. Here was where they took anyone who either had tried to escape or was planning an escape. All those people were transported here and investigated. When I was locked up I was ninety-two kilograms [200 pounds]. I knew this because the week before I had had a check-up. Three months later I was sixty-one kilograms [135 pounds]. What a diet!

What were the conditions like in Klatovy?

In the morning and at noon we would get a small piece of bread, maybe twelve dekagrams [0.3 pound] and a little bit of black coffee, which we called *nafta* [diesel]. For lunch we got soup in a small enamel cup. Mine was numbered forty-nine, sometimes forty-seven. You know, in prison you try not to go crazy, and you need to work and you need your mind to work somehow, so for example I would count the knots in the wooden boards and try to remember how many knots the third or fifth board had. I always counted nineteen and half to twenty spoons of soup. That was lunch, and sometimes for supper we would have the *nafta* again. Only on Fridays did we get three small tiny unpeeled potatoes and coffee.

What was the hygiene like in Klatovy?

Hygiene... Well, there weren't any combs or any toothbrushes. There was a rag for washing the floor, 30 x 30 cm [14 x 14 in]. We washed ourselves first with this rag, and then we washed the floor. In Klatovy they gave us a bucket with water, which was also used for the floor afterwards. Plus, they would give us the cloth for the floor. So, first we would wash ourselves, then pour the water out and wipe off the floor. That was what the hygiene consisted of over there.

Did you stay in Klatovy the whole time?

No. They eventually took me to Nitra to meet my accuser. In Klatovy they handcuffed me and kept me in a dark cell until I was taken to see the interrogator. He was a sharp man. I refused to eat because I was being held in darkness. I kept asking myself, 'Why am I being kept in the dark?' The interrogator called me out and demanded to know why I wouldn't eat. I just replied, "Because I am here, I am in the dark, and nothing is happening." He sent me back but not into the dark anymore. They put me into the cell next to the old one. There were two other prisoners there, Dr. Homola and an accountant from a cooperative. After five weeks they transported me to Nitra. One guard, who was trying to be diligent, took my accuser to my cell. We were together the whole night, so we were able to explain things to one another.

Did you find out everything that your friend did and who he was working for?

He worked for the French. They were recruiting people among emigrants, and he was supposed to go to the French Foreign Legion or to work in a company. His father was also in America, but it was his stepfather, and he never invited him to the United States. My friend was hoping he would, but he never did. So he stayed in Germany and worked for the French. He was coming to Czechoslovakia, and he always went back. In Slovakia they finally caught him. He had a trial with another group of people in Slovakia because he had formed two or three different groups, which all together included fifty people. I was sentenced alone and transported from Nitra to Bratislava. On that day there was some really hot weather, and they put me into a Škoda car and made me lie down. They put some fur coats that guards wore in winter over me. When they took me out of the car I was so sweaty that you can't imagine it. They took me up a spiral staircase where I was put into a cell. I was completely exhausted, and my head was buzzing, and I lay down. A guard opened the door for food and asked, "What's wrong with you? Aren't you feeling well?" I didn't answer. He opened the door completely, came to me and asked, "Would you like to take a shower?" I said, "No, not really." "Are you sure?" "Yes." "Come and have a shower." He blindfolded me, and we went up the steps. Once there they spun me around.

I didn't want to believe this was happening because I didn't have a good experience at Klatovy. There it happened that a guard came to me and asked if I wanted to take a bath. After he walked me there, I didn't want to believe it. It was a beautiful, clean warm bathtub. It was joy. I took my clothes off and everything started moving. Electricity! I fell out of the bath, and the guard was just laughing. He was looking at me through the observation hole in the door laughing, "So what? Did you have a bath already?" I didn't even wipe myself off. I got dressed, and he blindfolded me. He sent me walking blindly across the corridor and yelled, "Hey, I'm sending him to you." I bumped into something, and it made a terrible commotion. I stepped on something and fell over. There were washbasins and buckets stored there. I bumped into it, knocked it down on the concrete, and in a second someone came up next to me and dragged me away. I never wanted to have a bath again.

Anyway, in Bratislava I told myself that this guard looked nice, so I went to take a shower. "Set the water as you like it," he said. I set the water; he gave me soap and a brush saying, "Take it easy and shower. Wash yourself properly." So I washed, and I wiped myself off. I came back to the cell, and he said, "Lay down. I'm guarding, so you can sleep." He asked me if I was hungry, and I said yes. He brought me coffee, but it was sweet coffee for soldiers and a piece of

bread. I ate it all, and I fell asleep in a second. Do you know how I felt?! In the morning I woke up. He was there again and told me, "You are leaving today. I'm transporting you to Bohemia," and I went back to Klatovy.

You returned to Klatovy again where you had such bad experiences. Had anything changed there?

The food had changed beyond recognition. There was lunch. The food was served through a small little door, and they would push your cup with soup towards you using their leg. We got one cup, a second cup, and then the guy took it away. All of a sudden I saw something like a can, and I just asked, "What is it?" We had eaten the soup, and all of a sudden there was another meal, some potatoes, some sauce, and a piece of meat. So I said, "Excuse me, but am I in Klatovy?" My prison mate answered, "Yes, that's the place." I responded, "This food?" "Well friend, we've had this food for about two weeks." So I asked, "Why?" There was a new prisoner who was a member of the International Red Cross who had been invited into the country because he was an expert on snake farms. He was imprisoned, because an officer from the State Secret Police who was a spy in Switzerland had been caught. It was understandable that they wanted to make an exchange, so this specialist from the Red Cross was arrested so that a prisoner exchange could happen. He refused to speak or eat. Two days later a consul came from Switzerland and threatened an inspection from the International Red Cross. They didn't do the inspection, but the food was upgraded. We got a meal for lunch and supper, which improved things a little bit.

I also have another story to tell you. In the cell there was an inmate named Pepík Fořt. Once he was called out, and a little while later I heard a terrible cry and yelling underneath the windows. Soon after they brought Fořt back and put him back into his cell without his towel. The guy was white as a sheet. I asked him, "What's wrong?" He was shaking and told me, "Man, it was horrible. Do you know what happened? They took me and another prisoner, and they let the dogs out to chase us, but the dogs went after the guards instead." Meanwhile we heard from our cell, "Serves you right then. You weren't supposed to do this. Why did you irritate the dogs wearing the *mukl's* clothing? You thought they would go after the uniform, but they go after the smell." This guard was training the dogs to chase *mukls*, and he would do it dressed in a *mukl's* uniform. He was quite brutal to the dogs in the cage. When they saw him coming they would growl. He thought they did this because of the uniform, but the dogs learned by sounds and smells. So in the moment after they took the two prisoners out and he stood by them, the dogs had pulled him down to the ground. Pepík Fořt quickly removed the blindfold from his eyes and saw one dog holding the guard's leg and the other his shoulder, and they couldn't get them off. So, Pepík was returned to his cell. Things like that happened there.

Could you describe in detail how the investigations went?

It went like this. They would take me there, and in the beginning it was quite ordinary interrogation, sweet things and reasoning that I had a family, a son, and that I would stay in prison for a long time if I did not cooperate. My son was born in December 1950. Once a lady came who brought in some papers. She hit me so hard that I fell down off my chair. It was like a punch from a cannon shot. My teeth were broken, and so I spit them out. They let me be like that. I refused to give the testimony they wanted, and so I wasn't allowed to sit. I had to keep walking in my cell, and if I stopped for a second they would bang on the door. At night

they kept waking me up even though I wasn't at any hearings or interrogations. Sometimes I would sit, and five or six people in a circle would exchange seats at the table. One would ask you these questions, and another would give you different ones to completely confuse you. I was practically sleeping, but I was still speaking and would suddenly realize that I didn't know what I was saying. These things were quite unpleasant. I had to keep marching. My legs were swollen from the sandals I wore. It was like standing on needles. My soles were swollen, and I complained about it. They kept making up things about me all the time. At night they would kick my door, I would have to jump up and report my presence every quarter of an hour. The light would be constantly on, and we had to lay straight on our backs with our arms at the top of the cover. When I turned over after only a moment there would be knocking at the door again. You had to jump up and report your presence once again. The arms had to be out because sometimes people would cut their wrists. We had to lie on our backs, the bulb was lit above our heads, but people still fell asleep because of the exhaustion.

Once I was ordered by an interrogator to stand up by the wall. At that time there was paper money, and I had to keep my arms behind my back, holding the paper bill by my nose on the wall. The paper money fell down, and I got such a slap from the back that my nose broke against the wall. They were laughing about it. Sometimes they would make me sit in the corner and threaten me with a knife, but the worst types of torture were the psychological punishments. The guard would start by telling me that they were going to arrest my wife or claimed that she had already been arrested and that my kid has been taken away somewhere. They would ask, "What do you think you can do to us? We will make corpses out of you, your wives will become whores, and your children will become orphans. We will bring them up, and they will never even come to visit your grave."

What confession did they want to hear? What exactly was their goal?

They wanted to hear what I told my friend. I said, "He didn't want to hear anything from me." When I told him, he wouldn't get anything out of me, and they said that they had information from other places. I was in Klatovy for two weeks, maybe three weeks, and then they put me in a car again and took me to Pankrác. In the morning they just woke me up; I had to take my clothes off, cross the cell to the other side, take one step to the back, and lean against the wall. It got dusty down there, and I had dust up to my armpits. They were spraying us with DDT. It was like an enema. It stunk, and it burned. I came back to the cell, and there was a guy waiting for me. When I emerged he said, "Hey, I will be washing you down." So, I had to wash in the toilet. In Pankrác we washed our dishes in the toilet and drank water from the toilet because there was nowhere else. That was where I stayed for about five weeks, though I really don't know how long. Then they took us in an *anton* to Cheb. They transported eight or nine of us.

So did you confess to anything?

No, there was nothing I could confess to. There was a trial, and of course my defense attorney did a great job. He spoke to the court and acknowledged that he was a court-appointed lawyer. The court also said that it would not view the defendant with sympathy, because it's their duty not to and that they would be strict, but "fair" to my age. That was it. The prosecuting attorney made me out to be a real bad man; a drunkard and an irresponsible person. I was also psychologically warped because I was raised in a monastery.

When were you sentenced?

I had my trial in October 1952. I got eighteen years of so-called hard labor. My civil liberties were stripped away for ten years, and all of my property was confiscated. The State Senate in Cheb ruled that in my position I could divulge sensitive information about the country's defenses, which is why they sentenced me to eighteen years of hard labor. They had also suggested the death penalty, so I could be happy that I only got eighteen years. I didn't believe that the regime would last in this country for another forty years, though. I gave it five years, at a maximum six.

What exactly were you charged with?

When they were handing down the sentence, I don't know how many pages there were in the charge. In the end there was a suggestion for capital punishment. Three days before the trial the head of the Senate read it to me. The next day another man came in telling me that he was now my court appointed attorney. He introduced himself as Dominik Skutecký or something like that. He told me that I should confess everything, or I'd get the death penalty.

Where did they take you after the trial?

I was transported to the Central Camp in Jáchymov that was called Bratrství [Brotherhood]. There they shaved our heads, changed our clothes, and we received a couple new things. There were two blankets, a cup, a spoon, and clothes called *halina*. We were sorted into groups. I was sent to a place called Vršek, and then they took me to Nikolaj. After two years I was taken from Nikolaj and sent back to Rovnost [Equality]. In total I was imprisoned for eight years. I was pardoned in 1960.

What were the relations like in camp? Did you have any friends there?

I had friends. When I showed up there were two other guys who came to see me from Slavkov. I knew they worked at Mine 11, and I helped them a couple of times when I used to work at Slavkov as a mine inspector. They brought me sugar and tobacco for which they could have gone to prison for.

What was it like when you used to work there as a civilian employee and all of a sudden you had returned as a *mukl*?

Well, there was nothing I could do anything about it. I was stuck there. It was helpless. Whenever civil workers who recognized me started to approach me, I just told them, "Hey, keep back, continue your work, and don't pay any attention to me." I was worried that they would keep watching me, and other peoples' lives could be ruined and made miserable because of me. My wife lived in Jáchymov, but I never sent anyone to see her because I couldn't put her or the other person in danger too, because she was under surveillance; that I'm sure of. A couple of times when she showed up we were riding in the *Russian Bus*. Do you know what that is?

No. Could you be more specific?

Two hundred and fifty people had to stand up together according to the number that was supposed to go on the shift. They counted us on the square, and then we had to come together so that we would be touching each other's' hips and bodies. Then they went around us with

a steel rope, which was about five millimeters thick, and locked this with a padlock. In this way the whole package of people marched. I don't know if you can call it marching. We were actually jogging because the Eduard mineshaft was 800–900 meters away from Camp Nikolaj. We had to go on the main road without a walkway or guard rail. It sometimes took us an hour to get there before we started jogging there.

What were the conditions like in Camp Nikolaj?

Camp Nikolaj had a reputation for being one of the worst camps. The Commander there was Schamberger [Ladislav]. There was also a prisoners' group, which made prisoners sentenced by the State Court sign the Socialist Commitment. These prisoners were not called "political prisoners," rather they were referred to as "state prisoners". One had to commit himself to fulfill work quotas over 100 percent. If you didn't sign it, someone in the prisoners' group would beat you up.

Did you know who was in that prisoners' commando?

Well, the boss of the group was called Jeníček⁷. The whole group consisted of twelve people, if I remember correctly. There were also guys such as Baxa, Kužela, Jirka, or Grygar. The last thing they did was beat Honza Mátl and Sošenko. I don't remember who ran up to the building and told us, but we simply declared that we would not stand for it. So we all ran to the gatehouse, and they started jumping out from the windows because they were scared. They were always summoning people to the gatehouse to be beaten up. This time the brigade got a great whipping. They took all of them to the infirmary, and Jeníček was transported to Camp L.

I want to mention the *prison university*. Can you tell me anything about it?

Well yes, there were two things. First the guards gave us indoctrinations. There was a guy we nicknamed, *Filth*. He was a cultural educator⁸, and he would wake us up at 11 p.m. and summon us to the cultural house in the camp. All shifts had to go there, and he would lecture us for an hour. He would always say, "*Filth*, is that right?" Those who were sitting in the first row would have to nod their heads. "Is that right, *Filth*?" That's why we called him *Filth*. Once he gave a lecture called *Stalin Sent a Word*. This meant he lectured to us for one hour about Stalin's message. Also, there was another guy, another cultural educator, we called *The One Who Told Seven Lies*. This one was always saying, "What I'm telling you here are the facts of what really happened." At that moment no one could laugh or he would explain to us the difference between socialism and capitalism. He would tell us to notice how long it took the Soviet Union to dig a channel from the Volga to the Don. That was the work of the socialist countries. He would then tell us to look at how long it took the capitalists to dig the English Channel. You couldn't laugh about that.

Someone suggested that we should gather in the buildings. When you asked the guards politely, they would say yes. There was always someone giving a lecture on something. For example there were *Baťovci*⁹ who told us about Baťa, his system, and so on. There were also

7 **Břetislav Jeníček** (1902–1970) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

8 **Cultural Educator** – an official position within the penal labor camp. He organized various political and ideological lectures with the aim to brainwash the prisoners and impose communist propaganda.

9 **Baťovci** – name for a group of people who attended Baťa's school. This school was established in Zlín by Tomáš Baťa who was one of the most successful businessmen during the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). He is an important icon in the history of management and business.

professors who would give lectures about philosophy or chemistry. It depended on what you wanted to hear. So this was called the University of Jáchymov. Actually, it was a good school for us, you know. You could meet a lot of good people and learn wonderful things.

Do you have any health problems from prison?

I have not seen any major health consequences, but for example, my fingers are cracking. I have these tiny little cracks. I got that from sorting the uranium. I worked four years at a place where uranium was sorted by hand. We didn't get any gloves. For a long time I had azoneurosis [not enough blood was getting to his fingertips]. To this day, whenever the weather turns cold my fingers turn white. That comes from working with a machine, but all in all I don't have any other problem.

If we look at your story through the eyes of your wife, how did she handle this separation? You were a father of a family, correct?

I think that our wives, parents, and families were psychologically affected much more, because at least those of us in the prison were together. We all had similar attitudes. We were all of the same blood group, you could say. But those who stayed at home had it very hard. People were turning their backs on them, being malicious, and intentionally treating them badly. For example, the police would visit my wife at midnight with dogs, wake her up, trash the whole apartment, and tell her that I had escaped. They would tell her that if I showed up she would have to report it or she would go to prison and that our kid would be sent away to a foster home. Then two weeks later they would tell her that they had caught me! They told the same stuff to my mom, and two weeks later they would tell her that I had been shot and wounded while trying to escape. At that time my mom had just received a permit for a visit. So she came, and coincidentally at the time I happened to be injured. Some stones had fallen on me and had cut my eyebrow. I was also a little pale. My mom said, "Boy, why are you doing this? Don't you know that you have a family?" I didn't know what she was talking about. "Well, they will kill you." Then the guard jumped up, and I replied, "Kill me?" Mom asked me where I had been shot, and I pulled up my shirt asking, "Where was I shot?" The guard ended the visit telling us that we could only talk about family matters. I told him it was a family matter if they had told my mom that her son was shot, wounded, and was constantly trying to escape! So they were harassing them as much as they could. They were pushing the women to divorce. They were switching them from one job to another, telling them that if they divorced their husbands they would get better jobs.

While you were in prison, you made small gifts that you sent to your wife. Is that right?

I sent those not only to my wife, but to all of my friends. You know we made them because we wanted to give something to our visitors. If you had a contact through a civilian worker there you could also send some things. For example, at Christmas time we made little cards, little figurines, crosses, and other small gifts.

What was your return to civilian life like?

I felt really insecure. It took me a long time before I felt civilized again. I made a good decision, taking a month off after my release. I was supposed to report to the labor office, but

I went to Slovakia instead. I told myself that I hadn't had a vacation for eight years, so why couldn't I have a rest? I let the doctors give me a proper check-up, and they sent me back. They told me to get back into shape, or it would be bad for me.

Why were they telling you this?

Well, it was because of the radioactivity exposure. I had about 14,000 white blood cells. Míla Adámek, who was a doctor prisoner studying the effects of radioactivity on people's health and who was an icon in this medical field, told me I had two to three years to live if I left the mines. When we met in 1989, I told him, "Miloš, hey you don't know how to count." He said, "What do you mean?" And I said that he had given me two to three years to live. He just replied, "Be happy that I cannot count well."

Where did you go when you came back from prison? What kind of job were you searching for?

I went back to Levice. There was an old onyx quarry there. They made various things out of it: paper weights, tables, various chess figurines, and other things made from stone. They wanted me to be a teacher at a trade school to teach penmanship. The doctors recommended that I get away from the radioactivity for a while and slowly let it work its way out, so I listened to them. They won't let me go down into the shafts anymore because I was seriously ill. But I kept bravely going down until May when I was released.

What do you think about Charter 77, the dissidents, and the year 1989¹⁰?

Well, in my opinion they really didn't want communism to disappear. They wanted communists to deliver on the promises they made in Helsinki. Why didn't they make dissidents out of us? Why did they execute and make criminals out of us? They executed 240 people. They beat to death many of them. Many of them died in mines and many on the borders. No one knows exactly how many today. There are many people who were reported missing, but somewhere their bones lie, and these people were truly dissidents. They once brought Goldstücker¹¹, Hromádka, and Láďa – a guy who was a member of the Central Committee – to Rovnost. Goldstücker was beaten at Rovnost really badly. They beat him like a horse. Do you know why? Because he made a statement at the United Nations that we did not have barbed wires in Czechoslovakia.

How do you, as a political prisoner, look at modern history? What would be the easiest way to tell and inform this younger generation about what has happened?

Tell them the truth. It's necessary to speak about these things. Freedom doesn't mean I can do anything I want. Freedom means having responsibility so that things don't fall apart. It means toleration. I don't care who is communist today. That is his own business as long as he doesn't

10 **Charter 77** – an informal civic initiative in communist Czechoslovakia from 1976 to 1992, named after the document Charter 77 from January 1977. Signed and co-authored by Václav Havel and other dissidents in January 1977, it was a loose civic organization and movement which called upon the Czechoslovak government to adhere to the human rights agreed upon in the Helsinki 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international agreements.

11 **Eduard Goldstücker** (1913–2000) – a Slovak of Jewish origin, professor of German literature, and Czechoslovak Ambassador to Israel since 1948, member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Imprisoned in 1951 and sentenced to a life imprisonment. He spent three and a half years in prison, rehabilitated in 1955. He protested against Soviet occupation in 1968 which forced him into exile in the UK. Returned to the country in 1990.

do any harm to others. Or if someone is very religious. His faith is his own business, and he can be in any political party that he likes. I imagine that in this government we have the positions for a reason so as not to harm the nation. The opposition and the ruling coalition must agree on things that would benefit the whole country. The Germans were able to de-Nazify their offices. Why weren't we able to do that here?

What comes to mind when I say Jáchymov?

Jáchymov. One would rather forget about bad things. You can't forget it, but you can stop thinking about it. It is like if someone does something bad to you, you forgive, but you do not forget. That's how I feel about Jáchymov. When you say "Jáchymov," the labor camps don't instantly come to mind. When people speak about them, I can recall everything like now. But they don't immediately come into my head.

After you were released, did you ever meet any of your guards, court prosecutors, or anyone else who influenced your life's path during that those years?

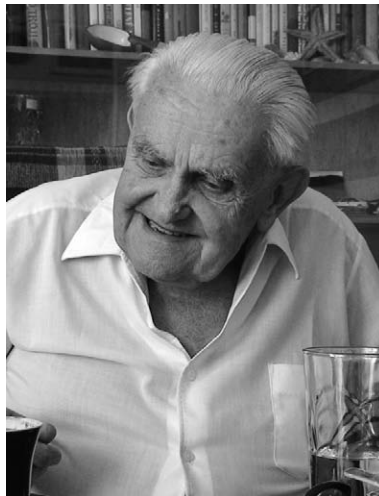
Yes, I met them. For example, when I applied for rehabilitation in 1969 the lady prosecutor took a look at it and said, "Well yeah, that's clear." She gave me my charge and asked me whether I had read it, and I said I hadn't. So she asked, "Why did you sign it?" I just said that I had to. If I didn't it would have been bad for me. So everything looked in order. I was summoned to attend one of the last court hearings. I went to the Regional Court in Plzeň, and the sitting judge was the same judge who had sentenced me. He was now chairman of the committee that was supposed to rehabilitate me. So I told myself, "That's it." He called me to the coffee table and asked me, "Do you know what happened in Chile?" I said, "Sure, there was a plot. Pinochet started a revolution." Then he said, "You see, then you cannot be rehabilitated." So because Pinochet started a rebellion in Chile, they could not rehabilitate me. So I asked, "What does Chile have to do with it?" He answered, "Well, because we are all in the same camp." So I wasn't rehabilitated then. I was finally rehabilitated after 1989. I submitted another application, and in a week I had a statement that I had been rehabilitated.

What do you think about the moral rehabilitation? Do political prisoners get enough attention?

You know, I don't support the glorification of anyone. I only think the biggest satisfaction would come if the Bolsheviks would say they were sorry. If the political prisoners have accused someone, the process should be carried out to its logical conclusion. The person doesn't have to go to prison, since these people are also old. The nation should know what really happened. I'm not calling for anyone's neck, but there were cases when people were executed under horrible circumstances. Even the surviving relatives of the executed never received any compensation. Money cannot make up for their loss. No one cares about these people today, although they live in deep poverty. Communists just laugh and ask whether someone should be compensated or they should be given back their property which they stole from them in the first place. What kind of law is that? This is the time we live in and this is the law, and we, who are too old, can't do anything about it. It's a pity we are not twenty years younger.

Thank you very much for the interview.

“Just work as well as possible, and do not believe in people who speak too much.”



Dr. Jan Pospíšil was born on August 13, 1916, in Černovice by Tábor. He studied law in Brno where he also met Dr. Stránský, university lecturer of criminal law, journalist, and politician who soon became the Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of Education. He joined Dr. Stránský's cabinet and worked on legislation changes by February 1948. Eventually, working for a non-communist Minister and helping him to escape brought him to prison. He was arrested on January 12, 1949, violently interrogated and tortured, and sentenced on February 24, 1950, for high treason and espionage to twenty years of prison. He went through Bartolomějská remand prison, Pankrác in Prague, Plzeň-Bory, shortly to Ruzyně prison in Prague, and then to the Jáchymov penal labor camp Mariánská, Camp XII. near Slavkov and the uranium grinder in the *Red Tower of Death* where he spent one and half year in the Grinder No. 2. After that he was transferred to Camp Bytíz near Příbram from where he was released in 1960 after eleven years and four months of prison. After release, he became a TV mechanic for twenty years, and after 1989 he worked as lawyer of The Office of the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism. He died in 2010.

Interview with Mr. Jan Pospíšil

Interviewer: Tomáš Bouška

Where were you born and what was your childhood like?

I was born on August 13, 1916 as the second son of the math and physics professor who taught at the first vocational secondary school in Brno. I wasn't born in Brno but in Černovice near Tábor, which was a small town in Central Bohemia. During WWI, when I was three months old, I caught dysentery. It got so bad that our family doctor said, "Mrs. Pospíšilová, this baby wasn't meant to live, accept this." He said that about me. Today he would probably be amazed because the baby that didn't look like it would live is almost 92 years old.

I spent the majority of my life in Brno. I attended the Fourth High School where I also graduated. If I remember correctly, I wasn't one of the most obedient kids in school. I was the class clown who always got into trouble somehow. I graduated in 1934 and 1935. I graduated in both years, because I wanted to go on to study law and had to practice more Latin. That meant I had to wait, and after a year I had to take the special graduation exam in Latin. I also wanted to improve my German, so I signed up for the German Technical School in Brno. I also got my first lessons in politics there, because that place was a stronghold of Nazism. What I remember was that there were three of us pure-blood Czechs. After passing Latin, I started at the law faculty where I was studying law and doing sports. I did rowing, athletics, hockey, and dancing [laughs] I lived a happy life.

Did you study law in Prague or Brno?

I studied law in Brno because the faculty in Brno had a much better reputation than the one in Prague. There was Professor Vážný, who was the European authority in Roman law. Then there was Professor Weyr, who was an expert on constitutional law. Also Professor Baxa taught there. We had a really good array of professors, but there were also disadvantages; for example, when we went to our first state exams, out of the eighteen students who entered the exams, there were only three of us who passed. I studied quite hard and passed the majority of exams with honors. I finished my classes just in time for that unlucky year when they closed down all the universities in the Czech Republic¹. I was also hit by that, because just before I entered the graduation ceremony and despite the fact that I had passed all my exams, the universities were shut down. So I was a lawyer without a graduation ceremony; that didn't matter though. At first I got a job in the Pension Institute in Brno, where I stayed for about three months. The Pension Institute was divided into Czech and German offices, and the Czech one was downsizing. It was natural there for the last man who arrived to be the first to be let go. So I started to

¹ **International Students Day** – on the occasion of the funeral of Jan Opletal, a student who died protesting the Nazi's power's harsh repression of student demonstrators, another demonstration was held on November 15, 1939, and was the last demonstration protesting the German Nazi occupation on Czech and Moravian land. On November 17, Hitler gave the command that all demonstrations would be strictly punished with the use of army power. The Czech universities and colleges were closed down, the main representatives of university students were locked up and executed, and 1,200 Czech students were beaten and dragged to the concentration camps. To commemorate these deaths, November 17 was established as International Students Day in London on November 17, 1941.

visit various shops and workshops of radio businessmen. I helped them to repair and fix radios, which other technicians didn't know how to do. It was a good job, though it was dangerous. Meanwhile, my brother who was a math teacher at the University in Brno was locked up by the Gestapo. He was locked up, sentenced, and died shortly after being released from prison.

Why was your brother sentenced?

He was sentenced for *Hochverrat*, which means high treason, because he was a member of a resistance group. My uncle, Dr. Vilém Pospíšil, who was the ex-governor of the National Bank, came to Brno for a visit. He looked into what I was doing, and he gave me recommendations for a job at the newly established labor office where I was supposed to specialize in different areas but still things I would normally do. Two months later, my uncle was visited in Brno by the Gestapo, and after that visit he was found dead in his apartment.

What year was that in?

That was in 1941. I was at the office working in the welfare department at the so-called *Familienhilfe* and the *Sonderhilfe*. I stayed almost to the end at these departments—and in the last three months the Gestapo became interested in me, but it wasn't that pressing, because they had other work to do as well. There were trenches all over Brno since it was in danger of a direct attack from the Russian Army. The government-in-exile came back from London², and they were going through Brno; and Dr. Stránský³ also came back. He had taught criminal law to us at the law faculty. Since he knew me and knew I was interested in politics, he asked me to join his cabinet. At first he was a Minister of Justice, and then he went to the top level of government as a Deputy Chairman. By that time I was interested in a real job, so I accepted his offer and started January 2, 1946, at the top level of government and got into his cabinet. In his cabinet I was working on national economic policy, and I was preparing a package of potential laws that were being considered at that time for Minister Stránský. I worked there until the elections in 1946. After the elections, Minister Stránský switched to the Ministry of Education, and I went there as his secretary. I stayed at the Ministry of Education until that infamous February. You can clearly see that I'm not a giant and I don't look like I would like to fight, but I was dragged outside by seven guys holding submachine guns.

When did that happen?

That was February 24, 1948. I must have received a really bad record in the black list for the Communist Party, because from that time on I was unemployed. I had a package of applications where I was asking for employment at various ministries and also the private sector, but I always got an answer saying, "The working class does not consider you to be a reliable person." In better cases they answered that the position has already been filled. But since I had a lot

2 The **Czechoslovak Government-in-exile** (sometimes styled officially as the **Provisional Government of Czechoslovakia**) was an informal title conferred upon the Czechoslovak National Liberation Committee, initially by British diplomatic recognition. The Committee was originally created by the former Czechoslovak President, Edvard Beneš in Paris, France in October 1939. Unsuccessful negotiations with France for diplomatic status, as well as the impending Nazi occupation of France, forced the Committee to withdraw to London in 1940. It was the legitimate government for Czechoslovakia throughout the WWII.

3 **Jaroslav Stránský** (1884–1973) – politician, journalist, university lecturer and lawyer. During the WWII and after 1948, he worked in the Czechoslovak exile.

of time on my hands, I was able to do various things. I was mainly interested in border crossings and the checkpoints, because Minister Stránský was getting ready to escape. So I started organizing his escape and became really successful at this. With Minister Stránský we said our goodbyes at the summerhouse, Hvězda, in July 1948. That is where he got into a van disguised as a worker and crossed the border near Karlovy Vary the same day. His family went to the West before he did.

Can you remember anything in detail about the organization of the escape? How did you prepare it?

A customs officer named Snopek helped us during the escape. Also, a businessman from Prague who was selling carpets was involved in the process. His name was Losenický, and he was able to go abroad to buy carpets. He would get rides from Mr. Hons, who had a freight company. Mr. Losenický escaped one time before Christmas before 1948 around Vimperk. Hons was locked up because his own son reported him. I was locked up much earlier. The escape itself was talked about in 1954, although I was locked up January 12, 1949. Hons was locked up in 1954. I was sentenced on February 20, 1950, and in 1954 I was taken from my job site in Jáchymov to another round of trials in a so-called JAV prison. I even helped to build this interrogation cells, since I was in a group that worked on building it.

Did you lead people across the borders regularly?

When I was unemployed, I would do this from time to time, and I helped a couple of people. I was especially interested in the areas around Vimperk and Karlovy Vary.

Why did you choose these two places?

I chose Vimperk because I knew Šumava, and Karlovy Vary because I had a connection there through Hons senior.⁴ But I will not speak about these things, because I know Drtina [Minister of Justice in 1945–1948] made a big mistake when he spoke about the way he got out of the Protectorate because after that, the only possible way of escape was closed. I will not be running away anymore, but I could close some else's way if I talk about it now.

I understand.

At Vimperk it was good; there was a good organizational structure, but then the trap closed sometime around May 1949. I found out that the guy named Hons, who helped us at Karlovy Vary, was probably cooperating with the Secret Police, though he didn't speak about everything – about all the cases. I helped Doctor Rohlíček, the ex-secretary to the Minister, and I was getting ready to organize another escape across the borders for Mrs. Zemínová⁵ and Mrs. Kleinerová⁶, but that didn't happen because I was locked⁶ up. Before that I was trying to have some kind of employment, so I pretended to be employed by a builder named Jiříkovský in Prague. Unfortunately, this guy was locked up based on the testimony provided by agent-walker⁷ An-

4 The narrator intentionally chose to keep the name anonymous.

5 **Fráňa Zemínová** (1882–1962) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

6 **Antonie Kleinerová** (1901–1982) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

7 **Couriers** or so-called **agent-walkers** – see the list of key words at the end of this book.

derle, and then because Jiříkovský provided testimony, I was locked up. In the end, Jiříkovský didn't testify against me at court because he died in prison, but I still got twenty years.

What happened after you were arrested?

When they locked me up, the head of the State Secret Police Jindřich Veselý⁸ was interested in my case. They didn't hold my hearing in Prague, instead they took me to Olomouc. I had a lot of friends in Prague, and they were worried about that. So then I was interrogated in Olomouc where Jindřich Veselý and another famous State Secret Police person, Kamil Pixa⁹, were. There they roughed me up. I will tell you, that was something. I was in the cellar of a police department where Pixa dragged me out of the room, took me upstairs to the first floor, blindfolded me, and took me out on the scaffolding around the building, because they were remodeling the building. They walked with me there, and they took me back downstairs. Then they put me in a car and drove me through a couple streets; my eyes were covered the whole time. Then we came back to the police department. Although your eyes are blindfolded sometimes while in custody, you can get an idea of what is happening, so I knew we were back. Then they began the hearing for me. Jindřich Veselý said, "Doctor, have you ever been kicked by a horse?" Then he punched me so hard that I had to go up about three meters high in the air. After that, I don't know how, but they burned my palms. My whole palms were burned except the place in the middle, and all the burns turned to blisters. I also had a cut on my cheek, which had already disappeared. After some time, I had appeared right behind my ear, which was full of blood and pus. From that time onwards, I couldn't hear from that ear.

How did the interrogations go?

On February 17, 1949, I was picked up by Veselý and Pixa again in a big truck. They covered my eyes with my red scarf and rode with me somewhere. I still have the scarf today. Pixa said, "You will pick up a red cold any ways, so that scarf will match." We stopped somewhere by a roadside to urinate, and when I went Pixa fired off a whole round of bullets right next to my ear. From that time on, when I wanted to urinate, I had a hard time getting started. After some time it got better. Then we stopped somewhere, and they took me out of the car. I took my clothes off, eyes still closed, and they put me in between two big bars. There I was left standing for a little while. Then I was taken to a cell where there was nothing but a table and a chair. They let me sit down naked on a chair, and we started the interrogation. I didn't know where all this happened until two years ago. Then I found out that those were cells at Ruzyně. There were twenty-four cells together, twelve upstairs and twelve downstairs. You weren't allowed to say your name there, and you couldn't see anyone – not even the policeman or your guard. He only said, "Open your window," and pushed your food inside with his foot. Then I was taken to Bartoměřská and from there to Pankrác¹⁰. I didn't have any records about the stay at

8 **Jindřich Veselý** (1906–1964) – the member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. From 1939 to 1945 he was in a Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald, and in October 1945 he was inducted as a member of the National Security Corps and later became a Commander of State Secret Police from 1948–1950. On March 5, 1950, he tried to commit suicide for the first time. After he was recalled from his post as the Director of Institution of Socialist History on March 19 (20) 1964, his second suicide attempt ended in death.

9 **Kamil Pixa** – one of the founders of the Communist State Secret Police who became a representative of the 1st sector of The Head Administration of State Secret Police in 1951.

10 **Bartolomějská, Ruzyně and Pankrác** are police and remand prisons in Prague.

Ruzyně in my papers. It wasn't nice there. I was directly opposite the room where they held the interrogations, and I heard all of it. That wasn't nice at all.

Do you remember who you heard from that room?

I remember an agent-walker and a woman. I didn't know the names though.

So you were arrested at the beginning of 1949?

Yes, I was arrested at midnight on January 12, 1949. They came for me in my apartment and checked it out. They sealed off my library. My daughter who was seventeen months old tore down all the seals the next day. I didn't know that though; my wife told me that later. From there I was taken to Bartolomějská and then to Olomouc.

What exactly did they want to hear from you?

Jiříkovský gave testimony claiming that I was probably helping people to cross the borders, but he also talked about a radio station, and since I had a close connection with the radios, because I was an amateur radio operator, they were also interested in that.

What was your political affiliation?

I was a National Socialist¹¹, but I wasn't really active politically. I was very busy as a General Secretary.

Did you confess to anything in Olomouc?

No, they didn't even document it there. It was just a beating session.

Do you remember any names of people who beat you there?

Yes, I remember a name from Olomouc. He was a member of the State Security Police named Housírek; he was one of the men in charge there.

I know that it's not easy to remember this, but could you describe in detail what they did to you during the hearing?

During the hearing they were spinning me around. That means that they punched me anywhere so that I would move away, but closer to another person. Then they were also beating me with truncheons. Note this: that the majority of *mukls* are deaf in the left ear. Why? Because they were always hit by the truncheon on the left ear because most of the policemen were right-handed. Note that.

Who was the person making a case against you?

In Ruzyně it was Pixa. Then my trial was held in July 1949, when they locked up Horáková¹² and would drag me out of my cell at midnight. She was supposed to say that we had ridden the trams together once, and she would give me warnings that people had kept talking about me, because I was the one who kept helping people across the border.

11 Mr. Pospíšil means Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. Do not confuse with the German NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party).

12 JUDr. Milada Horáková (1901–1950) – see the list of main personalities at the end of the book.

Was this true? Did you know Dr. Horáková?

Of course I did – she was a Member of Parliament, but the fact we knew each other meant nothing. I would still be in prison, even if she did not know something about me. She probably knew something about me from Zemínová. This lady had her leg broken, and she was learning to walk again afterwards. There was man named Kočí with whom I was preparing her escape. I don't know whether that was his real name or not.

Where was the file or case written that they had built up against you?

In Ruzyně and later in Bartolomějská.

When did the trial start?

The trial was on February 22 and 24 in Prague. The head judge was Dr. Rudý¹³, and as a counsel for the prosecution; Dr. Brožová¹⁴. Dr. Rudý was trying really hard to put me in prison. We began to quarrel a couple of times and with Mrs. Brožová, as well. I had my defense lawyer, and he was a really nice man. He informed me that Jiříkovský was dead. So I could speak about everything. So we all were arguing and, since I was resisting them, the court was postponed until the 24. So I was sentenced two days later, but that didn't really matter.

Who was the defence lawyer, what was his name?

Dr. Langer from Prague. He was older than me, a very decent man. He was forbidden to continue his job soon after that.

Were you alone in court?

No, I was sentenced along with: Dr. Josef Dráb from Beroun, a friend of Otakar Losenický – sentenced to four years of prison because he was meant to know about his anti-regime activities but did not report it. Běla Veselá from Prague, a journalist who was meant to know that Minister Stránský was about to flee the country but did not report it either. She got two years.

What were you sentenced for then?

At that time a written sentence did not exist publically, that means they wrote it down, but it stayed only in my records with no public notification. The verdict came much later, after the hearing with Hons. I got Paragraph 1, high treason, and Paragraph 5, espionage¹⁵. The other reason that I got sentenced was because I was a high state official. I knew many people in the government since I had served as counselor. They tried to prove that I played tennis with Major Katttek, who was the head of espionage of Czechoslovakia in Prague and then later of

13 **JUDr. Vojtěch Rudý** (1910–?) – a lawyer since 1936. Originally named Benjamin Roth. He was a pre-war communist of Jewish origin. In 1944, he and his family were transported to Auschwitz. He was the only survivor. After the establishment of the State Court in 1948 he volunteered to work in it. He was involved in many political processes. Political prisoners, who were with him during his long career met him nicknamed the Red Executioner. He worked as a judge at the Regional Court in Prague in 1970s.

14 **Ludmila Brožová-Polednová** (1921–2015) – the ex-communist counsel for the prosecution is especially infamous for the trial that resulted in the execution of politician Milada Horáková. In 2008 she was sentenced for an eight-year imprisonment, but served less than two years of that sentence, because at age 89 she was released in 2010 with a pardon from President Václav Klaus.

15 **The Law 231/48 Sb.** – the clause by which many of the political prisoners in Czechoslovakia were sentenced.

the whole of Europe. They didn't like that I was also meeting diplomats from the West. I got twenty years of prison. The original suggestion was a rope (hanging), but that didn't happen.

What ran through your mind when you heard the verdict?

It felt like being put in cold storage for a while, but all in all, I was quite calm.

What happened after the trial, and what did they do with you next?

After this trial I was transferred to Bory prison¹⁶. There I was put in a cell called Waldes. From there, I don't know why, I was transferred to the book workshop after half a year. That was wonderful. We had our own stove there so we could warm up the place, and we had our own little room there, as well. Three of us were state prisoners¹⁷ and the rest were retribution prisoners. The guards didn't order us around, and we lived quite peacefully.

Do you remember any significant prison mates from Bory?

When I was in section B I slept on a single bed with a Mr. Podsedník, the ex-mayor of Brno. Then there was also Dr. Cahín and two pilots, Mikš, who was also called Divůšek and Nový. Divůšek was shot, and up until now he still has a bullet in his shoulder. The guy named Nový crashed his plane when he tried to escape Czechoslovakia and broke his leg. So these two guys were pilots. Then there was Cyrda Musil, who used to represent the country in cross-country skiing and who I had met before when I went skiing in Vysočina. This guy was later killed in Canada. He escaped from Jihlava, and he made it abroad; from there he traveled to Canada, and then he was killed by his girlfriend's brother who was Yugoslavian.

Do you remember Gusta Bubník?

Yeah, I know him from Bory from Camp Number XII. He was on XII, but he would go down underneath and I was just a worker upstairs or above the mines.

Do you also remember Pravomil Raichl¹⁸?

I know Pravomil Raichl very well, because I was with him in the same cell. I remember him talking through the window once with another soldier from the army, and then he was caught. Brabec¹⁹ beat him with a short whip, and they sent him into solitary confinement. Pravomil Raichl was missing a piece of muscle in his leg, because he had been shot several times in the past in the Soviet prisons before he was jailed with us. He was a good boy. He slept in the corner of B in Number 8.

Where were you sent after a half year at Bory?

From Bory I went to Jáchymov in B at the Central Camp. Then I was sent to Camp Mariánská²⁰ for about two months. In fact, that was a camp for youth. Then I went to Camp Number XII. I went back to Jáchymov in 1952, and I stayed there until the end. Well, not actually until the

16 **Plzeň-Bory Prison** – a facility situated in western Bohemia. During the communist era it was one of the strictest prisons and was used mainly for political prisoners.

17 **State Prisoners** – political prisoners sentenced by the State court.

18 **Pravomil Raichl** – see the list of key words and personalities at the end of this book.

19 **Václav Brabec** – see the list of key words and personalities at the end of this book.

20 **Mariánská** – one of the penal labor camps at the area of Jáchymov district.

real end, because in January of 1960 I was taken again to some hearing in Ruzyně. Then I was released from Ruzyně in 1962, but I was forbidden to be in Prague, so for the whole day until 9 o'clock I was followed by a policeman. I would tell him, "Just go home, this doesn't make any sense at all." "No, I have to stay with you." I was walking with him all around Prague in Na Příkopě, and I bought a kilogram [2.2 pounds] of nougat chocolate for my daughter. I got home earlier than the boys from camp did. My wife had a schoolmate whose husband was in the same camp that I was, and his name was Razík. He wrote in a letter that he would come home, and my wife kept crying because I didn't write anything, but I came home earlier than he did.

What kind of work did you do at Mariánská?

At Mariánská I worked primarily as a bricklayer and a digger, but mainly I was laying brick. Eventually I even became a boss of a little group where eight of us were lawyers and I was giving commands, because I was the only one who knew how to do these things. I am, for example, able to allocate and do similar tasks. I knew how to work with dolomite, and I had a soft pencil; so there were eight lawyers, one farmer from Košice, and another forester from Orava, both Slovaks. So this was our little group. They had plans, and we would build.

What did you build?

We built houses in housing developments. At least it was a housing development that we worked on in Příbram, at the House of Culture; then our group built a whole kindergarten, where there were special round columns made from concrete, and we did all of that. Our group did the whole building. They would take us there from Camp Vojna²¹. It once happened, for example, that we were about to leave by bus, and there was a woman standing and waving on the road. The bus driver stopped, and I found out it was my wife [laughing], and it took the commander of the escort from morning until three in the afternoon to figure out whose wife it was because there were five of us whose name was Pospíšil. So she was standing by the bus, waving to us. She was there with other wives like Mrazíková and Plocková, who would run around these camps searching for us.

How did they end up there?

They got there somehow. You know, you will not believe this, but when I was at Bory and there was stuff running out of my ear, my wife made such a commotion that the doctor Chudáček, who was at Bory as the main doctor, was able to arrange it so that every day I would be taken to the medical center for treatment. She was not afraid and she insisted upon things.

What was it like to finally have contact with your family? When did you see your daughter again for the first time?

In the beginning, if we were ever actually allowed, we could have visit every half a year. Then it was every quarter a year, but I'm not sure if we could really call them visits. There was glass, and no contact was possible. At Bory I had a prison mate, Mr. Spálenka, who was a member

21 **Vojna** – a POW camp used 1947–1949 for German Prisoners of War, it was later turned into a forced labor camp from 1949–1951 and finally a penal labor camp for prisoners from 1951 to 1961.

of the army guard who had been looking after President Beneš²². This man's wife was English, and she took for a visit also her small daughter. She could be two years old. She put her hand to a small gap and the prison guard Brabec hit her. A guy from the British Embassy came with her for visits. He started such a commotion that we all lost our visitors because they canceled all of them. I saw for myself how Brabec hit the girl.

How long did you stay at Camp Mariánská, and what did you do there?

At Mariánská I had very short stays, twice for two months I think. The thing that happened was that the prison doctor at Bory put in my record that I was refusing his treatment and that I was faking an inflammation of my ear. That was bullshit of course. At Mariánská there was a German doctor, a very polite man, and this guy said, "What kind of bullshit is that? How can you pretend to have inflammation?" So they sent me to the hospital in Karlovy Vary. I stayed there for a week. During that time they brought my old acquaintance there, Dr. Pešek who used to be secretary to Mr. Nebesář, who was the head of the Czechoslovak National Bank. These two guys were already in prison as well. Pešek was being interrogated, and they took him to the hospital because his heart was inflamed, and he finally died there. He recognized me, but I didn't recognize him, because he looked so much older. He asked, "That's Dr. Pospíšil right?" and finally I asked, "And who are you?" He said Pešek. Thanks to that I realized that we already knew each other.

Could you tell me anything about the legendary escape from the Camp XII²³?

Well, as for the escape from Number XII, that happened on the second day I got there. I was in Block 1, and there was one priest with me. This priest was supposed to go on the shift with the same group that was planning to escape, but the group changed it so someone else could go with them. Then, in the middle of the night, we were taken outside and forced to stand in a circle. Bodies of the dead boys were lying on the ground, and the Commander was kicking them and jumping around. They took out two who were caught alive. We could see they were really badly beaten. They were supposed to walk around and point out those of us who knew about the escape. These two were not really sane at that moment. Anyways they walked around and took two boys from our group. Later in the nineties, I got deeper into this case as a member of the ÚDV²⁴. I found out that the whole thing happened completely differently and that the planned escape was known about beforehand. The guard who was helping with the escape had been in prison before, and they had a trial with him previously. They called this guy Frenchie, because he was an ex-patriot from France. So the guards knew about the escape in advance.

22 **Edvard Beneš** (1884–1948) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

23 **Camp XII Escape** – a prisoner escape attempt which happened at night from October 14 to 15 1951. Eleven prisoners escaped from the shaft no. 14 in camp XII from the Jáchymov uranium mines. The group was unsuccessful, however, and on the next day the majority of the escaped prisoners were caught and shot. Out of eleven only Karel Kukal and Zdeněk Štich survived. The rest were either killed or executed. The memories of this escape are described by Karel Kukal in his book *Ten Crosses*.

24 **The Office of the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism, Police of the Czech Republic (ÚDV)** – a committee established in 1995 in order to expose and to prosecute criminal acts from the period 1948–1989 where it could not be decided by final judgment for political reasons. The ÚDV is located in Prague, it enjoys a full-state competence and in order to arrange the work a more efficient way another detached branch office was established in Brno.

Did Karel Kukal know about all this when he wrote his book about the escape²⁵?

He didn't, and neither did Štich. That was interesting because Štich had been beaten so badly that he stopped speaking. When he was in the hospital a policeman was trying to find out whether he was pretending by burning his toes with a cigarette. He started speaking much later, and he is still alive. He doesn't know about anything that happened there since he has a complete memory gap.

What exactly did you do in Camp 12?

I went to the housing development and lay concrete. Then I became unemployed because in 1953 they didn't have any other work for us.

What did Camp L²⁶ look like when you got there?

In L there was a great deal of starvation and hazing. I was there and saw how they put a hat on Commander *Šlachtecký's* [Miroslav Píbil by civil name] head and tore off his shoulder patches. This is what happened: a bus was sent to L that had equipment for X-raying lungs. The night shift went to bed, and shortly after that they were woken again to get their X-rays done. Prisoners started getting really angry, and they started fighting. It ended up that someone put a hat on the Commander's head and tore off his shoulder patches, and the dog handler was such an idiot that he brought his dog there. So they brought the dog there, and the dog bit the Deputy Commander in his ass...

Imagine that we received for processing a box of 270 kilos [594 pounds] of ore, and it wasn't full yet. It was pure uranium. The worst thing was that in the Camp L the purest uranium ore was produced, and the ventilation was directed straight to the camp. Yet, before this there was no ventilation at all.

Were you employed in the grinding department?

Yes, I was at the grinding department No. 2²⁷.

How long did you stay in Camp L?

I stayed a year and a half. I was at the grinding department, and then I was transferred to the penal labor camp Bytíz by Příbram. From there I had to go to court because I was called to give testimony on someone. Ultimately, I said that I did not know the person. He said he didn't know me either, and in this way it was done. Then I asked the judge for my lost wages that day since I had to come and testify for a guy I didn't know. I suggested that the member of the State Secret Police who called me to testify should pay for my lost wages. The judge only laughed. What could they do to me, throw me in jail? They could put me into solitary confinement, but that would be normal. In Camp L we were sent there on every national holiday. For example on day of peasants! On May 1, on October Revolution or the Victorious February they came for us with blankets, and we knew what was coming up next.

25 KUKAL, Karel. *Deset křížů [Ten Crosses]*. Rychnov nad Kněžnou, 2003.

26 **Camp L** – sometimes called also a liquidation camp. There was a *Red Tower of Death* where the prisoners were in direct contact with radioactive uranium while sorting and grinding it in this building.

27 **Grinding department** – the department within the Jáchymov mining district where the uranium ore was ground into a soft powder (see also the *Red Tower of Death*).

What was solitary confinement like?

The solitary cells were alright. It used to be a pig sty. Before the cells were in a cellar meant for potatoes or coal. There was also a great deal of bullying when we were in solitary confinement. There were thousands of barrels which we were storing here and there for nothing. A pile of sand was transported from here to there, back and forth. In winter we had to take all the hot coals from the fire place at 6 o'clock in the evening. There was no heat. All these buildings in the camp were standing on pylons, and most of them had special linings so the buildings wouldn't fall apart, but Camp L was the only one where the lining was missing so under the floor you could hear the wind blowing. There was no water and no showers. Those were outside of solitary confinement, we got only cold water. I remember Radim Kuthan washing his face with coffee. There was nothing else, there was simply nothing else!

Can you remember your prison number?

017764 and then they changed it to 02008, but for the longest time I had the first one.

What comes to mind when you hear the name Jáchymov today?

Well you know, I can't really say it nicely.

In total, how many years did you stay in prison?

Eleven years, four months, and couple days.

What was it like to return to civilian life?

I was released by amnesty. My family was alright, but it was something like a whale of tears. The landlord let me into the house and I rang the doorbell, and I could hear how my daughter was running towards it. She was thirteen years old. My wife's schoolmate got a message that her husband was coming back, but my family didn't hear anything from me. In spite of that, they expected me.

How did you look for new employment?

First I started as a bricklayer and carpenter in a company called *Stavba* [Construction] in Židenice. They were bigger thieves than criminals, because for all the work I did I only earned about a thousand crowns a month. These people were the bigger thieves. We worked in small groups; the maximum number was seven people. I was writing a building book for them, and I could hear how a bricklayer said, "Hey, what are you doing? How come you are writing a building book? Doctors are supposed to do that." Then the master builder said, "He's not supposed to do that. He was in prison." I stayed in this company for only a short while, because fortunately my mother-in-law saw an announcement that *Svazarm*²⁸ was opening a course for TV mechanics, and so she said, "Please go there. You know how to do these things." So I went and they told me, "Well, the course is running. Go and ask if they will accept you." So I went, and this teacher Kůra said, "But the course is already running, and there wouldn't be anything for you, man." We talked it over there, and he finally said, "You know how to do all this. You know what? In two weeks there are the exams for new TV mechanics and technicians, and

28 *Svazarm* or *Union for Cooperation with the Army* – was the largest paramilitary organisation in Czechoslovakia.

I will sign you up. If you do well on the exam, I will give you a job; if not, you can try again next year." I passed with an A, and I started working as a TV mechanic. If you remember, I was studying at the German technical school, but I never talked about it much. For twenty years I would work as a TV repairman [laughing].

Did you go back to the law?

Yes, I did. I worked for the Office of the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism in the 1990s.

What long-term effects did prison life have on your health?

Well, my ear is the first thing. I'm deaf as a post in that ear, and I think that I had a problem with my colon and problems with my blood due to prison life. In January 2008 I had an operation where they took about twenty centimeters out of my colon because I was bleeding into my intestines. I also have a medical statement that I have only 2,700,000 red blood cells and in 1959 I had 3,300,000, but a man is supposed to have about 5,000,000. I had problems with hemoglobin. All the problems I've had are a result of the radioactivity.

When you look at your life and what you went through, is there anything you would want to say to the young people?

I would only want to tell them to work as best they can and not to believe people who speak too much. They should always look to see if one is doing what he says he is doing. People today talk too much.

Thank you for the interview.

“Live in such a way that you will not do harm to anyone else.”



Hubert Procházka was born on December 27, 1930, in Brno. Both of his parents were medical doctors, though he lost his father in an accident when he was five. In 1946 he joined Czechoslovak National Socialist Party and continued to be an active Scout. After 1948 he helped to print and distribute anti-communist leaflets, communicated with persecuted priests, and according to the State Secret Police maintained the radio connection for couriers. He studied medicine at the Charles University in Prague in the early 1950s. He was arrested in the age of twenty-one and sentenced to eleven years of prison for being a member of the group “Scout Detachment Beneš”. He worked in the Jáchymov *Red Tower of Death* where uranium ore was milled and in the camp hospital. As a result of interrogations he lost several teeth and the hearing in his left ear; as a result of working in the camps he got hepatitis and skin cancer. He was released at the end of 1958. He has been an active member of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic since 1990. In 2012, he was awarded the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

Interview with Mr. Hubert Procházka

Interviewer: Tomáš Bouška

What do you remember about your youth?

I was born December 27, 1930, in Brno to the family of a psychiatry professor whose name I share; Hubert Procházka. My mom was a doctor, but a housewife at that time. I have a sister who is two-and-a-half years younger than me. She is a doctor of pathology in Prague. My dad was shot in 1935 by a madman at Zelný Market in the city of Brno. Mom was Czech, so we moved to Hradec Králové, where we lived until 1946. Then my mother became a lead doctor working with radiology at the Janské Lázně spa. We lived there until the February of 1948. Then they fired her, and for about two years she was jobless. Then she started working in the Physical Therapy Department in Pardubice. During that time we lived in a family house in Heřmanův Městec¹. The house was constructed and remodeled by my grandfather.

How did you struggle through the WWII when you didn't have a father?

My mom held a normal doctor's practice as a neurologist, so we made it through the war quite well. I went through the five classes of primary school before starting a classic eight-year Gymnasium [type of secondary school that prepares students for higher education], which I had to postpone for a year. Since I was born in December, I began school half a year earlier. But I lost a year after primary school when, at the beginning of the Occupation, the Germans began using a principle of Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – and because they thought that I was a member of the bourgeoisie, I wasn't accepted to the Gymnasium. However, it was changed again in another year, because by that time the changes were happening quickly. I graduated in 1950 and went to study medicine for one year at Hradec Králové. But then they threatened that the Medical Faculty would be changed to the Army Academy, and so I transferred to Prague.

Do you have any special memories of February 1948? Were you politically active in anyway?

I was a member of the National Socialistic Youth² and the Scouts. I was active as a Scout since the age of seven. I was also with the Water Scouts...but when I left Hradec Králové to move to Janské Lázně in 1947, I became a little less involved since this tradition wasn't in the border land and contact was limited. My mother wasn't a member of any political party, but would more or less cooperate with the People's Party. She would give lectures to the party about various medical fields – mainly physical therapy. So we could say that she was more or less politically active.

How did you come to join the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party? Was it your decision?

It was strictly my decision since the rest of the family was Christian. I voted for the National Socialists because I was convinced that it stood the furthest to the right.

1 Heřmanův Městec – a town in Eastern Bohemia, in the region of the town Chrudim.

2 Mr. Procházka means Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. Do not confuse with German NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party).

What year did you join?

In 1946 we moved from Hradec Králové so that my mom could travel to the United States in order to study polio for over half a year. She received a grant from the American Red Cross and one of Roosevelt's foundations. Roosevelt himself had polio – he was practically working from a chair all the time. During the time that she was away, we stayed at Heřmanův Městec for about a year. She left in October and came back around Easter of the following year, so it was almost one whole school year. Then I would kind of jump from one school to another. Over the course of my first year of grammar school I went to Chrudim first, then attended another half year in Trutnov, and then spent the rest of the time in Chrudim until graduation. It wasn't possible to do it any other way.

How would you define your so-called “anti-regime” activities? Were you actually aware that you were doing something wrong?

Yes, of course I was. We started to issue leaflets, and I also made contact with two agents – Eliáš and Marcal [Jaroslav]. They were connected to the CIC³. The one named Milan [Bohumil] Eliáš had an uncle at the American Army in Germany. Therefore they had a direct connection with Germany, and I worked as a wireless operator. In addition to that, thanks to my Christian relatives, I was also helping monasteries which wanted to stay in touch via mail. So I would go to them and distribute letters. This whole thing was organized by Vít Tajovský, an Abbot from the Želiv monastery. I was asked to help with this by the Dean named František Kolář. They knew I was reliable because my aunt served as an assistant to the head nun of the Sister's School. At the beginning of the war the whole monastery moved to Rome. My mother cured Mr. Tajovský during the war and saved him from being conscripted to the forced labor in the Third Reich. The information I would distribute was accurate as of 1949. Then monks were imprisoned one after the other, and so it was no longer that up-to-date. We had three different routes. The first one I did with the Dean, because he had a motorcycle. The other two I did alone, since it would not be as conspicuous. However, they didn't find out about all that – only the leaflets.

When did you start helping and printing the leaflets?

I started in 1949. Before that year the situation was completely different. The Sokol⁴ gathering in 1948 was very anti-communist, but after that the regime became stricter. Generally, people thought that the situation could not last for a long time. Gradually, they started suppressing free news in the media, so we all wanted to inform people about the truth – whether it was national or international news. The edition ranged from one to two hundred printed copies. The conditions for copying were very challenging at that time so we had to use stencils. Since the printing was done in Eastern Bohemia, and the headquarters were in Heřmanův Městec, it wasn't very easy to produce a high number of printed copies. The majority of people from this group came from that town.

3 Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) – see the list of key words at the end of the book. Bohumil Eliáš and Jaroslav Marcal according to State Secret Police were couriers of CIC. However, CIC did not operate in Czechoslovakia. It is not clear if they were couriers or it was fabricated by the State Secret Police.

4 Sokol – see the list of key words at the end of the book.

How often did you distribute the leaflets? And for that matter, who wrote them?

On average, once every two months. Of course the terms were not fixed. When there was a lot of news we wrote commentary on the issues as quickly as possible so that the leaflets would still be up to date. The content would then be set after we had reached an agreement, and then each of us would prepare one response. Then we laid them out and edited them. We were distributing them unofficially, of course, and putting them into people's mailboxes.

Do you remember the names of your colleagues who helped you write and deliver the leaflets and were later sentenced as well?

Naturally, they were guys who were attending the Gymnasium or college in Chrudim, or else they had recently graduated. There wasn't a big age difference between us. There were also other people sentenced with us who were older. The main group from Heřmanův Městec was plus or minus two years apart in age. There was Mirek Kabeláč, Milan Netušil, Josef Řehák, and Vláďa Doležal, Václav Rychnovský, Libor Choutka... As time went by, we not only edited the leaflets, but also got in touch with two agents – Eliáš and Marcal – to whom we would deliver some spy information, mainly about the airport in Pardubice. It had always been an army airport, so there was always a deep interest in it. They had their own operator and radio transmitter, but they wanted to have a back-up plan. Sometimes the radio didn't work, which was the second reason. They had troubles with that.

How did you get in contact with the two agents?

It was through a schoolmate [Bohuslav Capoušek], another guy who, along with my mom's patient Zdeněk Dušek, functionary of National Socialists. Together we talked about the radio. Fortunately, no one else knew about it and nobody found out. The State Secret Police had me on a list because I had officially kept a radio as an amateur operator until 1949. Then they took away my license. I still had some receivers, but I put all the transmitters away because I didn't want to risk it. The one I used to send out messages for this purpose, then, was bricked in a chimney of our house for use only in the event of an emergency. The agents had their own operator, but sometimes they needed to check or had problems with their own. I was the substitute when theirs didn't work. We were all nineteen or twenty years old. I was locked up a week after my twenty-first birthday.

How did it happen?

I was traveling from Hradec Králové, where I was studying medicine for the first year, to Heřmanův Městec almost every single weekend. Later, when I was in Prague, nothing was very easy. I would meet with my schoolmates and other people from the group who studied in Prague. We weren't meeting periodically; more by chance or when we needed something, and then we just arranged it and went somewhere else. Coincidentally – and I was really lucky at this time – I met my friend at a tram stop at Wenceslas Square. It was before Christmas, and I was going to go back home that evening. This boy told me that my schoolmates from the group had been locked up two or three days previously. So I went home, and when the State Secret Police came for me in the evening, I was lucky enough to be prepared for it. I had the chance to destroy a lot of things before they came. I had done these activities from the spring

of 1949 to midway through 1951, before I came to Prague. So it lasted for about two years, maybe a little more.

Were you aware of any monitoring? Did you have a feeling that they assigned someone to monitor you?

I was riding motorcycles professionally. In 1950 I was nominated to go on a six-day race, which would take place in England, but the invitation was rescinded. In 1951 the invitation came again, but all of a sudden I was told that I couldn't go anywhere. This six-day race always takes place in September or October. In late August, early September the two agents with whom we were cooperating were locked up. Probably it had to come out the radio. I assumed that I had to be a suspect as well, because I can't find any other reason.

That was a sign for you then?

Yeah, but unfortunately I didn't take it very seriously. If I had taken it seriously, it would have been possible to cross the border, and I wouldn't have had to stay here. There wasn't any other option than to run away. That would have been my only possible other option.

When were you locked up, and what was the process like?

On January 4, 1952. Until Christmas, they interrogated me all night in Bartolomějská Street⁵. In the morning they released me, and I didn't wait for anything. I hopped onto my motorbike and went straight to Heřmanův Městec to destroy the radio. If that didn't work then there would be a bad ending for my whole family since it was in my family's house. But I destroyed it successfully, and on January 4, I was officially locked up. It happened in the evening on Charles Square while I was coming home from school. They took me back to Bartolomějská. They left me there for four days. I was in such a state that it would have been hardly possible to transport me somewhere. Then they took me to Pardubice. The whole group was investigated in Pardubice in the State Secret Police Department. In Bartolomějská I had a hearing, but of course I denied almost everything. I only admitted that I knew the people from the group, and then the police offered me cooperation. I found that abhorrent, but I made an agreement with them that I would reflect on it. By the second hearing there was nothing to think about; so I had to say this, and sign a piece of paper with a statement that I was not going to cooperate with the State Secret Police. After that, things started moving in a different direction. At first they were trying to convince me to work for them because they needed skilled people – especially people who knew foreign languages. By that time I was already able to speak English and German very well. So for this reason I was a really attractive person to them. However, we didn't make any agreements, [laughs] and then a big brawl started [fighting motion] and of course I answered on the first punch. I knew jiu-jitsu and was even boxing for a while, but that didn't help in the end. At first it was three on one, and I don't even know how many of them got together on me there after that. They really finished me in a bad way; it cost me three teeth and one ear. Today I hardly hear out of my left ear.

5 Bartolomějská – a remand prison in Prague.

Where in Bartolomějská was this happening?

In some interrogation room and I don't know where exactly, because they were always blind-folding me. When you don't know the building, it's hard to get any chance to orient yourself. We went up the steps, down the steps, and then they turned me around three times, and took me somewhere again. What sense did I have? I don't know. Maybe they were trying to depress me. They could have had my trial anywhere; it wouldn't have mattered. I knew I was there and that they were interrogating me, but why were they making such theatrics; I don't know. Because this wasn't clear to me, it didn't depress me at all.

Did someone give you first aid?

No, no one gave me first aid throughout the whole investigation proceeding. I don't think they even had a doctor there.

Were you alone in Bartolomějská or were you with someone?

I was alone for the first two days, but before I was taken to Pardubice, they took me to an escort room where there were three or four of us. I hardly saw the people because they threw me into the room in the evening and took me out in the morning. I don't remember anything.

How did that beating affect you? How did you rationalize it to yourself?

Someone had warned us about the methods of investigation that the Germans had. We knew that and these methods would not be better or worse. I personally wasn't really surprised by it at all.

What did they want? Or, to put it another way, what were they trying to beat out of you?

Including the curriculum vitae, it was not more than three pages of protocol. For almost five months I didn't say anything about myself. Whenever I could stonewall them, I did. From the others, they found out about the distribution of the leaflets, which was enough to arrange my conviction. In my case, they were more interested in the radio and my radio connections. Since I was an amateur operator until 1949, I was officially allowed to have my own amateur radio. In 1949 they banned it, took my license, and I had to cancel the official radio, which I did. But I had another radio, which I built up in the chimney. We didn't use the chimney, and they didn't find that one. After the first interrogation I went to [Heřmanův] Městec and destroyed it, because I didn't want to put the whole family at risk. That was an idea that I couldn't live with.

How did it end with the two agents? What happened to them?

They crossed the borders a couple times, and, of course, they were eventually caught. When my group was investigated, the investigators didn't make the connection between us and the agents. A guy named Zdeněk Dušek didn't mention the connection to anyone else. It was a big advantage that the others from our group were not involved with that.

After four days in Bartolomějská they took you to Pardubice. What happened there?

There were normal investigations. But I was placed into solitary confinement, which was appalling. It was a real small room with four small windows, none of which could be completely closed. That was in January. They turned the heating on for one hour a day. It was a complete atrocity.

What was the food like there?

There were two or three potatoes from the bottom of the pot without anything on them. We used to say served once with caraway seeds and once without anything. They were not even salted. We also got some water-downed soups and some fake coffee in the morning.

Did you meet anyone from your group when you were in custody in Pardubice?

Did you sit together?

For my entire incarceration I was in a solitary cell. I saw only one of them when they showed him to me and asked, "Do you know each other?" "We do." So then we turned our backs on each other, and that was it. That was the end of the confrontation. It was like being in a crazy house. Then they took us to the prison in Chrudim. There we awaited the trial, which was open to the "public". Part of it took place in Heřmanův Městec and another part in Sokol Hall. But the "public" is in quotes, because whoever actually wanted to come, couldn't. They chose who would be there and brought in party functionaries and workers. I don't know who else they brought in, but they were trying to make a circus of it. It took three days and was a huge attraction. That was right after the June, 20. They took us before people from the party and were showing us off like wild animals.

What was it like during the proceedings of this three-day trial?

They wanted the accused to repeat the same thing that was on the written on the hearing statements. I was not shy and started arguing about the communist ideology with the head judge. The funniest thing was that those idiots were recording this and playing it out over the town's public announcement system. So my discussion with the judge was broadcast for quite a while before they figured out what we were talking about. The sentence was eleven years for high treason and espionage.

What happened to your colleagues?

At fifteen years, Mirek Kabeláč received the highest sentence. They made him the leader of the group. He was older than us by about three years, and so they made everything look the way they wanted. Then they brought in the agents, Milan Eliáš and Dušek. I started to be afraid for the second time since I received the messages from them on the radio, but they didn't say anything. They kept it to themselves.

What was the name of your legal case, and how many people were in your group?

We were called the Scout Resistance Beneš, named after President Beneš⁶. The abbreviation was S.O.B. There were fourteen or fifteen of us, and they caught everyone. The lowest sentences were two or three years. No one was lucky enough to escape.

Do you remember the name of the judges or the chief prosecutor?

The judge was a Hungarian Jew named Roth. Then he changed his name to Rudý⁷. The chief prosecutor was Čížek⁸. Both of them were bad guys. It was a show trial. There was not much

6 **Edvard Beneš** (1884–1948) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

7 **JUDr. Vojtěch Rudý** (1910–?) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

8 **JUDr. Karel Čížek** (1913–?) – see the list of main personalities at the end of this book.

happening in that area, so it seemed like something quite useful for publicity, which is why it took three days.

What was running through your head when you heard the sentence at court?

We didn't take it seriously at that time. We were very foolish.

Where did they take you after the trial?

First the court left us in the prison at Chrudim, and then they took us to build a dam in Křivanovice. That was only through the summer – just a short time, maybe three weeks. The dam was built at the beginning of the fifties. Then the authorities took us back to prison. We found out that the working camp by the dam was mainly comprised of *měsíčkáři*⁹, who were farmers who hadn't met their quotas. The place wasn't guarded much, but it didn't really hit us that we could have escaped. But to be honest, we didn't really have a way to do it or even a place to go. All of the escape routes we had prepared before were already blocked, and in 1952 it was too risky to try to go through. That wasn't really possible. Then in mid-August they took us to Jáchymov. They took us to the Central Camp named Bratrství. That was the central camp in Jáchymov – the mine which had two camps. The normal camp had pits, and the other part was separated to serve as a central building. That was where we waited for three or four days until they distributed us into different camps. I was taken to Camp L¹⁰ with Milan Netušil.

What did you do in the camp?

It was a very small camp with about three hundred people. We crushed the uranium ore. There wasn't any other work. We were surprised about that. Right away I was put into the tower, because I was almost deaf. They put me on the main grinder. There was a lot of noise, and no one wanted to be there. With one ear I didn't really mind it, so I was working there.

What exactly were you doing?

In the tower we worked on the rock that contained a lot of uranium that was brought by cars. From the cars, it was put in big boxes and from these put into smaller ones. The radioactivity was measured, and according to its size, the ore was sorted into these boxes. From the boxes, two prisoners took it out and threw it onto a big, wide conveyor belt. When there were about fifty tons ready in one big box, the rocks were all crushed and processed as one load. From the bunker, it went to the grinder where it was ground up. Then it was sent back up to the tower, where the finely ground portion was suctioned with a sieve. The large chunks would fall back down into the grinder, and this is how it kept rotating until everything was ground. Meanwhile, the finely ground portion was barreled. The barrels were then stored, and once every two or three days, depending on how the process went, the uranium would fill about thirty wagons. Half of these wagons were loaded with poor-quality uranium ore. They also brought low-quality ore in open wagons, which were only sorted, and the loads on different cars would be mixed into big containers that filled up a wagon. That meant fifteen to twenty

9 *Měsíčkáři* – derived from the Czech word *měsíc* [month], this term denotes people who stayed in prison for only one or two months.

10 **Camp L** – Also called also the liquidation camp, Camp L had a *Red Tower of Death* where prisoners came into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

tons. The high-quality ore was processed in the method that I described in the tower before being loaded into closed wagons.

What exactly did you do with the grinder? Also, how were the working conditions?

I had to make sure that a stone didn't get stuck and make one of the two slabs crack. The grinder consisted of two huge slabs that would grind against each other. The rocks would fall down and be crushed in between them. There was a lot of dust and noise. You could hardly see anything there – especially when the rocks or materials were dry. Usually they were dry; the camp stored fifty tons. In the storage boxes they would dry very quickly. Of course it also depended on the weather. For example, during the fall the rocks were wetter, but then they would dry out again. It was a nonstop operation. That means there were three shifts with eight hours per shift. Everything was organized like that. According to this schedule and to which shift you worked, that's what the routine looked like, okay? Everyone except for the night shift would get up with the morning shift which was at 5:15 a. m. or something like that. A loaf of bread was split into thirteen slices, so you would get about fifteen decagrams of bread a day (0.33 pounds). Hunger was terrible from the beginning until Stalin and Gottwald's deaths¹¹. The hunger was so terrible until the communist leader's cult of personality ended, and then it got a little better. I didn't even weigh fifty kilograms (110 pounds). You must consider that I was fifteen centimeters taller than I am right now because I've gotten shorter since then. I was a relatively young man, and we all looked like this.

What did you wear for work? Did you have any gloves or masks?

We wore what we normally lived in. We wore something called a *halina*, which was made from a higher quality burlap or freight material. We had trousers in this fashion and also a jacket. We had one pair of long underwear underneath, a shirt, and a hat. Otherwise we got linen pants and a linen jacket for summer. That was everything. We didn't have anything else. We didn't have any special working uniforms because those idiots thought that all these working places weren't radioactive on the surface. They didn't even admit that it was radioactive down below in the shafts. Sometime in 1954 or 1955 they brought us some air masks, but those were for little kids. You really couldn't breathe in those. So when it got to be very dusty we would use damp clothes to cover our noses and mouths, tying the cloths behind our heads. That was all. We didn't get any other precautions.

How long were you on the grinder?

After one month all working positions rotated, but that didn't mean that everyone went everywhere. One had to get some practice with the grinder and find out when to push and when not to and when you should stop things for a while. Of course I couldn't stop it very often because there was a supervision – Russians. There was a minimum of Czech employees, and all of the Czechs would not do any manual work. They were either bosses – but there were many bosses – or else they were guards. So I didn't go to throw the uranium ore into containers very often because I never really liked working with shovels – not that I couldn't learn, but there people who liked shoveling more than me. So in our group we were switching the positions

11 Stalin and Gottwald died in 1953, after which the conditions in the prison and penal labor camps improved slightly.

a little bit. Our group had about thirty people, and we formed the staff of the tower. For example, one of us wasn't able or nimble-handed enough to roll the barrels. We would roll the barrels through the storage which was about 150 meters long. The barrel or oil drum would roll when you kicked it well. We had hooks to give them direction while lifting them up since three barrels were stored on top of each other. Not many people could do it really well, so it was better if someone went to do something else rather than break his legs trying to roll barrels. Each barrel had to weigh a minimum of sixty kilograms (121 pounds). All barrels were weighed. So I can't really tell you how long I was at the grinder, but it was at least a third of the time I was in that camp. That means a third out of the three-and-a-half years.

How many people do you think lost their lives there or left with permanent health effects?

I suppose that all of us had some permanent health effects. Those who worked down in the deep holes, the ones who were digging out the uranium ore, and everyone who worked on Camp L had to receive some health damage for sure. It wasn't documented anywhere. One had to stay in these radioactive zones for the effects to become apparent. That is an utterly different mechanism of damage than, for instance, a nuclear explosion. You can't really compare them because they are so different. The illness you get from being exposed to uranium radioactivity looks different. No one really knows how it looks. At the time when they were supposed to study it, no one really did. That means that all these examinations were done post-factum after a long time gap. They started examining it in the seventies. That's a twenty-year lapse.

Was it called *A Red Tower of Death* because of the mortality rate?

I don't know if we can say mortality. That didn't really occur there because while you are exposed to the radioactivity, there is some time of latency before the changes occur in the organism. These changes are gradual, and each organism reacts to it individually. For each person it manifests differently. Only if they would examine a certain amount of people – at least thousands – could they identify these trends. No one ever did that, although Jáchymov was required to undergo regular research as early as the second half of the 1930s. During the First Czechoslovak Republic [1918–1938] they were measuring the activity, taking measurements in the mines and checking the employees. So the communists knew very well where they were sending us. There were no question marks about these things – and there were already rules in place for this under the Department of Health and Human Services. No one took this into consideration, and everyone was pretending that nothing serious was happening and that there were no potential risks.

How did it go with injuries? Were you ever injured?

Dealing with injuries was particularly atrocious as there was only one nursing room for the whole camp. There was one room for a nurse's room, and another room with four beds where the injured could stay. The doctor who served there was a retribution prisoner, and he was a real jerk. Only a few of these retribution prisoners were as bad as this one. He was a German living in Prague and had served as an SS doctor – but originally he was a pediatrician. Yes, as a pediatrician he served the SS before he was sentenced to work at our camp. There were major problems with him because he didn't take any of our injuries seriously. His favorite phrase

was, “Oh, my grandma suffered from this as well.” Fortunately I didn’t have any injuries so dangerous that I couldn’t take care of them myself.

Were you aware of the risks in the conditions you worked? Were you taking measures to protect yourself?

Of course I was aware of that. I studied physics for doctors with Professor Santholzer, who was one of the most well respected researchers from the Institute of Radiology. So he told us a lot about radioactivity. How could I protect myself? All I could do was tie a cloth over my nose and mouth. I simply couldn’t do anything else.

How did Jáchymov prison affect your own health?

First of all, I got skin cancer. The most critical spots were caused by the alpha rays from the radon since we worked in areas without ventilation. Sound ventilation was implemented in the beginning of the 1960s. In spite of the fact that the administration concerned with mining put these notices out in the 1950s, no one put this into practice. It took another five to seven years before conditions started to progress. It improved probably in the mid-1960s because everything depended on ventilation in the chutes. As for the work places where the material was processed and ground, there was a lot of radioactive dust, but those places closed in the second half of the 1950s – maybe 1956 or 1957. At that point, the ore began to be processed chemically. Therefore, because these methods were no longer continued, they thought that there was no point in studying the effects. Even if someone was studying the changes, they could only look at the after-effects and not the original health. These effects were generally attributed to age and workload – not necessarily where they worked or the effects of radioactivity. The Institute of National Health began to examine the Jáchymov mines in 1959. However, since the institute was affiliated with the mines, it wasn’t an independent organization. In addition to the cancer, I also have damaged joints. I am fifteen centimeters shorter and have an artificial hip joint. I should get another artificial hip joint in the next six months. My backbone is damaged as well, because my spinal discs are disintegrating. My fourth vertebra pulls forward towards my stomach. So actually, I can’t move very much, or else the vertebra would move further and pinch my spinal cord. Then I would have to be in a wheel chair.

How did the guards behave, and in what ways did they persecute you?

There were polite ones and worse ones, but of course there were fewer polite ones. We had to go to brigades, which meant compulsory employment outside of work. During that time we couldn’t go to the prison house, and if they found you there, it wasn’t good. There were guards who never checked on us – especially if they knew that the Commander was not in the camp. They would give good reports on each other. When the Commander was around they were much more active.

Who were your prison mates? Did you know anyone who worked with you in the tower?

At the beginning there was my accomplice, Milan Netušil, but after half a year he was taken to Příbram. He got relatively better over there. In our group you made contacts very quickly. You either got acquainted immediately or you didn’t get in-touch at all. It depended on who it was. Mainly there were political prisoners, and there was also a group of fifty retribution

prisoners; those were the Germans or German-Czechs who were sentenced for cooperation with the Germans during WWII according to the so-called Retribution Decrees. These people were released in 1955 and some even as late as 1954. There were many interesting people. Some people were quite famous and from the upper class. There was Army General Václav [Karel] Paleček, the head of our mission of occupation administration in Germany; and Dr. Jan Pospíšil, who was an ex-Secretary for Minister Stránský. They were people with strong moral fiber. There was also the son of the Social Democratic Minister, Zdeněk Bechyně; and also many great clergymen, like Josef Zvěřina, who was a theologian and art historian. One could learn many interesting things from him. There was also the head of the Czech Jesuits; Mr. Josef Cukr. They were really a class of men unto themselves, and there were many others like them.

Were there any communists there with you?

There was only one, who came after the trial with Slánský. His name was Vavro Hajdů, and he was from Slovakia. For some time he was our UN representative and also served as a civil servant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was quite nice and polite for the time I was there.

Did you ever meet any civilians working there? Do you remember any of the guard's names?

I remember the names of the Commanders; Mr. Píbil, for example; one can't forget that, of course. There were no civilians working there at all.

Not even women, for example in the infirmary?

At the labor camps, that was unacceptable. The first woman came when the prison hospital opened at Jáchymov in 1955. She was there as a head nurse and part of the main staff in the surgery unit. I don't remember the name now, but I recalled it once, because people from ÚDV¹² wanted to hear my opinion about the head staff in the hospital. The second half of my prison stay I was in the prison hospital. I never worked in another working camp after that. For three weeks I was at Mariánská hospital, where I was a doctor and treated a flu epidemic.

So after three years they transferred you to the hospital?

They took me there not because they wanted to, but because they had to. I got jaundice. At that time there was an epidemic of jaundice and – thanks to the kindness of people who worked there – I began working there too. Of all the *mukls*, the highest boss there was Professor Koch, a sergeant from Bratislava and my father's friend. They served together during WWI in a hospital in Udine, Austria. In 1920 they established an army hospital in Bratislava together before demobilization started. So I was transferred to the hospital. One fact that also helped was that it was already 1955, and in 1956 the grinder was shut down so that the uranium could be processed chemically. So they would have had to transfer me somewhere else anyhow.

¹² The Office of the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism, Police of the Czech Republic (ÚDV) – see the list of key words at the end of the book.

Where was the hospital located?

The hospital was located near the new headquarters of Jáchymov, just a little way from Camp L. From the crossroads there was a field, and today there is a factory for tram buses. Then there was Camp L, the processing work place with the *tower*, and right next to that were the Central Camp headquarters. The Central Camp always served for two different purposes. On the one hand, it provided transportation of newcomers to other camps, while on the other hand there was C Block, which housed construction crews. They built the town Ostrov upon Ohře and other buildings nearby.

While you were in the hospital what were your responsibilities?

That was at the end of 1955, and the situation was completely different. I started to do physical therapy. I exercised with people after their operations and injuries. I learned this from my mom, who worked in Janské Lázně. Then, because there wasn't a dermatologist, they bought me a book on dermatology, and I also had to learn that. Fortunately, for a short amount of a time, there was Dr. Standa Novák, who was a dermatologist. Then they took him to Leopoldov¹³. I learned a lot from him. In addition to that, I worked in the Infectious Diseases Department as a nurse. The boss there was Dr. János Hlaváč, a Slovakian from Žilina. He was very good doctor, he was on internship in Zürich by Professor Fanconi two years after the war. He was a pediatrician, but he also was an expert on radiology and tuberculosis, which was a big problem at that time. He taught me a lot. After him came Dr. Jan Šmíd, who was an army doctor and the family doctor of the Beneš family. He was also an excellent doctor. Unfortunately, he only stayed for a short amount of time and then was also taken to Leopoldov. So, finally, I took care of the whole Infectious Diseases Department by myself, with only a doctor of internal medicine coming to check on me once or twice a week. This department wasn't really an Infectious Diseases Department. There were three rooms for tuberculosis and one for jaundice. There were also problems with curing syphilis. These people who were also getting special treatment would stay in two rooms, as well. If it was documented that they had syphilis when they came to prison, then they had to get treatments. Then I also had two rooms dealing with dermatological illnesses.

How long did you serve there?

I served there until November 6, 1958. On that date I was released because they reviewed my case and – I don't know how – but they shortened my eleven years to seven. I then should have been released on January 4, 1959, but they released me with ten years of probation on November 6, 1958, and I was lucky they didn't give me back my civil rights. That saved me from being sent to PTP¹⁴. As a citizen without rights, I didn't have to go to the elections, and I didn't have to go the compulsory service in the army. I had some problems concerning this after the pardon of the President in 1960. I got a blue book excuse, because I had jaundice. I was really affected by that illness, and I have permanent effects from it. Until today I am on a diet that is not very strict, but I am still on a diet.

¹³ Leopoldov – a prison facility in Slovakia.

¹⁴ Czechoslovak Army's Auxiliary Technical Battalions (PTP) – were established in 1950 for so-called "politically unreliable people" who were subjects of the military law. People in PTP worked in mines or on military buildings, civil buildings, and other construction projects. From the last months of 1953 to May 1954 they were all closed down.

So the jaundice was harmful to you?

It certainly was. The truth is that I didn't turn yellow when I was ill, so it was hard to see that I was not healthy. It was Dr. Honza [Jan] Šmíd that figured it out.

Were you ever in touch with your family?

Contact was very limited because if you could write letters from Camp L even twice a year it was a miracle. Out of the three-and-half-years I stayed there, I only had one or two visits. When I was at the hospital it got much better.

Was your family persecuted in any way?

My sister wasn't allowed to take her graduation exam, and she waited five years before she was allowed to take it. Then she wanted to enter medical school, but it took her another four years to be accepted. She wanted to be a dentist, and in that year they were accepting more dentists so they took her. My mom wasn't especially affected since after a year-and-half of unemployment she became the head of a Physical Therapy Department in a hospital in Pardubice. Professor Řehoř got her a position there, and then when they built a new hospital in Chrudim she commuted daily from our hometown, [Heřmanův] Městec. There, she started doing neurology as well since there was never more than one neurologist, if that. She worked as a neurology consultant as much as the hospital needed. So it was okay for her.

Do you remember your prison number?

Of course – AO6997. That was my number when I came to Jáchymov. According to this number you could find out on precisely which day exactly you arrived. These files still exist since there are about twenty thick books with about the 16,000 names of people who went through that.

Were you officially rehabilitated?

Of course; without the rehabilitation I couldn't claim any rights. I was rehabilitated in 1990 or 1991. I had already handed in the demand in 1968, but no one really took care of that at the time.

What comes to mind when I mention Jáchymov?

Well, in comparison with other things, it was a great school for me in the spheres of knowledge and morality in general – but on the other hand, I paid dearly for it when I come to consider my health. I can't tell you that I didn't count on being sentenced. That would be a lie, because I was aware that what I was doing could endanger me. But I really expected that everything would work out fine and that I would have time to escape.

What helped you to survive?

All kinds of work – and my interest in many things helped. I didn't believe that communism would fall during my lifetime, or in 1968, that the regime would get better. That was impossible, and I was always realistic about that.

Do you think that we devote enough attention to this historical period?

A minimum is being devoted – and when we do, it is really misrepresented. First of all, at school kids aren't taught the history the way it should be taught. In the best scenario they finish with WWI. Also imagine which teachers were there and how they were hired. There are some normal people among them, but the majority came from communist families and the families that didn't want to shit in their own nest. The same thing works for historians. Don't tell me that during the eighteen years since the Velvet Revolution there has been any solid material written that could be considered true and accurate. Have you seen anything like that? I haven't yet!

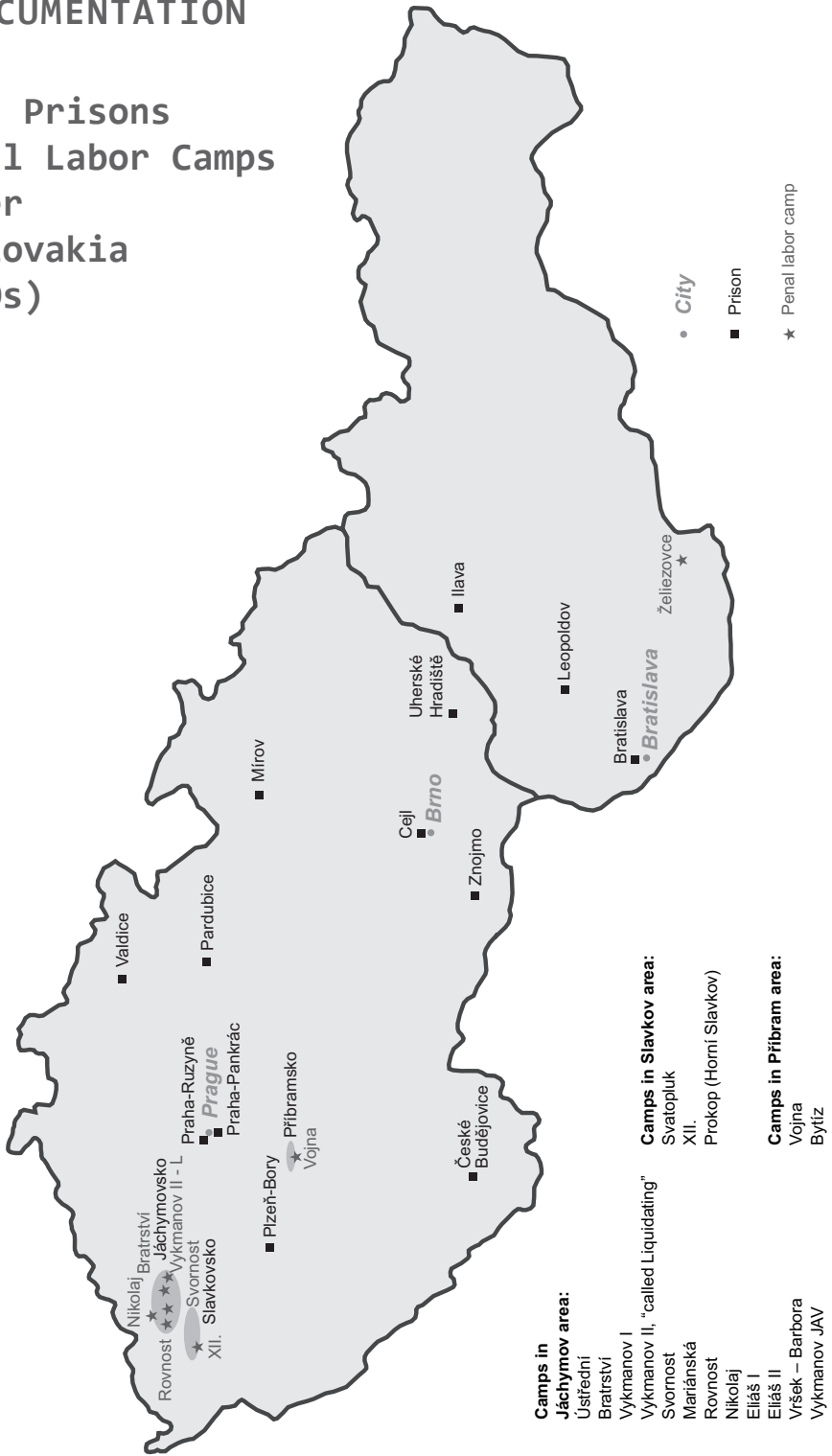
Do you have any advice for the young people who are trying to figure out their own way of living? Like, how to go through life with their heads held high?

I think this recommendation is really simple: Live in such a way that you will not do any harm to anyone else.

Thank you for the interview.

PHOTODOCUMENTATION

The Main Prisons and Penal Labor Camps in Former Czechoslovakia (in 1950s)



Penal Labor Camp Vojna (near Přebíram)



Penal labor camp Vojna in the 1950s.

Photo archive of the Mining Museum Přebíram – The Vojna Memorial (Roman Abušínov, Václav Trantina – Hornické muzeum Přebíram)



The Vojna Memorial – entrance to the former penal labor camp Vojna.

Photo archive of the Mining Museum Přebíram – The Vojna Memorial (Roman Abušínov, Václav Trantina – Hornické muzeum Přebíram)



The Vojna Memorial – wash-room.

Photo archive of the Mining Museum Přebíram – The Vojna Memorial (Roman Abušínov, Václav Trantina – Hornické muzeum Přebíram)



The Vojna Memorial – accommodation for prisoners.

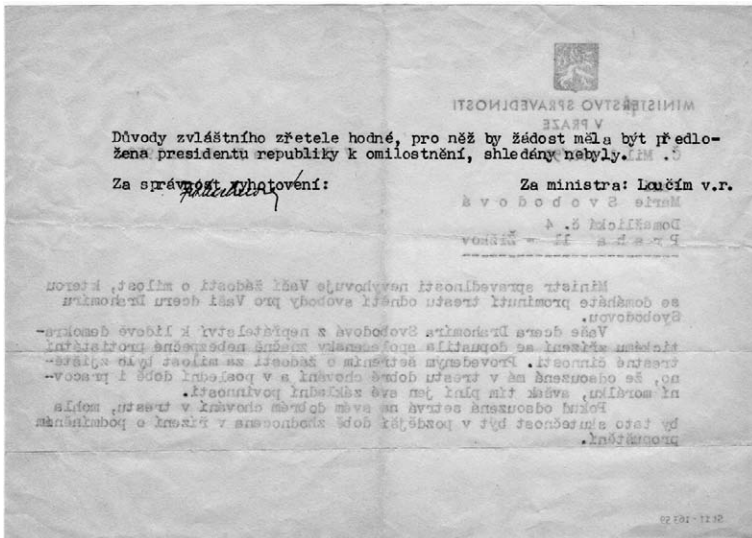
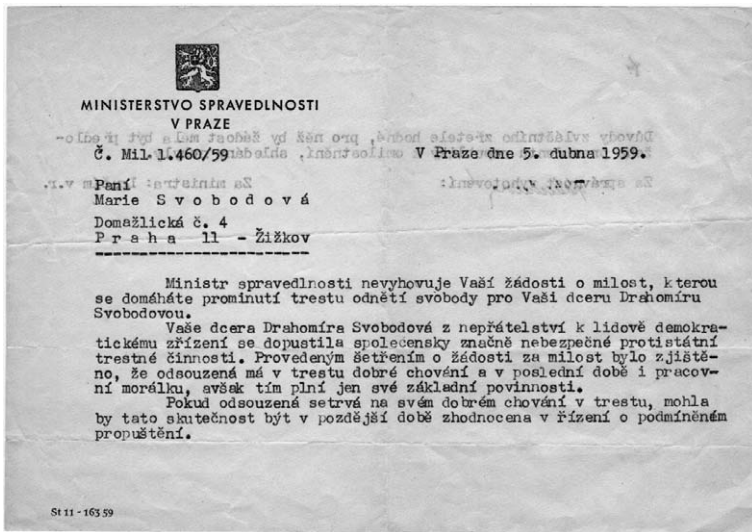
Photo archive of the Mining Museum Přebíram – The Vojna Memorial (Roman Abušínov, Václav Trantina – Hornické muzeum Přebíram)

~~.....~~
~~.....~~
To nejhlavnější si nechtávám na konci, draze! rodiče,
a prosím Vás, abyste nezapomněli napísat do zrujinské věst. memo-
ruce primární MUDr. J. Pechovi, aby Vám poslal doporučení pro od-
louho lékaře zde v Liptě, a recepty na kapky, které jsem měla
od něj ve 7., takže by Vám mohl sdělit, jak mám zde pokračo-
vat v léčbě. Jeliže se sem ani léky nemůžou poslat, vřáďte je
na ministerstvu porolení; jeliže mi jistě ty kapky vrátí, i ri-
taminu C (celaskon) a injekce. Doufám, že už má po dovolené.
Zatím ještě nevím, jak to zde bude s balíčky, ve Zrujini jsem
je měla po operaci povolny lékařem každých 14 dní, bez ohledu
na to, zda už jsem schopna práce nebo ne. - Dnes (4.8.) jsem
dostala od Vás, draze! rodiče, peníze a děkuji za ně mnohokrát.
Snad se také jednou dočkám dne, kdy budu za svou práci dostát
vat takovou odměnu, alych Vám nebyla tak na obtíž jako do-
sud. - Snad po Váš návštěvě jsem pádala o povolání jet za Vě-
stou a teď žiji v očekávání, co se bude dít. Budu-li mít štěstí,
mohly bychom se končeme po dvou letech vidět. - Draze! rodiče,
za všechno, co pro mě děláte, Vám mnohokrát děkuji a čekám na
zprávy od Vás, hlavně na odpovědi ke všem mým otázkám. Ta-
jín jedete prázdně, nebo se třeba vrátíte, dostaly jsme lepší sukne a
bluzy, tak zase vyprávějte k tomu. Draze! mamko prosím te,
~~.....~~
P.S. ~~.....~~

Archive of K. Pinerová

Each letter from prison had to be censored, because it might have contained some forbidden information, complaints about treatment, or a negative comment on communism. It was the censor who finally decided whether a letter would be sent or not. Unsented letters have been stored in personal files of the prisoner. Small problematic expressions in a letter were blackened so the reader could not read it. Prisoners themselves sometimes said that these letters were only stylistic essays because they could never freely write about what they had felt, lived through, or what their anguishes were. Mrs. Stuchliková here writes a letter to her parents, where she is also asking them to bring her some little things she was missing in prison when they come for the next visit. What the little things she wanted were, we cannot find out, though, since the censor completely blackened this part of the letter. We can only argue and guess what was anti-communist and improper about the words.

A Suit for Pardon



The reply from the Ministry of Justice on a suit for pardon of Drahomíra Svobodová (nowadays Stuchlíková) is from 1959. We can see that in spite of the fact her behavior meets expectations and she even fulfills all working quotas, this suit can not be granted since Mrs. Svobodová is only fulfilling her basic obligations and said in other words, she just does what she has to. That was not enough to be released of course. Archive of K. Pinerová

Former Uranium Mines and Penal Labor Camps in Jáchymov



▲ Stairway to the pit Eduard. This is where prisoners used to walk every day from and to the Camp Nikolaj.

Archive of T. Bouška

◀ **Red Tower of Death** near Jáchymov – former uranium processing station for uranium ore. Today an ideal place for future memorial.

Archive of T. Bouška



So-called Paleček's Castle. A copy of medieval castle that was built by the prisoners of Rovnost Camp in 1950s. Today one of the last remains of the former mining area.

Archive of T. Bouška



One of the few remains. This used to serve as dressing room at former Rovnost Camp.

Archive of T. Bouška

Prison Memories



▲ Prayer beads by former political prisoner Jozef Kycka.
◀ Hand made of electric wire in the 1950s in the camp.
Archive of T. Bouška



Examples of the Jáchymov penal labor camps' currency. Prisoners were not allowed to use ordinary money to purchase basic goods from the prison canteen (badly supplied with some food, tobacco, clothes) and were given special banknotes as part of their monthly wage in cash, valid in the camps only.
Archive of T. Bouška



A flower hand-made by former political prisoner Květoslava Moravečková and later secretly passed on her mother during her prison visit.

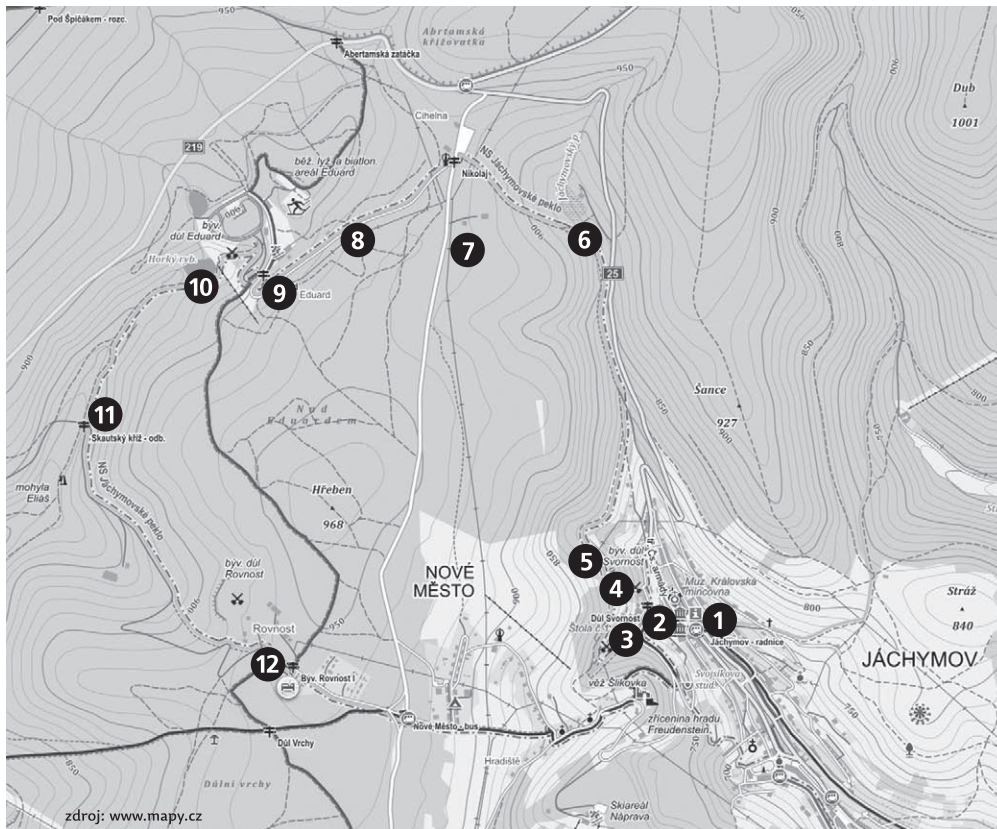
Archive of K. Pinerová



A doll done by former political prisoner Hana Truncová in prison.

Archive of K. Pinerová

Knowledge Trail “Jáchymov Hell”



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 JÁCHYMOV HELL – FIRST STOP | 7 CAMP NIKOLAJ |
| 2 MINE SVORNOST (CONCORD) | 8 JÁCHYMOV FORREST FLORA |
| 3 SHAFT NO. 1 | 9 MINE EDUARD |
| 4 MAUTHAUSEN STAIRS | 10 HEINZ POND |
| 5 CAMP SVORNOST (CONCORD) | 11 CAMPS ELIÁŠ |
| 6 TOWN POND | 12 MINE AND CAMPS ROVNOST (EQUALITY) |

Map of the newly reconstructed knowledge trail in Jáchymov. For more see www.jachymovskepeklo.cz.

About Us



Tomáš Bouška

Earned his Ph.D. at the Charles University in Prague, Department of Political Science. Since 2003, his main field of interest is the oral histories of political prisoners who survived jailing in the 1950s in the penal labour camps of Jáchymov district (former Czechoslovakia) and survivors of genocides around the Globe. Founder and chairperson of the volunteer civic organisation *Političtí vězni.cz* and co-author of its website. He was the founding board member of the Czech Oral History Association (COHA). Tomáš is a co-author of the book *Czechoslovak Political Prisoners. Oral Histories of Victims of Communism* and director of the documentary portrait of a female political prisoner “K. Ch.” (42min, 2011). In 2008–2010 he served as spokesman of the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. He also worked as Deputy-Director of the College of Media and Journalism in Prague, Development Manager of the Shoah Memorial Prague and Strategy and Development Manager at the Aspen Institute Prague. He is a Faculty Member of the New York University Prague.



Klára Pinerová

Received her Ph.D. at Charles University in Prague, Institute for Economic and Social History. She is interested in the topic postwar penitentiary system in Czechoslovakia and East Germany and the history of socialist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia and published several publications and studies. Nowadays, besides preparing her doctoral thesis entitled *Prison System in Czechoslovakia and the GDR in the 1950s in Comparison* for publishing she is working on new book *Life in the Prison: Sociological analysis of prison subcultures in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s*. In the years 2007–2011 she was a member of the research project Communist Party of Czechoslovakia at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague 1968–1989, where she published several books. In 2011, she received a fellowship at Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at the University of Alberta, Canada, and after her return in 2012, she began to deal with the topic of anti-communist resistance in Czechoslovakia in the years 1948–1989 at the Ministry of Defense where she worked as a historian. In the years 2012–2014, she also taught at the programs for foreign students at Charles University in Prague. She worked at Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe – Institute of the Leibniz Association in Marburg, Germany in 2015–2016. Founding member of the civic organisation *Političtí vězni.cz*.

List of Key Words

Anton – a closed police van for the transport of prisoners.

Bartolomějská – a remand prison in Prague on the street Bartolomějská.

Camp L – also called liquidation camp. Camp L included the infamous *Red Tower of Death* where prisoners came into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

Charter 77 – an informal civic initiative in communist Czechoslovakia from 1976 to 1992, named after the document Charter 77 from January 1977. Signed and co-authored by Václav Havel and other dissidents in January 1977, it was a loose civic organization and movement which called upon the Czechoslovak government to adhere to the human rights agreed upon in the Helsinki 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international agreements.

Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic (KPV ČR) – established on January 2, 1990.

It is an association of former political prisoners in communist Czechoslovakia. In addition, it also brings together people who left Czechoslovakia for political reasons and received political asylum, and persons who engaged in anti-communist resistance.

Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) – was an American intelligence service established during WWII in December 1943. Its task was to search for and eliminate German agents in the ranks of allied armies. In the immediate post-war period, the CIC operated in the occupied countries, particularly Japan, Germany, and Austria, countering the black market and searching for and arresting notable members of the previous regime. The CIC became the leading intelligence organization in the American occupation zones.

Couriers or so called **agent-walkers** – people who illegally crossed the Czechoslovak borders to bring foreign intelligence agencies (American, French, and British) information from military, economic, or political spheres. They often passed only a very superficial training and were unprepared for the extensive network of State Secret Police informers. Few of them were professional intelligence officers; often these were inexperienced young people looking for adventure.

Cultural Educator – an official position within the penal labor camps and prisons. He organized various political and ideological lectures with the aim to brainwash the prisoners and impose communist propaganda.

Czechoslovak Army's Auxiliary Technical Battalions (PTP) – were established in 1950 for so-called politically unreliable people who were subjects of the military law. People in PTP worked in mines or on military buildings, civil buildings, and other construction projects. From the last months of 1953 to May 1954 they were all closed down.

Čůzák or čůza – read [chou:sack, chou:sa]; a prison slang word from prison for a guard, in the Czech language it comes from the word bitch. *Čůzák* is a male guard and *čůza* is a female guard.

Domeček [little house] – small 30-cell building on Kapucínská Street in Prague-Hradčany, called Domeček (pronounced "domacheck") was the prison where mainly Czechoslovak soldiers were kept for interrogation. Originally a military prison of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the building was later used by the Gestapo and then the communists. The tortures and cruel beatings which happened there are infamous.

Hrad [Castle] – a special prison department for prominent politically engaged women in prison of Pardubice. For example, Růžena Vacková, a professor at Charles University, Dagmar Skálová, and Vlasta Charvátová were imprisoned there. Altogether there were sixty-four female prisoners.

Jáchymov – originally a spa town close to Karlovy Vary, near the Czechoslovak border with (East) Germany. Penal labor camps for prisoners were often established in or near uranium mines surrounding Jáchymov; political prisoners tend to call these penal labor camps concentration camps. Historians rather prefer penal labor camps, since concentration camp is a term connected mainly with the victims of Nazi camps.

Legions – Volunteer Militia – troops of volunteer soldiers that were formed during WWI, mainly in Italy, France, and Russia. They supported Czech and Slovak immigrants in their effort to create an independent Czechoslovakia.

Leopoldov – a prison in Slovakia.

Mariánská – one of the penal labor camps at the area of Jáchymov district.

Moták – a secret message usually distributed among prisoners on a small piece of paper.

Mukl – comes from the Czech abbreviation of “a man on death row” (in Czech: *muž určený k likvidaci*). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by the communist or Nazi regimes who were not supposed to be released and were expected to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label was used for all political prisoners.

Munich Agreement – an international treaty signed in Munich on September 29, 1938, wherein representatives of four countries – Neville Chamberlain (Great Britain), Édouard Daladier (France), Adolf Hitler (Germany) and Benito Mussolini (Italy) – agreed that Czechoslovakia must give up the Sudetenland to Germany. Representatives of Czechoslovakia were present but not invited to partake in the deal. Up until today this agreement is a painful and controversial topic in Czech history.

OBZ – the postwar Czechoslovak military intelligence service. It was meant to protect the army against both internal and external threats such as enemy spies and collaborators. It lead investigations against Nazi collaborators and traitors and thanks to the support of NKVD, worked on the production of fabricated evidences and show trials against the inconvenient officers and army opposers of communism.

Pankrác – one of the largest and most infamous prisons in Prague.

Plzeň-Bory – a prison situated in the western region of Bohemia. Under communism it was one of the strictest prisons primarily delegated for political prisoners.

Political officer – a prison position in which the individual would organize various ideological lectures for prisoners, offer an opinion upon a prisoner’s release, and check that a prisoner’s sentence was being fulfilled and that inmates spoke positively about communism. In short, he took care of political issues.

Prague Uprising – on May 5, 1945, almost 30,000 people in Prague took up arms against the German occupiers in an attempt to liberate the capital. After three days and more than two thousand deaths, a ceasefire was negotiated, only for the country to be liberated by the Red Army.

President Antonín Novotný Amnesty – announced on May 9, 1960, the 15th Anniversary of the end of the WWII, this decree pardoned sentences for seditious crimes. It was the most important amnesty for political prisoners. Around five thousands political prisoners were released from the prison, but three thousand prisoners excluded from this amnesty were regarded as instigators of “subversive” activities. Persons convicted of offenses against the state were released on the condition that they would not commit an intentional crime in the next ten years.

Red Tower of Death – a uranium-processing tower which still stands close to Jáchymov in northwestern Bohemia. It was proclaimed an official National Cultural Monument but has not been made accessible for wide public yet (at least not by 2015).

Retribution Prisoners – prisoners sentenced on the basis of Retribution Decrees for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany.

Ruzyně – a prison in Prague.

Semtín – now part of Pardubice, is one of the oldest and yet fully functional industrial areas in the Czech Republic. In 1921 construction had already started on factory buildings. Initially nitric and sulfuric acids, nitrates, and other products that were intended mainly for the production of explosives were produced here.

Slánský Trials – political processes launched against all strata of Czechoslovak society, including the prominent representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. From 1950 onwards, the State Secret Police concentrated on “searching for the enemy, even among its own”. The leading investigated communist was Rudolf Slánský, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He was accused of espionage, high-treason, and sabotage, which he confirmed after torture. He was hanged along with ten other Party officials on December 3, 1952, in Pankrác prison.

Sokol – The Sokol movement (from the Slavic word for falcon) is a youth sport movement and gymnastics organization first founded in Prague in the Czech region of Austria-Hungary in 1862 by Miroslav Tyrš and Jindřich Fügner. Primarily a fitness training center, the Sokol, through lectures, discussions, and group outings provided what Tyrš viewed as physical, moral, and intellectual training for the nation. This training extended to men of all classes and eventually to women.

State Prisoners – political prisoners sentenced by the State Court.

The Office of the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism, Police of the Czech Republic (ÚDV) – a committee established in 1995 in order to expose and to prosecute criminal acts from the period 1948-1989 where it could not be decided by final judgment for political reasons. The ÚDV is located in Prague. It enjoys a full-state competence and, in order to arrange the work a more efficient way, another detached branch office was established in Brno.

Vatikán [Vatican] – a special prison department for nuns in prison of Pardubice.

Vojna – a POW camp originally used in 1947–1949 for German prisoners of war, it was later turned into a forced labor camp from 1949–1951 and finally a penal labor camp for prisoners from 1951 to 1961.

Wenceslas Square – big space in the prison of Pardubice where female-prisoners were gathered and proceeded the roll calls.

Želiezovce – a big prison for women in Slovakia. Female-prisoners used to work there in agriculture.

List of Main Personalities

Edvard Beneš (1884–1948) – the second President after T.G. Masaryk (1935–1938), a President-in-exile (1940–1945), and the President of Czechoslovakia after WWII (1945–1948). Together with T.G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik, he took part in the resistance movement during WWI and is one of the founders of Czechoslovakia.

Václav Brabec (1920–?) – a Chief of Disciplinary Department in Plzeň-Bory prison. He worked as a worker during the WWII and was imprisoned for his illegal activity in 1943. He joined the Corps of Prison Guards in 1947 and worked in the Plzeň-Bory prison. He became Chief of the Disciplinary Department (correction) in 1950 and revoked from his duty for alcoholism in 1952. He was known for his brutality towards prisoners.

Ludmila Brožová-Polednová (1921–2015) – the ex-communist counsel for the prosecution is especially infamous for the trial that resulted in the execution of politician Milada Horáková. In 2008 she was sentenced for an eight-year imprisonment, but served less than two years of that sentence, because at age eighty-nine she was released in 2010 with a pardon from President Václav Klaus.

Vlasta Charvátová (1925) – a political prisoner. She studied at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Charles University in Prague. After her studies she made a living as an interpreter. She was arrested when she wanted to help her friends break free out of a prison in Litoměřice on August 22, 1949. She shot and wounded a guard during the attempted rescue. The whole group was arrested. Vlasta herself went through brutal interrogations, and she aborted during that time. Her husband was sentenced to the death penalty, but Vlasta Charvátová was sentenced for life. She was released on amnesty on December 18, 1963.

Karel Čížek (1913–?) – a prosecutor who was famous for taking part in communist show-trials during the 1950s.

Eduard Goldstücker (1913–2000) – a Slovak of Jewish origin, professor of German literature, and Czechoslovak Ambassador to Israel since 1948, member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Imprisoned in 1951 and sentenced to a life imprisonment. He spent three and a half years in prison, rehabilitated in 1955. Protested against Soviet occupation in 1968 which forced him into exile in the UK. Returned to the country in 1990.

Klement Gottwald (1896–1953) – a Czechoslovak communist politician and longtime leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He was Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia from 1946 to 1948 and President from 1948 to 1953.

Milada Horáková (1901–1950) – a Czechoslovak politician executed in a Stalinist show trial. During WWII she was arrested and brutally interrogated by Gestapo. She was sentenced to death, which was then changed to life imprisonment. The rest of the war she spent in the prison in Terezín. After the war she joined the National Socialist Party and became a member of Czechoslovak Parliament. In 1949 she was arrested, sentenced in a show trial to death for putative conspiracy and high treason. Although televised, she refused to follow the trial's script. Among others, Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, and Eleanor Roosevelt petitioned for her life but did not succeed. She was fully rehabilitated in 1968.

Jaroslav Huňáček (1924–?) – a Commander of female prison of Pardubice in the years 1955–1964. During the years 1939–1951, he worked as a plumber. A member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from December 1, 1945. He joined the National Security Corps in 1951 and worked as a guard in penal labor camps in Jáchymov. In the years 1954–1955 a Commander of penal labor camp Prokop in Horní Slavkov. In March 1955, he was awarded the medal "For Service to Fatherland". In October 1955 appointed to a Commander to the prison of Pardubice. In 1962–1963 disciplined twice for deficiencies in the prison of Pardubice. Removed from office of Commander in June 1964.

Gustav Husák (1913–1991) – President of The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from 1975–1989. In 1950 he was accused alongside V. Clementis, L. Novomeský, and many others for "bourgeois nationalism". In February 1951 he was locked up and in 1954 sentenced for life imprisonment. Husák was among the very few who refused to confess – a factor which most likely saved his life. Internally, he remained a believer in communism. He was pardoned by President A. Novotný in 1960, and fully rehabilitated in 1963. In 1969 he became a leader of the Slovakian Communist Party. By May 1971, he became General Secretary of the Party and in 1975, the President of Czechoslovakia.

Břetislav Jeníček (1902–1970) – a main camp functionary in prisoners' self-administration in Camp Nikolaj. In 1946, convicted of denunciation as an active collaborator with Gestapo to twenty years of prison. Cooperator with State Secret Police. Released in the year 1954.

Antonie Kleinerová (1901–1982) – a politician who represented the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party as a Member of Parliament after WWII. In 1949 she was sentenced in a trial with Milada Horáková and given a life sentence. She was pardoned in 1960.

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) – was a Czechoslovak politician, sociologist and philosopher, who as an eager advocate of Czechoslovak independence during WWI became the founder and first President of Czechoslovakia.

Bohumil Mikovec (1919–?) – a Commander of female prison of Pardubice in the years 1952–1955. By profession a roofer, worked from 1937 to 1950 as a miner. A member of the Communist Party from June 9, 1945. He joined the Corps of Prison Guard in August 1950. On December 1, 1952, he was appointed to Commander to the prison of Pardubice. Bohumil Mikovec was officially released out of service from the Ministry of Interior on March 31, 1955. The main reason was an intimate affair that he kept with the former condemned political prisoner Dr. Jana Hánová. He was sentenced to five days simple imprisonment and then released.

František Pergl – alias *Dry linden* or *Black penicillin*, this staff captain was a caretaker of of the Military prison on Kapucínská Street in Prague (*Domeček*). Due to his service in the prewar Czechoslovakian Army, Pergl was already known for his brutality. He followed every interrogator's command to persecute prisoners, and he himself made up various styles of torture.

General Heliodor Píka (1887–1949) – a Czechoslovakian soldier and legionnaire. During WWII he formed an army unit of Czechoslovakian soldiers in the Soviet Union. In May 1945 he returned to Prague where he was named the Deputy of the Chief of General Staff of Czechoslovakian Army. After February 1948 he was arrested and executed. In 1968 his process was renewed and fully rehabilitated.

Pravomil Raichl (1921–2002) – Army officer who fled from occupied Czechoslovakia to the USSR in 1939, where he was arrested and sent to Gulag camps. He was released thanks to entering the Czechoslovak exile army battalion in the USSR where he fought at the Dukla battles, got multiple battle wounds, and arrived back to Czechoslovakia in 1945 as lieutenant. He was sentenced to death in 1948 (later changed for life imprisonment), but managed to escape from Leopoldov (Slovakia) in early 1952 and successfully fled through Czechoslovakia and East Germany to West Germany and then the United States.

Benjamin Roth (1910–?) – a lawyer since 1936. Later named Vojtěch Rudý. He was a pre-war communist of Jewish origin. In 1944, he and his family were transported to Auschwitz. He was the only survivor. After the establishment of the State Court in 1948 he volunteered to work in it. He was involved in many political processes. Political prisoners, who were with him during his long career met him nicknamed the Red Executioner. He worked as a judge at the Regional Court in Prague in 1970's.

Vojtěch Rudý – see Benjamin Roth.

Jiřina Štěpničková (1912–1985) – a Czechoslovak theater and film actress. She was sentenced to fifteen years in prison in a trial in 1952.

Ludvík Svoboda (1895–1979) – an Eastern Front Army General, in 1945 he was a Minister of Defense as an „independent“ politician and in 1968 was elected as the Czechoslovakian President.

Nina Svobodová (1902–1988) – a Czech writer and journalist engaged in the activities of Catholic cultural movement; worked as an editor for the calendar *Czechoslovak Woman* and cooperated with the weekly *Catholic Woman*. Member of the Czechoslovak People's Party and sentenced in the Liberec show trial.

Jarmila Taussigová-Potůčková (1914–2011) – a member of the Communist Party; one of the leading members of the Party Inspection Committee. She was responsible for political and stalwart activities within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. She was sentenced in one of continuous trials with Rudolf Slánský in 1952 and released on amnesty in 1960.

Václav Trepka (1919–?) – a Commander of Plzeň-Bory prison. Trained as a bricklayer. He was sentenced to five years in prison for listening the foreign radio and disseminating the anti-Nazi leaflets in 1943. A member of the Communist Party from 1945. He joined the Corps of Prison Guards in the same year. He worked as a guard in Plzeň-Bory prison and in the penal labor camps near uranium mines. From August 1, 1951 to April 30, 1952, he served as Deputy-Commander of the Plzeň-Bory prison and later as its Commander. He was revoked from this position in the year 1968 because of many charges and subsequent investigations by the Military Prosecutor's office and the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Justice. He is known for his brutality towards prisoners.

Růžena Vacková (1901–1982) – a professor of classical archeology, an esthetician, and an art historian. She studied archeology at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague. During WWII she participated in illegal activities. In 1947 she was named an adjunct professor of the university. In February 1948 she was the only professor taking part in the anti-communism demonstrations of students, in the first term of the academic year 1950–51 she could not teach, February 22, 1952, she was arrested and sentenced to twenty-two years in prison. She was released in spring 1967, and in 1969 she was fully rehabilitated. In 1971 she was de-rehabilitated. In January 1977 she was one of the first to sign the statement of Charter 77. October 28, 1992, she was posthumously honored with the Decoration of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

Jindřich Veselý (1906–1964) – the member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. From 1939 to 1945 he was in a Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald, and in October 1945 he was inducted as a member of the National Security Corps and later became a Commander of State Secret Police from 1948–1950. On March 5, 1950, he tried to commit suicide for the first time. After he was recalled from his post as the Director of Institution of Socialist History on March 19 (20) 1964, his second suicide attempt ended in death.

Antonín Zápotocký (1884–1957) – Czechoslovakia's Prime Minister from 1948 to 1953 and President of Czechoslovakia from 1953 to 1957.

Fráňa Zemínová (1882–1962) – a Member of Parliament who represented the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party from 1918 to 1939. In fall of 1949, she was arrested at 68 years of age and tried in a show trial with Milada Horáková. She was sentenced to twenty years and released in 1960.

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Second amended edition

Life Stories
of 5 Male and 5 Female
Victims of Stalinism

Tomáš Bouška Klára Pinerová

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prisoner's portrait from his interrogation file. Backside photo is
a barbed wire near Ruzyně prison in Prague, the Czech Republic.

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