

THEY THREATENED MY DAD AND I, THAT WAS COMMON...

František Brož (*1939)

In the Communist era František Brož was the only private farmer in the entire Havlíčkův Brod district. But resisting wasn't easy. "They threatened my dad and I, that was common. My father was actually meant to go to jail but in the end he paid for part of it, so it was handled like that. It's hard to describe situation. We ran the farm, but at the same time didn't know if we'd still be running it tomorrow," says František Brož.

What's more, the Communists tried a number of ruses. "They didn't act directly, for instance. You can't imagine what they came up with. For instance, they banned threshing during the day, saying there was an electricity shortage. So that the unified agriculture cooperative would be able to thresh at the same time. They also changed the layout of the land. By this I mean they took one field from us and gave us another. But the new field was worse, further away than the first one. Their explanation was the co-operative needed the original field. They exchanged one of our fields maybe three times a year," Brož says.

But there were far more such iniquities. For instance they confiscated their thresher, proscribed high, hard to fill quotas and even conducted home searches looking for money or raw materials that were hidden away... But neither he nor his father gave up. In the end, František Brož's farm was the only private one in the entire Havlíčkův Brod district. And it was as a private farmer that Brož experienced the fall of communism.

František Brož was born on 13 January 1939. He grew up in the small, charming village of Radňov in the Havlíčkův Brod district. His father had a homestead, which he and his wife ran. A turning point arrived in 1948. František Brož, then aged nine, recalls a strange atmosphere at home – nobody knew what was going to happen. One of his neighbours had been to Russia and described the situation there. So people were worried about what would happen in Czechoslovakia.

The family farm in Radňov had originally not been very big, around 19 hectares in total. Just part, around 14 hectares, was fields. The rest mainly comprised woodland. There were

around seven farmers like the Brožs' in the village. However there were also bigger ones, which in a way protected them from the worst. Initially, at least.

After the Communist coup of February 1948 the totalitarian rulers turned their attention to all who could be classed as enemies, imagined or real. Immediately placed in this bracket were agriculturalists who were independent of the regime because they ran their own farms. And in their own way. They were difficult to control so it was necessary to eliminate them, on the Soviet model. To force them to join a unified agricultural cooperative, a collective farm, or to set up a state farm in the village. When it couldn't be done smoothly, the Communist regime employed violence. To forcibly move people, to seize land, to confiscate property. And to drive out entire families. However, first in line were the really large private agriculturalists, which meant the focus wasn't on the Brožs.

The biggest farmer in Radňov was Bedřich Hojer. Possessing around 35 hectares, he was the village mayor and a skilled farmer who helped his neighbours. This made him very popular. Radňov's new Communist rulers set their sights on him first. And his entire family came to a terrible end. They were expelled from the district, forced out in February 1953 when Hojer was sentenced to eight months in jail and the confiscation of his property. They were banned from staying in their native village and forced to move to a state farm in Týnec nad Sázavou. At that time Hojer and his wife were around 70 years old. They suffered cruel persecution.

It was obvious they would come for others after the Hojers. But nobody imagined the Brožs would remain the only private farmers. František Brož's father was dubbed an anti-communist, meaning his son couldn't be accepted at the secondary school of agriculture. He went to the local starch plant but was immediately sent packing. At that time they were pressuring the family to cease farming privately. It was at this time they confiscated their thresher, an extraordinary complication. "So my father brought a different one. We needed to thresh around 50 kilos of grain. So we threshed all night. But we did what we had to do," says Brož.

From 1958 to 1960 he had to go to military service, leaving his father to run the farm alone. Even though he was sick. It was only after the army that Brož could focus intently on agriculture. They had around 14 cows and two horses at that time.

"The agricultural cooperative was set up in 1958. Under duress, my parents signed to join, but I didn't sign. What's more, my parents were the last in the whole village to sign. But I was the co-owner and as my signature wasn't there we weren't in the coop," Brož explains. He decided to carry on as a private owner. "Finish? My father was an anti-communist. My mother too. So we fought. By the way, my father always told me to listen to broadcasts

from London, or Radio Free Europe. We had a different outlook than many around us. But I wasn't alone. My relatives were also persecuted."

The Czechoslovak regime went through better and worse periods and the pressure changed. At the end of the 1960s things eased off. However, after the Soviet occupation and the launch of normalisation everything was different yet again. There was a renewal of pressure to join the cooperative. In 1972 they called him in and forced him to sign a contract. They had threatened to discontinue his insurance. He travelled to Prague to find the relevant officials, who claimed he had signed himself. In the end he still managed to defend the farm. At a cost of constant surveillance. Officials visited local shops to make sure he wasn't secretly selling eggs, for instance, in them. He wasn't allowed to even go to Yugoslavia on holiday. When the regime fell in November 1989 he made up for this, travelling the world. He also started running his farm without the harassment of officials. And he did something else. He paid for the construction of a monument in the form of an open book to his brother farmer Hojer. The one the Communists had initially harrided out of the village. It bears the inscription: "In memory of Václav Hojer, school director and native and chronicler of the village of Radňov." No members of the Hojer family returned to farming in Radňov after the collapse of communism.

But František Brož also had a second monument erected. On it there is a cross, a board and a plough. And the inscription: "Memorial marking the anniversary of the cessation of Communist rule / dedicated to the repression and suffering of farmers in the years 1948–1989 / Radňov 27. 6. 2006 / František Brož"

Text by Luděk Navara