

I DIDN'T WANT THE COMMUNISTS TO RULE HERE

František Vincenc Přeslička (*1933)

When the Communists seized power in February 1948 František Přeslička from Přerov immediately understood what it meant. "I remember February 1948 well. We railed. We said at the time that it was all over. I said, Why didn't the Americans liberate Přerov too at the end of the war? Why did the Russians come instead of them? Everything might have been different..." he says. At that time he was still very young, just 15 years of age. However, he felt like an adult. His father had died in 1946 so he and his mother had to look after their shop. His family were Christians. His parents were in the People's Party and he himself was a member of the Orel Catholic youth organisation. So it was clear what side he was going to take. He met young people with a similar outlook while attending medical training for firefighters. "We gave friends who were hiding in the Hostýn Mountains and preparing to leave illegally for the West food vouchers that we had free. People used to travel there to summer apartments and I always carried the vouchers. Nobody else knew about it, but the StB found out about it," he says. But there was more. They formed a group that destroyed glass-fronted noticeboards filled with Communist Party propaganda materials and distributed leaflets. He himself had a revolver hidden at home. He didn't use it. As things worked out, he didn't actually have time to before being arrested by the secret police. "I did it all because I didn't want the Communists to rule here. I just couldn't agree with that. But as a Christian neither could I agree with the position that the Church began to take," he says. In the end he was lucky in a way. He was sentenced to eight years in 1950 but as a minor his sentence was commuted by half to four years.

František Vincenc Přeslička was born in 1933 into a shopkeeper's family. His father's store carried mixed goods. He was raised in a spirit of Catholicism. But the shop, which provided the family's livelihood, also came with responsibilities. When his father died he had to help his mother, who also had his two younger sisters to look after. So in 1947 he started working at the shop as an apprentice. "Mother couldn't go on the bike with the basket for bread rolls, so I had to. In the end I got dispensation at school that I didn't need to come in till the second lesson," he says. Přeslička also helped his grandfather, who was then 74. He says his grandfather was one of the first victims of the new totalitarian regime, when state officials seized the shop. "When they stole our shop the old man had a stroke... From my perspective, he was actually a victim of the regime," he says. In any case, responsibility for the shop and family represented a commitment. "The hardest thing for me about becoming more or less the head of the family was that I couldn't think about for instance

escaping. The goal was to hold onto the shop, but in the end they stole it from us anyway..." The store was nationalised in 1948.

However, soon after the takeover František Přeslička went to medical training for firefighters. There he met young people worried about the Bolshevik threat to the country. The anti-state group was predominantly made up of people from the village of Rokytnice near Přerov, where the local priest František Petrů was a kind of moral leader.

František Přeslička was himself religious. He had been an altar server and his parents were in the People's Party. His father and grandfather were Orel flag bearers. He himself was also in Orel and briefly in the Junák scouts.

"We distributed pastoral letters, for instance. My friend got them from Father Petrů and copied them and gave them out to acquaintances."

The group also organised other actions. They destroyed glass-covered notice boards of Communist Party propaganda materials and distributed leaflets. František Přeslička also supported a different group, who were preparing at Troják in the Hostýnské vrchy area a future crossing of the Iron Curtain to the West. Přeslička supplied them with food vouchers that could be missed in the shop. When he went to the Hostýn Mountains on a mission he brought a gun. "I had a revolver lined for pistol bullets and they later found it during a search. I had it concealed in a cabinet in the hallway. But I don't know who I got it from. They also took a sabre and rifle belonging to us. They literally stole them. They didn't list them in their record, so they could take them home."

František Přeslička was arrested for the first time on 4 August 1949. They came for him again a few weeks later. "They came after me, they pursued me... if I hadn't been so bound to my mother I probably wouldn't have hesitated and escaped. I came home and mother said, They were here for you. And they came again right away. I couldn't even call anybody..."

However, the secret police had no idea about the revolver, which they found later. When he got to a state court the charge was expanded to include conspiracy. He received eight years but as a minor had his sentence reduced by half. He didn't appeal the verdict like the others. His ex officio lawyer didn't help him much, either. Half of his property was confiscated under a court order. However, his age helped him avoid "ordinary" prison or a labour camp. He ended up in a special facility: a camp for juvenile delinquents at Zámorsk near Choceň. There the "re-education" regime was inspired by Soviet methods. "Military drill and musters. There were various groups, like the recitation group, the choral group.

There was various kinds of training, which we naturally had opinions about,” Přeslička says. He himself was allowed to play the saxophone.

Prior to being sent to Zámorsk he had undergone interrogations. “Fellows left the interrogations with black feet – their feet were beaten with tyres. They were tyres off pram wheels. That’s what they beat them with. I got hit on the hand. And slapped on the head. The worst thing was our people were doing all of this. During the war the Germans had done it... They basically needed to beat out of people what in reality they hadn’t done.”

He didn’t know it at the time but when they executed Milada Horáková he was by coincidence also at Prague’s Pankrác prison. He heard about it later.

In the end he spent two years and four months in prison and was then released. Naturally with a five-year conditional period. After getting out of prison the only work open to him was in mining or heavy industry. He opted for the latter and joined the Přerov machine works, where he apprenticed to be a fitter and later worked as a welder. However, when the political situation eased in the 1960s he actually managed to get into shop keeping, managing a number of outlets. Following the fall of the regime he became a member of the Confederation of Political Prisoners, heading its Přerov branch.

Text by Luděk Navara