

## ***THE WORST THING WAS WHEN THEY ARRESTED US...*** **Zdenko Černík (\*1932)**

Zdenko Černík has clear memories of the building on the corner of Bratislavská and Příční streets in Brno. Interrogations took place there and there were cells in the basement. It is also where they brought him and the friends with whom he met and wrote anti-communist slogans. The group circulated flyers and called for free elections under the patronage of the United Nations. They also began gathering weapons and practiced shooting. Fourteen of them were arrested, between them receiving sentences of 53 years in prison on 1 March 1950.

*“The worst thing was when they took us after we were arrested to the building on Příční, to the StB. We didn’t want to give them the answers they required so they ordered: shoes off, strip and kneel on a chair. They then beat us with a kind of pedal-operated cable,”* says Černík. The fact that he was 16 at the time of his arrest was not taken into account. *“Everything was possible in those days,”* he says. He was sentenced to four years, with another three added later. Seven in total. When they released him after three and a half years he was actually lucky. Not that he avoided further harassment and problems. Instead of the army, the auxiliary technical battalions awaited him. He dug coal in Ostrava...

Zdenko Černík was born to Czech parents in Prešov in Slovakia in 1932. His father worked in the state service. They later moved to Brno, where he found work with the financial administration. In Brno, Zdenko enrolled at a grammar school on Antonínská St., but didn’t complete his studies. The secret police came for him during his fourth year. By then, as a student, he had begun taking an interest in political affairs. He was unhappy with the direction the country was taking. When President Beneš signed the resignation of democratic ministers in February 1948 he was deeply shaken. He discussed politics with his classmate Boris Morávek and the pair considered how to proceed. Morávek invited him to meetings with other young conspirators. They began writing slogans and circulating flyers. At about 2 am on the morning of 1 May 1949 they painted slogans on walls in Veverská Bítýška. One read: *Communism out!* They also daubed lime all over a Communist Party local organisation notice board. Other actions followed. They distributed flyers with a speech by Edvard Beneš. Being very young, they may have taken everything frivolously. *“We even circulated flyers in the daytime. We weren’t careful. We were boys and took it as an adventure,”* Černík says.

Investigators subsequently named the group after one of their number: *Břetislav Jeník et al.* There were 14 of them, 13 of them boys. However, they weren't all from grammar school like Černík. Some attended a catering school. They met at their parents' homes, at the Brno Dam or at another student's home. *"Somebody always brought flyers, more often than not from the catering school. Apparently they were connected to the resistance group Světлана, but we hadn't a clue about that then. We didn't know for sure where the flyers came from."* According to Černík, the teenagers who were studying at catering school received the flyers and handed them out to the others, who distributed them. Including Zdenko Černík.

StB secret policemen in leather coats arrested him and two others while they were at school. They carted them off to the dreaded corner building on Brno's Příční St., where there was an interrogation centre. There they were beaten and forced to confess. *"After four blows you'd say whatever they wanted. For instance that you'd murdered your mother with a chain. I remember the four blows but nothing more. Whether I received more, I don't know. But I do remember that I didn't know what they wanted. They kept demanding some contact from us. We slept on tables and so on,"* says Černík. He spent the following six months at the Cejl prison, in cell number one. On the first floor of the slammer. It was winter and there was just a small stove for the whole room that had to be cleaned out by the evening. That was it for heating. At that time his case, set for Brno's Palace of Justice, was being prepared. In view of his youth he was not treated so terribly. At least that was his impression. But then older wardens left and their young replacements were worse.

In court he was charged with treason. The verdict reads: *"... they established a subversive illegal organisation whose leader was Břetislav Jeník and other members Vlastimil Ženíšek and Zdenko Černík. The organisation was in operation until the arrest of its members in June 1949. The accused met regularly, learned to handle weapons and created and distributed subversive flyers. While creating and circulating subversive flyers they were assisted by other subversive groups. They wrote subversive slogans at publicly accessible places and worked on plans to attack a National Security Corp station and Communist Party of Czechoslovakia secretariat so as to acquire weapons and funding for further subversive activities..."* The verdict was signed by Antonín Fresl, State Court judge, Brno division.

Following his conviction, normal prison did not await Černík. Given his age he was sent to a re-education facility in Zámorsk. There they tried to inculcate teenagers along the Soviet model. Naturally they were forced to work, knitting insoles for shoes. Nevertheless, the regimen was relatively relaxed.

*“I personally didn’t regret a thing. But I did feel sorry for those who suffered on our behalf. My parents. It got them down. My father worked at the financial administration. He was forced to be present when they exterminated priests. He never got over what he’d seen. How they treated them. Especially the nuns. He had a stroke. Until his death he never recovered.”*

Following his release Zdenko Černík, like other political prisoners, faced difficulties. He was sent to the auxiliary technical battalions. Luckily, however, before that he found work at a Brno construction company. He was also lucky to live to see the fall of communism. On 30 April 2013 he was awarded a prize for resistance at the Ministry of Defence. For active involvement in Břetislav Jeník’s student resistance group...

*Text by Luděk Navara*