

WE WERE WONDERING HOW TO HARM THAT TERRIBLE SYSTEM

Jaroslav Mojžíš (*1934)

Jaroslav Mojžíš experienced jail, harassment and harsh labour in the Jáchymov camps. But from his perspective the uncertainty was the worst. *“The worst thing was that they threatened us. They threatened me with 20 years. But I’m such an optimistic person that I believed that it would all come to an end one day and the regime would fall. In the end I was lucky, so I got a little, but for all that enough, to experience Christmas and New Year’s Eve in Jáchymov,”* he says.

Jaroslav Mojžíš had joined the resistance in the early 1950s out of a conviction that it was necessary to take some action against the rise of communism. He came from a Christian family that listened to foreign radio stations and his father was active in the People’s Party. He attended the Archbishop’s grammar school in Kroměříž. *“There were several of us; we knew one another from grammar school. At that time there was great pressure to enter unified agricultural cooperatives and we decided that we should write a flyer. We were wondering how to harm that terrible system. We started meeting. Then somebody suggested we give ourselves the name Freedom. It was before our leaving exams so time was limited. But we believed that war was coming,”* he says of the situation that led him to opposing the totalitarian regime and later to prison. He was arrested in December 1953 and got a 17-month sentence. *“They had nothing to catch,”* he says. Nevertheless, he was in a way fortunate. The then regime was governed by fear of spies and espionage was severely punished. Photographs that could have caused him to receive high sentences were destroyed in time, so did not end up in the hands of the secret police.

Jaroslav Mojžíš was born in 1934. His family lived in Kojetín in the Kroměříž area. He grew up during the war and when it ended realised that the world around him was changing. Even during liberation a Russian soldier had told him that things would be bad. Jaroslav Mojžíš went to school in Kojetín before enrolling at the Archbishop’s grammar school in Kroměříž. *“We went to church regularly and I was an altar boy when I was small. Our family was Christian. Father was active in the People’s Party. I remember him suddenly saying that it was the end, that the Communists would control everything. Then we listened to foreign radio at home, as we had during the war.”*

Other teenagers also unwilling to accept the inception of a new totalitarian regime attended the same secondary school as Jaroslav Mojžíš. There were five boys, joined later by a girl. They began meeting and discussing what to do.

They were aware that the world was not as it had been. And was no longer as it was on the other side of the Iron Curtain. *"We were all well-informed. We knew that what was happening in Czechoslovakia was bad... Around us there were lots of villages from which farmers had been expelled. We knew that they were going to be evicted. It was also expected that war would come. There was enormous tension – the world had been split into East and West. So you went to some state office for instance and there was a poster hanging up: 'We use the address comrade. And we use the greeting: Honour labour!' So saying good day to somebody required courage."*

At meetings they began planning resistance activities. However, they had no cross-border connections, so they considered and planned operations they could do alone. For instance they wanted to throw metal spikes or nails in front of party HQ. One of the conspirators, Lubomír Veteška, took photographs of the airfield in Kunovice. Fortunately his father managed to destroy the photos in time, meaning they avoided espionage charges. Having followed show trials, they all knew the risks involved in resistance work. However, when you're young you underestimate danger. In the end they decided to produce flyers. This too was extremely difficult. *"It wasn't possible to find a duplicating machine, or carbon paper either. There wasn't even regular paper,"* says Mojžíš.

Nevertheless, they did gradually find everything and began producing home-made flyers on a "copier" they had created themselves. However, the result looked that way. The flyers made on their primitive duplicating machine were illegible so they couldn't even distribute them. *"The aim of the organisation was to publish subversive flyers, seditious in content, a magazine, to put up seditious posters and to in this way fight the government of our republic. The organisation was divided into cells. Each was headed by a leader and these formed a committee that was to run the entire organisation,"* read the subsequent indictment. It was signed on 27 January 1954 by the regional prosecutor Suchomel. They decided among themselves to call their resistance group "Freedom". Their meeting place was the apartment of one of their number: Jindřich Hlaváček. His parents were completely oblivious. Just like the parents of the other members.

A plan to steal a copying machine from the national committee in Hradisko also came to nothing. But it was probably when the secret police got on their tails. The arrests began in December 1953. Mojžíš was picked up on 10 December 1953. He found himself in the dreaded prison in Uherské Hradiště, though fortunately this was after the darkest period. Initially they told him nothing, not even the reason for his arrest. Then he received prison

clothing and was led to a cell. There was somebody lying on the ground. *"I learned he was a certain Vašíček. A farmer from Slovácko. I wanted to urinate and he said that there was milk in the mess tin for him, because he had TB. Then I discovered there was a second receptacle. I asked my cellmate whether they beat prisoners there and he said they didn't. But that there were different methods. There were interrogations night and day..."* Mojžíš was in Uherské Hradiště from 10 December 1953 until March 1954. He was given a grey prison uniform. And a number: 644.

"I know that one prisoner was forced to walk non-stop. When he couldn't, they poured water on him, and again. They didn't try that on me. But in solitary in January I heard a female cry. Something like 'what you're doing to me isn't human...' Otherwise I was totally isolated. I knew they took people for interrogations and brought them back badly beaten. They eased off from 1952. I already knew that. I was in solitary for six weeks. I understood somebody could speak after that and not know what about. In solitary you can just walk. There's no impetus. I prayed too. Of course there were walks. They took me to a small courtyard. You could talk 15 steps and back. But I saw a house at the end of the road. That was an image of something beautiful and free," says Mojžíš of his time in Uherské Hradiště.

They sentenced him to 17 months and sent him to Jáchymov. There he was forced to mine uranium ore. He and the others walked single file. They supported one another and the wardens constantly recounted them. All of them stumbled along... They filled a cart with extracted material and walked, passing a dead man. He had been buried in dust and suffocated.

"My clothes in Jáchymov seemed to be a uniform from the old Austrian period. There were patches in six different colours. It wasn't possible to fasten the waist so the electricians made me a belt out of cable. We got a rusty bowl for food. And we gathered uraninite into barrels by hand. Of course I was aware that it could be dangerous," says Mojžíš. In Jáchymov he also attended a secret mass. *"Yes, there was a second life there. After a while it became clear who you could trust. They placed blankets on the windows and served a mass, truncated. Also different imprisoned professors had lectures. It wasn't possible to walk about after supper, so one had to be careful. And when there was a check, everybody scattered."*

Mojžíš was released on probation a few weeks early and returned home in the same clothes in which he had been arrested. He returned to his parents in Kojetín and hoped to enter school, though he knew as a former political prisoner he would have it tough. Generally the regime only gave second-class, manual work to those imprisoned for

political reasons. But he wanted to study. In the end he managed to get into university and studied in Nitra in Slovakia, where conditions were not as tough.

“Prison gave me a lot. It was an excellent personal experience. I began to appreciate things, to look at the world differently. I met a lot of people. So for me prison was a good school. It should be talked about more, explained, so that it’s not forgotten,” he said in 2017.

Text by Luděk Navara