

Jaroslav MICHÁLKA
Roky v pekle. Vzpomínky politického vězně z 50. let
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Memoirs of Jaroslav Michálka open an unknown story of Sudeten German, Czech patriot, soldier from Eastern front (of WWII), member of Czechoslovak social-democratic party and former employee of criminal service, that was enacted on the background of the events of the tragic period of Czechoslovak post-war history under the conductor of the Soviet Union. As the title already suggests, author lived in the “years of hell” from 1952 to 1963. However, neither his life before those fateful years cannot be called ordinary.

Jaroslav Michálka was born in June 1924 in Opava in a mixed marriage. Although his father had a German nationality and his mother was Czech, he and his two older brothers were raised completely in the Czech spirit. He attended a Czech school and in 1932 he became a member of the Czech Scouts. During the war years, he was arrested in Opava by the Gestapo. The reason for apprehension was a robbery of civil air defence warehouse and library of Czech school in Opava, whose contents should helped the German army. As minor he was placed in

an institution for the re-education of the young people. However, due to the offense of writing an anti-German letter addressed to his parents, another court was followed. This time he served his punishment in the juvenile prison in Reichenbach. As a son of a German father, after reaching the age of eighteen he received a call-up to onset the military service in the Wehrmacht. Michálka had no choice but to enlist. He underwent a military training in France, from where he was moved to the Russian front with his unit. In late 1944 he managed to desert. In the ranks of the guerrilla units he participated in the battles on the Eastern Front. In March 1945 after the completion of training as an artillery observer he was assigned to the then newly formed 4th Independent Brigade of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps, where he was involved in the battles of Malá Fatra or in the liberation of Slovakia and Moravia.

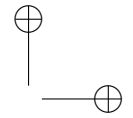
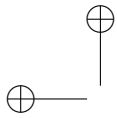
After demobilization in June 1945 he joined the service of NB (National Security, later National Security Corps – SNB), where he was subsequently assigned to the criminal service – component of National

Security. Although he was many times in transitional post-war period appealed to join the Communist Party, he became a member of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, which later badly backfired on him. After the February events he was transferred from place to place for his unfavourable opinions, until he was finally committed for military trial in 1951. After two months in pre-trial detention he received so-called discharge decree with immediate effect. Another prosecution followed, according to which, as a body of criminal services, he didn't make decisions in continuity with a class in 1945–1948. An attorney Donath, J.D. was able to shatter this accusation so much it was dismissed. However, a subsequent prosecution, according to which – during the recruitment process in the service of the SNB – he concealed the fact that he once served in the German army, wasn't dismissed. Jaroslav Michálka was sentenced to one year imprisonment and his lieutenant rank was removed. Based on the recommendation of his defence lawyer he hasn't appealed and accepted the punishment. He served a half of his sentence, the other half was pardoned. A year later he was convicted by a State Court in Brno to twenty-five years in prison during so-called monster trial with dangerous subversive group. Without suspected anything, his "years in hell" began.

During his imprisonment Jaroslav Michálka went through a series of

prisons and labour camps of which he gave a very detailed and realistic testimony. A regime was practically the same in various camps and prisons, only difference was in the degree of bullying, while an influence of an international political situation reflected de facto on everything and among other things determined the guards' behaviour in dealing with prisoners. Exploitation, humiliation, bullying and threats, slavery in uranium mines along with radioactive radiation or death were Michálka's "everyday bread" of his unjustified stay in jail. Human life, particularly the life of the prisoners was worthless. Cruel and inhuman treatment, inadequate diet and poor sanitary conditions pointed to the fact that prisoners were nothing more than numbers. However, not all wardens and guards were the same, and even among them occasionally man could find a bright exception.

Publication describing memoirs of Jaroslav Michálka is undoubtedly an extraordinary author's act which illustrates the difficult period of Czechoslovak history of the twentieth century. The book consists of six chapters that chronologically follow each other. As the name of the book itself already says, the core part is devoted to the years of the author's imprisonment, in which by a narrative form depicts an important events of his life. The aim of Michálka's effort was to achieve a best insight and elucidation into the reality back then, so that the reader could create



at least a rough idea of the former regime and the situation that was not favourable for many. He undoubtedly achieved success in this respect. Unfortunately the published memories submitted only a part of author's life story. For example Michálka's life before and during the war or after release from the book depicts only marginally. Worth mentioning is Michálka's theory on the principle of the "class struggle" which uncovers a "recipe" for the production of seditious groups he had first-hand experience of it.

Due to the fact that the publication is based on the author's memories there are no notes together with bibliography or archives references. Which is nonetheless fully replaced by epilogue in which Prokop Tomek subjected a memories of Jaroslav Michálka to critical exploration. Epilogue is completed with some personnel or time data that is not entirely clear from the narrative. Thanks to a careful archival examination a personal Michálka's memories provide a comprehensive picture of life in a complicated twentieth century. An abundant picture supplement which is conceived into the half of the book is a pleasant diversification of

the publication. We can also find Jaroslav Michálka's personal photos – various awards (e. g., Czechoslovak War Cross 1939), personal correspondence, document about an acquittal or judgment on which basis he was convicted and so on. All this together with colourful narration provides a comprehensive picture of the Michálka's personality and his uneasy fate – without the influence of emotions, malice or hatred, which, as it is evident from his memoirs and statement, he never felt or had.

Publication describing a narration of the life story of Jaroslav Michálka, along with other memories of political prisoners from the fifties, undoubtedly presents an essential component which complements a qualified historical works and portrays the human nature in the context of historical reckoning with mistakes, grievance, injustice and crimes which occurred in the Communist era. This colourful testimony without bias or anger and with a great deal of humour could be recommend to anyone interested in the history of Czechoslovakia in the era of the totalitarian regime.

Jana Křivancová

