

JAROSLAV ROKOSKÝ

Faculty of Philosophy of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem

K 231. ASSOCIATION OF FORMER POLITICAL PRISONERS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA DURING THE PRAGUE SPRING OF 1968

Prague, Sunday 31 March 1968. The founding assembly of K 231 was held in the great hall of Žofin Palace on Slovanský ostrov. From the early morning hours, former political prisoners gathered there from all over the country. There were about three thousand of them; the furthest distance was covered by those who worked in the East Slovakian Ironworks (*Východoslovenské železářny*) in Košice. It was an unprecedented event. After twenty years of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, which ruthlessly and unscrupulously had destroyed everything that resembled the old democratic times, they were able to meet publicly for the first time.

The club chose a name after Act No. 231/1948 Coll. to protect the People's Democratic Republic, according to which most political prisoners were convicted.¹ There were 128,000 men and women who were described by the ruling communists as "former people" or "hostile persons." In the foreground of the lit hall stood a small table with a bouquet, an opened copy of Palacký's *Dějiny národu českého* (*History of the Czech nation*) and the Bible, covered with black tulle lace. No one sat at the table, the chairs were empty – a reverential commemoration of those who did not live to see this day. There was a national flag on the stage, and the radio lines were laid out into the staircase and into the garden, where those who could not fit into the hall were crowded. There was a festive mood, joy mixed with sadness, expectations with past injustices. The inscription behind the chairman table read: "So that it doesn't happen again." (*Aby se to už neopakovalo*).

¹ After the Communist coup of 25 February 1948, Czechoslovak citizens were also sentenced under Act No. 50/1923 Coll. for the protection of the Republic. In October 1948, Act No. 231/1948 Coll. for the protection of the People's Democratic Republic was enacted, and also under the Criminal Code No. 86/1950 Coll. and under the Criminal Code No. 140/1961 Coll.

The assembly was opened by General Václav Paleček. During World War II he had been with Czechoslovak troops in France and England, later he had worked as a diplomat, and in the early 1950s he had been sentenced to thirteen years of heavy prison for high treason and espionage.² Paleček, who was sixty-six years old, expressed respect for the wives and partners of the imprisoned men and urged those present to join him in a minute's silence to honour all the dead victims of the Communist regime. After that, Dr Jan Šmíd, imprisoned by the Nazis and Communists, took the floor and talked about the principles of planned rehabilitation. Šmíd, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment after February 1948, said:³ "Not our principle but the principle of the ruling circles of the party and the state must be: if something is not red it does not mean that it is black and that it belongs in jail. [...] Therefore, we say that if someone assures us of human dignity, freedom and well-being, and that freedom must be as broad as all people in the world imagine, we do not care what the regime calls itself, what -»ism« adorns its name."

Geologist and philosopher Jiří Krupička spoke about democracy, pondered over what K 231 was and what it was heading for. He rejected hatred of anyone and called for consistent information to citizens about the events of the 1950s when anyone could have been persecuted. In 1950 Jiří Krupička had been sentenced to sixteen years in prison for attempting to export his manuscript *Člověk a lidstvo* (*Man and Mankind*) abroad.⁴ Religious, political, social or philosophical questions were often discussed in prison where the nation's spiritual elite met. František "Bony" Falerski, who had been brought up by church schools and the Scout since his youth and had spent ten years in a Communist prison, introduced the idea of origin of K 231 to those present, and the steps that had been taken in recent days.⁵ The speeches lasted for several hours, political prisoners took turns behind the rostrum; 180 people signed up for the discussion, but only a fraction of them actually spoke. "We talked about how suffering had taught us wisdom; that we had got rid of the retribution complex and that we did not want to hate each other anymore; that we would not divide people according to political beliefs, but we would help people with moral and intellectual quality to get to the forefront, and guard the morons so that they would not endanger them; and we would also help democracy and a new society, which Dubček calls socialism with a human face."

The above was said by teacher Jaroslav Brodský, who then talked about organisational issues and outlined the nearest activities of K 231.⁶

At the conclusion of the founding assembly of K 231, elections to the board and individual committees were held. Karel Nigrín, 66, was elected the chairman: he was a secondary school teacher, who had worked in exile in London during the war, then he had worked as a senior trade union councillor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which he

² Národní archiv Praha (hereinafter: NA), f. Správa Sboru nápravné výchovy (hereinafter: SSNV), prison record on Václav Paleček.

³ P. Blažek, T. Bursík, J. Halla, J. Hoppe, *Aby se to už neopakovalo. Katalog k výstavě o dějinách sdružení bývalých politických vězňů K 231*, Praha 2008, p. 37; NA, f. SSNV, prison record of Jan Šmíd.

⁴ NA, f. SSNV, prison record on Jiří Krupička.

⁵ *Ibidem*, prison record on František Falerski.

⁶ J. Brodský, *Řešení Gama*, Ústí nad Labem 2007, p. 98; NA, f. SSNV, prison record on Jaroslav Brodský.

had had to leave after the Communist coup. In June 1949 he had been sentenced to life imprisonment by the State Court. He had been released from prison only in December 1963.⁷ This was only one of the many possible fates in Communist Czechoslovakia. The assembly ended with the national anthem, followed by a press conference. It was widely visited by domestic and foreign journalists. Czechs and Slovaks could read about the founding of K 231 in the daily newspapers about its main goals, and a bank account number to which the new organization could be financially supported was also added. The newspaper *Svobodné slovo* reported on “a mass movement that has the potential to spread throughout the country.”⁸ Foreign media also reported on the organisation behind the Iron Curtain. The French newspaper *Le Monde* wrote that non-communists, victims of the Stalin era, had founded their own organisation, K 231, in Prague with the approval of the Communist Party.⁹ The *Herald Tribune*, in turn, stated that the new association would help to undo Stalin’s injustice of the past and to secure civil liberties in the future.¹⁰ “The silent revolution in Prague gives the world a new hope: the dictator has been deprived of power by democratic means – without violence, without shedding blood. He had to give way to the will of the people who demanded freedom,” reporting the magazine *Quick* about how the Czech Stalinist Antonín Novotný had lost power. Political prisoners in Žofín sat side by side and could finally say what they had gone through and how they had suffered. The author described the atmosphere of expectation as follows: “Magnolias bloom on the banks of the Vltava. At the Prague Castle, in Hradčany, the flag of the Communist state flutters, promising a new era and democratic freedoms. It’s spring – in nature and politics. People are hoping for a better future.”¹¹

The Prague Spring of 1968 was the culmination of the processes that had been going on in society since 1957, when Antonín Novotný had become the first secretary of the ÚV KSČ (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). Externally, congresses had been held by the ruling Communist Party, people at different party levels had changed, but the system of power had remained the same. Society, however, had begun to change slowly, and a very cautious liberalisation process had started to take place. This was related to the fact that within Czech and Slovak society there had been a growing disillusionment with Communism. Novotný’s regime, which had already lost the oppressive features typical of Gottwald’s earlier days, had not known what to do with its increasing social problems. In the sixties, the era of dull dogmatism had been fading away, gradually losing its strength. Social and cultural life had relaxed, but Novotný had still remained a symbol of old party politics for this waking society, because he prevented revisions of the political processes, in which he himself had been involved, and the rehabilitation of those affected. In the new social climate, efforts towards reform had been

⁷ NA, f. SSVN, prison record on Karel Nigrín.

⁸ *Svobodné slovo*, 1 April 1968, p. 1.

⁹ Archiv Národního muzea Praha (hereinafter: ANM), f. K 231, kart. 4, inv. č. 591, *Le Monde* article from 2 April 1968, about the assembly in Žofín.

¹⁰ ANM, f. K 231, kart. 4, inv. č. 590, *Herald Tribune* article from 31 March 1968, titled “Aby se už nikdy neopakovalo.”

¹¹ *Ibidem*, inv. č. 592, *Quick* article from 17 April 1968, titled “Deník nekrvavé revoluce, Pražské jaro.”

made; especially in the management of the economy, which had been lagging behind more and more. In addition, a new generation, more critical of the regime, had grown up and no longer compared its life to the past, but to the West where it saw great differences. Fears and worries had been diminishing; on the contrary, the power apparatus had begun to fear that it would have to be called to account. In January 1968, critical and reform-minded members in the leadership of the ÚV KSČ had pushed through Novotný's dismissal as the first secretary of the ÚV KSČ and he, subsequently, had to abdicate even from the then insignificant, but still prestigious office of the President: this happened shortly before the founding of K 231.¹²

According to the reform Communists, the political democratisation in the country should not have gone beyond the general framework of the socialist order: it should have just been given a "human face" as defined by Alexander Dubček, who was a new type of Communist functionary. He behaved modestly and gained public confidence. The reform process had been initiated solely by the Communists. As a matter of fact, no one else could have done so – the former Stalinist system had broken all the structures that could have served as a vehicle for a non-Communist opposition. The playwright Václav Havel wrote an essay *Na téma opozice (On the Opposition)* in March 1968, in which he matter-of-factly stated that when more progressive and more democratically minded people prevailed over dogmatic people in the leadership of the Communist Party, this did not mean that the members of this movement, in whose "history so far there had not been a single attempt to transcend, in the conditions where it had prevailed, the principle of one party, were able to confront themselves more seriously with the idea, so shocking until recently, of opposition."¹³ Havel understood well that it was impossible to believe that the Communist Party would change itself without being forced to do so by any other, contradictory political force. He knew that this required official opposition, a different political party, but the Constitution did not allow it.¹⁴

Political prisoners proclaimed that they did not want to be a political party, for the establishment of their own organisation, of which they had had no idea a few days before, was a successful and unexpected act. The idea of a non-political club that would bring together former political prisoners of the 1950s originated in Jaroslav Brodský: one of the many people persecuted by the Communist regime. After the end of World War II, he had come with his wife Vlasta to the borderlands. The young teaching couple had found employment in the village of Brná near Ústí nad Labem. Brodský had been appointed head teacher at the elementary school, then worked at the MNV, and then founded and led the local organisation of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party (*Československá strana*

¹² General Jan Šejna, then the highest-ranking officer in the Warsaw Pact, emigrated to the West in February 1968. One of the consequences of Šejna's escape was the definitive fall of Antonín Novotný. E.g. Karel Kaplan's study about Antonín Novotný titled "Prezident republiky – vedlejší zaměstnání". See K. Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, Toronto 1989, pp. 61–94.

¹³ Archiv bezpečnostních složek Praha (hereinafter: ABS), f. A 34, II. správa SNB, inv. j. 2576, activities of KAN (Klub angažovaných nestraníků). Despite Havel not having been a member of KAN, his essay "Na téma opozice" can be found in the report. See also V. Havel, *Spisy III. Eseje a jiné texty z let 1953–1969*, Praha 1999, pp. 830–843.

¹⁴ The Socialist Constitution of 11 July 1960, proclaimed Czechoslovakia as a socialist state and directly enshrined the leading position of the Communist Party in society.

národně socialistická). When he was fired from his job as a politically unreliable person in February 1948, he began working as a clerk, cook and planner at the Construction Plant in Teplice. At the same time, he became a member of the preparatory committee for the founding of the Masaryk Teachers' Trade Union (*Masarykova odborová organizace učitelská*), which was to commence activities after free elections. Some school reforms had been prepared for this occasion. On 10 June 1950, he was arrested by State Security. At that time, the thirty-year-old father of two young children was interrogated hard, and despite pressure from the secret police, his wife refused to divorce him; though she had been evicted from the house and had to leave the education system. In the trial of twelve school workers that had taken place at the State Court in July 1951, Brodský was sentenced to fifteen years of heavy prison. He served his high treason punishment in prison camps in Jáchymov and Příbram, where uranium had been mined for the nuclear arsenal of the Soviet Union. The imprisonment continued in Leopoldov, where he spent months in the isolation department. He showed that he disagreed with the regime and openly criticised it. He spent almost 10 years in prison. After his release, he worked as an iron maker in the Ground Construction in Ústí nad Labem.¹⁵

On Wednesday 27 March 1968, Jaroslav Brodský and Zdeněk Mráz went to the ÚV KSČ building without any prior notice. They had met in Leopoldov prison. Zdeněk Mráz, a former law student at Charles University in Prague, sentenced to 15 years in heavy prison, had worked as a fitter and then an office worker after his release. They had never thought that they would ever go to the lion's den. They asked for Alexander Dubček to tell him they wanted to found K 231. However, he was not there: as like other senior KSČ officials, he had left for home after a presidium meeting that had ended in the morning. They only met with the head of the secretariat Toth, to whom they said they did not want to be a political force, and that they wanted to rehabilitate the wrongly convicted and to contribute to the democratisation of the country. Toth told them that the Communist Party wanted to rectify past injustices and would inform the party's presidium. Brodský and Mráz left for the Ministry of the Interior in Letná, where they were received by Deputy Minister of the Interior Jan Záruba, who had been in charge of the department after the dismissal of Minister Josef Kudrna. They had been told that there was no objection to the establishment of K 231 under the laws in force, but they had to submit the statutes of the organisation as quickly as possible. Subsequently, both former prisoners had gone to the State Bank of Czechoslovakia, where they had never been before, and opened a bank account for K 231. The last stop had been a visit to Czechoslovak Television, where they had been promised an announcement in the news: the date of the meeting of political prisoners and the account number of the club.¹⁶

In the evening, fifty political prisoners met in Ota Rambousek's apartment. One of them, Josef Čech, released from the communist prison in March 1964, later said that former prisoners Jan Dohnálek, Jan Bret, Josef Kanda, Karel Paleček, Karel Nigrín, Miroslav Kácha, Radovan Procházka, and Jiří Krupička had come to Rambousek's

¹⁵ J. Brodský, *Řešení Gama*, Ústí nad Labem 2007.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 92–95.

apartment in Vinohrady. Jaroslav Brodský and Zdeněk Mráz had arrived late and had informed them about the steps taken to establish K 231.¹⁷ The men gathered had to show some courage again. Getting involved had been quite risky. They had been released from prison on probation, so they had been threatened with new arrests. The numbers of convicts for “political crimes” had fallen sharply, but there still had been political trials and pardoned prisoners had been returned to prison. After their release, they had been meeting secretly, knowing they were under the supervision of the secret police. However, they still wanted to correct injustices and to achieve full civil equality. Therefore, they had to speak and negotiate with the ruling Communist Party, which had been difficult for them. As a result, they remained cautious and distrustful of the Communists.

For some of the former political prisoners it was then unacceptable, so they did not become members of “Káčko” (the then usual nickname of K 231). They held a fundamental position: the Communists should not be negotiated with. They watched the wakening Prague Spring with scepticism. They pointed out that it was sometimes the same people who had been enthusiastically building the regime and had been involved in organising repressions. From an international point of view, they considered this to be a Communist adventure that could not turn out well, as Moscow would not allow any changes in Czechoslovakia.

After the inaugural meeting of K 231, the political prisoners built their organisation, establishing local, district, regional and provincial branches. Everything took a fast to hectic course. The headquarters was at 17 Karlovo náměstí and people began sending them considerable sums of money. At the first meeting of the Central Committee K 231, held on 4 April 1968 eight specialised committees were set up: I. the organisational committee, led by Zdeněk Mráz, was supposed to help build district branches; II. the legal committee, headed by Josef Kovařovic, was given the task of drawing up its own proposal for a rehabilitation law and monitoring the progress of work on this law; III. the program committee, led by thoughtful Jiří Krupička, was to draw up program documents for functionaries and members in the regions; IV. the economic committee, in charge of which was Felix Nevřela, was to ensure day-to-day operations, oversee the account and manage finances; V. the information (press) committee, led by Radovan Procházka, was to maintain links to the regions, and to counter the defamatory campaigns of the Communists; VI. the documentation committee, led by Ota Rambousek, was supposed to document the past (imprisonment), and administer that routine activities of K 231 and its membership records; VII. the social committee, chaired by Věra Melicharová, was to provide social and health assistance to political prisoners (flats, pensions, treatment) and at least partially mitigate the consequences of long-term imprisonment; VIII. the audit committee, led by Josef Čech, was supposed to control the financial and economic operation of K 231, both at headquarters and in the regions.¹⁸

¹⁷ Chronicle of the Čech family written by Jan Čech (son of Josef Čech) on the basis of notes found in the estate of Josef Čech and archive documents, especially from the Archiv bezpečnostních složek in Prague.

¹⁸ J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68. Sociální demokracie, KAN a K 231 v období pražského jara*, Praha 2009, pp. 222–226.

The draft statutes were drawn up as a group in order to be able to be submitted to the Ministry of the Interior for approval under Act No. 68/1951 Coll. on voluntary organisations. “The mission of the association is to contribute to the exercise of the democratic rights of the members and to the strengthening of the socialist system by helping the members to achieve full rehabilitation or to provide them with social assistance,” said the second point of the statutes. This mission was carried out by the association by a) informing the Czechoslovak state authorities and the public about the demands and needs of its members, b) cooperating with the state authorities and social organisations to prepare general and concrete measures aimed at rectifying injustices caused to members by misapplication of laws and at punishing those involved in the illegalities (c) assisting its members in exercising their legitimate claims or provide social assistance; (d) organising meetings, lectures and cultural enterprises; (e) establishing special purpose facilities. Only a Czechoslovak citizen who was convicted under Act No. 50/1923 Coll. and pursuant to Act No. 231/1948 Coll. or under laws that later replaced those laws could enrol. The family members of those who were convicted and died or were executed under the above laws were also entitled to become members. The person who filled in the membership application, submitted evidence of meeting the conditions of membership, paid a one-off contribution of at least CZK 1, and was accepted by the branch committee in his/her place of residence became a member.¹⁹

Similarly, the Memorandum of Mission and Purpose of K 231 (*Memorandum o poslání a účelu K 231*), sent to the new President of the Republic, Ludvík Svoboda, on 16 April 1968, stated in an unexceptionable and moderate way why they had founded K 231, what people it brought together, and what the main program principles were – legal, civic, and social rehabilitation. They called for the elimination of all discriminatory measures, the punishment of all perpetrators, regardless of their function and status. They argued for a “reform process” in the country and stressed that they were not seeking revenge; they gave up being judges, but crimes against humanity were to be punished. They repeatedly stated that K 231 was a non-political association: “we do not ask our members to which political party they belong or belonged to, and we do not seek political power in the state.”²⁰

The former political prisoners were successful in building the organisation; their commitment was enormous and they devoted to it all their free time after work. They had four members of staff who mainly dealt with mail, because hundreds and thousands of letters from political prisoners from all over the country were arriving at the headquarters. Not only their testimonies of the 1950s came, but also the K 231 applications, and it was necessary to maintain contacts with the regions where the K 231 branch network was being established. It was necessary to speak with one voice, organised and tactically, not against February 1948, but against illegalities. Jiří Krupička worked out a brief but clear program that everyone who wanted to perform on behalf of K 231 in public had to follow. The first part of the program, entitled “Hlavní zásady” (“*Guiding Principles*”), reiterated that K 231 was a non-political organisation. The second part was called

¹⁹ ANM, f. K 231, kart. 1, inv. č. 1, Statutes.

²⁰ J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68...*, pp. 225–226.

“Chceme” (“*We want*”). It stated that K 231 wanted to be created under conditions of full legality and the purpose was to actively participate in the drafting of the law on rehabilitation. “We want to achieve full civic equality in all fields of public, economic and cultural life for ourselves and our families,” the program said. They also wanted to support the process of democratisation and signal any threats to it anywhere and by anyone. “We will try to make our organisation a small model of democracy in practice,” the second part said. The third part, entitled “Odmítáme” (“*We Reject*”), began with a paragraph stating that K 231 did not want any “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” revenge. However, K 231 did not have confidence in the reorganisation or re-education of former State Security investigators and prison guards. The association K 231 did not address any specific foreign policy issues and, generally speaking, K 231 gave full support for the principles of the UN Charter. The association respected the fact that socialism is anchored in the Constitution, but “internal attitude” would be a matter of each individual.²¹

Along with the program, K 231 headquarters sent instructions to the regions to build the organisation in a bottom-up fashion. The program and instructions contributed to the establishment of district branches and to the growth of the organisation. At the end of May 1968, there was not a district (the Czech lands had 75 districts) where there was no branch, or at least one was not being set up. The number of members is difficult to determine because the records have not been preserved. A realistic estimate is around 80,000 members, and if K 231 had been legalised, the number would have increased further, because even those who were still hesitant would have joined.

Political prisoners from Slovakia were involved in the establishment of K 231, but soon decided to go their own way and set up their own organisation. The Slovak Organization for the Defending of Human Rights, a sister organisation of K 231, was founded on 7 April 1968 in Bratislava. That day, six hundred former political prisoners from Slovakia gathered at the Dům loďníků. The meeting was opened by a former general Jozef Marko, and an attorney Emil Vidra presented the ideological program of the organisation. It was said in the debate that rehabilitations should not take the form of new trials: as it was possible to send people to jail by using just a pen, it should also be possible to set aside all judgments also by a pen, since the re-trial of rehabilitated persons would be degrading. Emil Vidra was elected as the head of the Slovak Organization for the Defending of Human Rights; Jozef Marko became the deputy; Anton Semeš, Jaroslav Fabok, Anton Horník and Jozef Tomášek became the secretaries; Vojtěch Čerešňa became the treasurer; former general Jozef Kristín, Karol Koch, Viestová, Jarmila Golianová, Bečko, Ján Reháč and Ladislav Kmeť were the board members.²²

The secret police soon reported that a “Human Rights Protection Organization” had been established in the West Slovak Region in order to record former political prisoners. This organisation had similar aims as K 231 in the Czech lands. At the same time, the

²¹ ANM, f. K 231, kart. 1, inv. č. 5, Sdělení hlavních zásad a myšlenek programového oddělení K 231 z 8. dubna 1968.

²² Archiv Ústavu paměti národa Bratislava (hereinafter: AÚPN), f. KS ZNB Správa ŠtB Bratislava, B 8 II, inv. č. 174, Zpráva o některých poznatcích k určitým osobám v souvislosti s probíhajícím současným obrodným a demokratizačním procesem.

secret police stated that the establishment of this organisation had been in its beginnings in the Central and Eastern Slovakia regions.²³ The statutes of the organisation were drawn up by Chairman Emil Vidra, and the Slovaks also sought judicial, civic and social rehabilitation.²⁴ “K 231 can be banned at any time, unlike a Human Rights Organization,” Vidra said at a meeting with a Dominican priest Jakub Antonín Zemek in Brno.²⁵

The leadership of the Communist Party initially did not oppose the emerging K 231. This was connected with the fact that the rehabilitated Communists such as Josef Smrkovský, Josef Pavel and Gustáv Husák had become the spokespersons for the “reform process.” Another reform Communist, Eduard Goldstücker, chairman of the Czechoslovak Writers’ Union, also imprisoned in the 1950s, had sent a salutatory speech to the founding meeting of K 231 at the request of General Václav Paleček. His salutation had been read and then printed in the newspaper *Mladá fronta*. The intellectual Goldstücker had written it with some embarrassment, knowing that there were many active opponents of the regime among political prisoners, whom he had not identified with, and had recalled the bitter experience he had had with them in prison.²⁶ Chairman Karel Nigrín had subsequently replied that in Leopoldov prison in 1953 he could hardly have expected anything other than hatred and contempt. He stressed that K 231 now wanted to bridge the gap that had opened before society after February 1948. This should be fundamentally supported by rehabilitation, and, moreover, non-communist views and freedom of religion should also be respected.²⁷

The new government of Oldřich Černík, appointed on 8 April 1968 by the President of the Republic, Ludvík Svoboda, maintained a friendly course towards K 231 and included rehabilitation in the newly prepared KSČ Action Program. The Communists, however, were fully engaged in internal personnel changes and disputes, rather than paying much attention to K 231. Only for Stalinists like Drahomír Kolder were they “reactionary elements” without the right to exist. When on 22 April 1968, K 231 filed a proposal for statutes for the Ministry of the Interior, the next day they received confirmation of issuance of the application, which authorised them to act on the establishment of the organisation.²⁸ Yet these former political prisoners remained cautious after the experience they had had. Many of the reform Communists were remembered as ruthless party members, members of the Action Committees of the National Front and the People’s Militia,

²³ *Ibidem*, f. KS ZNB Správa ŠtB Košice, B 10 II, inv. 1029, Zvláštní zpráva o založení K 231.

²⁴ Emil Vidra, a native of Šurany, southern Slovakia, was sentenced to seven years in 1958 for subversion of the Republic, then later released on the amnesty of the President of the Republic on 9 May 1960 (*ibidem*, f. BA-V, arch. č. BA-V 10 341).

²⁵ Jan Antonín Zemek, Prior of the Dominican Monastery in Znojmo, was sentenced to 18 years of heavy prison in September 1948. He was later released after 12 years imprisonment by the amnesty of the President of the Republic on 9 May 1960 (ANM, f. K 231, kart. 3, inv. č. 449, Jan Antonín Zemek’s letter to K 231 from 10 June 1968).

²⁶ *Ibidem*, kart. 2, inv. č. 298, Zdravice Eduarda Goldstückera from March 31, 1968. Dopis politickým vězňům. *Mladá fronta*, 2 April 1968, v. 24, n. 92, p. 2; Cf. E. Goldstücker, *Vzpomínky 1945–1968*, Praha 2005, p. 150.

²⁷ Obnovit úctu k zákonům. *Mladá fronta*, 20 April 1968, v. 24, n. 109, p. 3.

²⁸ The Ministry of the Interior had 60 days to comment, the proceedings were to be closed in mid-June 1968.

who had been behind their persecution after February 1948.²⁹ Distrust was in place, no one knew where the liberalisation would go, and what rigmaroles it would bring – the development could easily turn in upon them, which soon happened.

The main objections came from Moscow. At a meeting with representatives of the Communist Party in Moscow on 4 May 1968, the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Leonid Brezhnev said: “We have no reason to say that the experience of socialist construction in Czechoslovakia over the past 20 years has been unsuccessful. Taking this experience from positions that have been taken up by various »clubs«, individual reactionaries and organisations, as it is said somewhere in manifestations and rallies, would mean rejecting the entire history of the development of the Czechoslovak state.”³⁰

For the Kremlin, the newly founded K 231 was one of the “anti-socialist organisations.” During the meeting, there was a sharp criticism of internal political development in Czechoslovakia. Alexej Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, said that many states were monitoring the situation in the ČSSR to ascertain whether the Communist Party was unable to run society and that cooperation with the USSR was disadvantageous. If the ČSSR is fluctuating and capitalism is restored, other socialist countries would also be on the agenda.³¹ According to the Soviets, a creeping counter-revolution was to take place and threatened to reverse the situation. Some of the leading Communists, such as Vasil Biľak, Alois Indra, or Drahomír Kolder, who were not supporters of the “reform process”, fully agreed with this. At the same time, it was a signal for the reform Communists to reconsider their position thus far.

After returning from Moscow, Dubček’s leadership changed its position: K 231 became an unwanted grouping, similar to the Club of Involved Independents (*Klub angažovaných nestraníků, KAN*), or the preparatory committee of the Social Democratic Party.³² Alexander Dubček at a meeting of the ÚV KSČ on 7–8 May 1968, said:³³ “I think the big mistake was that the comrades in our radio and television and in the press gave some of these emerging clubs such huge publicity, KAN and K 231, just when we didn’t know what to do about them, how they would develop, without adopting the opinion of the Ministry of the Interior, which is in charge of these registrations, or without submitting a certain political platform.”

But no one said publicly that there still were political prisoners in the prisons – there were 682 such people in the spring of 1968. Some of them were released by the amnesty of the President of the Republic, Ludvík Svoboda, on 9 May 1968.³⁴ These included,

²⁹ For example, the three founders of the People’s Militia of February 1948 – Josef Pavel, František Kriegel and Josef Smrkovský – became the main representatives of the reform wing within the Communist Party during the Prague Spring. People’s militias were the “armed fist of the working class” and actively participated in the promotion and maintenance of the Communist dictatorship.

³⁰ Cited in P. Blažek, T. Bursík, J. Halla, J. Hoppe, *Aby se to už neopakovalo...*, p. 48.

³¹ NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-02/1, sv. 69, arch. j. 85/15, Zpráva z jednání čs. delegace se sovětskými představiteli 4. května 1968 v Moskvě.

³² For more details see J. Hoppe, *Opozice ‘68...*, pp. 45–134, 135–208.

³³ Cited in P. Blažek, T. Bursík, J. Halla, J. Hoppe, *Aby se to už neopakovalo...*, p. 48.

³⁴ NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-02/1, sv. 69, arch. j. 85/13, Návrh na usnesení prezidenta republiky o udělení amnestie. Final amnesty see Rozhodnutí prezidenta republiky č. 55/1968 Sb. o amnestii.

for example, thirty-six-year-old Jaroslav Šťastný, who returned home after 14 years of imprisonment. He started a job at the Czechoslovak Railways in Ústí nad Labem, earning 1200 crowns per month, of which 400 crowns were deducted from him for paying the cost of custody and 400 crowns for the maintenance of his illegitimate son, who was seventeen years old. Therefore, he hardly got by and was dependent on the support of his old mother, with whom he lived and who received a retirement pension of CZK 400 a month.³⁵ In the “golden sixties”, this was not an unusual case; former political prisoners could mostly work only in poorly paid blue-collar professions, and their social conditions remained dismal.

What the ruling Communists could hardly put up with was the documentation of the illegalities and crimes of the 1950s. Ladislav Gruber's proposal to duplicate the documents proved to be very far-sighted. Together with Ota Rambousek, they photographed every document onto 35mm film and then sent the negatives abroad, where the Report of the Documentation Committee K 231 (*Zpráva dokumentační komise K 231*) was then published.³⁶ The leadership of the Communist Party was well aware that such a thorough reveal of the past would not only mean the need to identify and punish the culprits, but that it would call into question the entire political system that had caused the injustice, and that was unacceptable to the Communists.

On 12 May 1968, one of the reform Communists, Zdeněk Mlynář, declared regarding K 231 at a national meeting of KSČ officials in Prague, that: “K 231; that is something quite different. This is indeed a phenomenon that, in terms of perfection of democracy, not even The Queen of the United Kingdom has. Because it goes beyond all limits. This is actually an association of people who have been lawfully convicted and who have declared themselves convicted unlawfully. No one has rehabilitated some of them and I don't think anyone will. And they act as a political power.”³⁷

K 231 began to bother and annoy the regime as it exceeded the limits that the reform Communists were willing to accept. Over time, it seemed more and more to them that democratisation, not the restoration of democracy, had gone further than they originally had intended, but they did not know how to stop or delay the process so that their popularity with the Czech and Slovak public would not suffer. The threats of the Soviets only reinforced this reluctance, but at the same time created an alibi for sluggish and unwilling behaviour, delaying the approval of the statutes of K 231.

In an excited atmosphere of hope and expectation, the media played an important role. The abolition of censorship led to an increased interest in the recent past. In some newspapers and magazines, topics that had not been spoken about for twenty years, or

³⁵ *Ibidem*, f. SSNV, prison report on Jaroslav Šťastný; ABS, f. MV-V, investigative report a. č. V-3217, Zpráva Krajské správy SNB Ústí nad Labem odbor vyšetřování StB Litoměřice from 6 April 1969.

³⁶ The report was issued by the members of the Documentation Committee of K 231 in exile, the afterword was written by the writer Josef Škvorecký. In the first edition of 1973, all names, dates, descriptions of places, prisons and camps were omitted with regard to the safety of the authors (See O. Rambousek, L. Gruber, *Zpráva dokumentační komise K 231*, Belgium 1973). In the second edition, already after the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, they deciphered the data (See O. Rambousek, L. Gruber, *Zpráva dokumentační komise K 231*, USA 1995).

³⁷ Cited in P. Blažek, T. Bursík, J. Halla, J. Hoppe, *Aby se to už neopakovalo...*, p. 49.

had been taboo or forbidden appeared.³⁸ The public learned about the concealed facts and circumstances of political processes, and they began to be discussed publicly. Especially for the young generation, who was enthusiastically watching the “reform process,” this was a previously unknown reality. The daily newspaper *Lidová demokracie* brought a praiseworthy contribution on K 231, which also included an interview with Radovan Procházka, chairman of the information committee.³⁹ Everyday activities of K 231 were mapped the article by the daily newspaper *Svobodné slovo* that identified political prisoners as highly qualified experts, who could only work in low-paid and poorly paid jobs.⁴⁰ Moreover, the TV report made by the editors of *Zvědavá kamera* in Mírov Prison, which was broadcasted on April 26, 1968, attracted a lot of attention. Captain Smrčka, who was still working in the prison and claiming to have always been polite, was confronted on the show by Ota Rambousek who called him a rapist. He just defended himself by claiming that it had been an instruction from above. It was with this television report that K 231 entered the wider public awareness. Rambousek, however, did not only earn the attention of the media, but also the increased interest of State Security. Thus State Security provided ammunition to the journalists from *Rudé právo*: the newsmen were provided access to court files and pre-trial detention files likewise, which was at that time unheard of. In the main daily of the Communist Party, the article *Kdo to chce mluvit jménem politických vězňů?* (*Who Wants to Speak on behalf of Political Prisoners?*) was then published as a result.⁴¹

Until the Communist Party began to oppose K 231, the party media had no significant reason to do so. The situation changed at the end of May 1968. On the pages of *Rudé právo*, a campaign discrediting K 231 started to blaze forth. One of the best ways to influence public opinion against K 231 was to publish letters from “honest members of the club,” who, however, remained persistently anonymous. For example, on 1 June 1968, *Kdo má očistit jejich řady?* (*Who Should Cleanse Their Ranks?*) with the subtitle *Znepokojivý hlas ke složení K 231* (*A Disturbing Voice on the Composition of K 231*) was published and it was accompanied by a statement by “honest members of K 231” stating that, “people who do not deserve rehabilitation have intruded in our ranks. These include occupation collaborators, thieves, and murderers who were and still are enemies of our nation.”⁴²

The K 231 leadership, therefore, called a press conference on 3 June 1968, at which false allegations of retribution prisoners, thieves, and looters being in the organisation were refuted. They reiterated that they did not want to become a political party, nor did they have any political ambitions, and they just wanted justice.⁴³ The organisation did not have its own printing platform where it could defend and print its views and attitudes.

³⁸ It primarily concerned *Práce*, *Svobodné slovo*, *Lidová demokracie* and magazines *Literární lisy* and *Student*.

³⁹ *Lidová demokracie*, May 13, 1968, v. 24, n. 148, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Vykoupení z hříchů* (*Svobodné slovo*, May 13, 1968, v. 24, n. 131, p. 1).

⁴¹ *Rudé právo*, 28 May 1968, v. 48, n. 148, p. 3. For the life story of Ota Rambousek see J. Rokoský, *Řemeslník Ota Rambousek – O pankrácké věznici, agentech chodcích a čistém štítě v komunistických kriminálech*, [in:] *Hovory o Československu* (DVD). FF UJEP, Ústí nad Labem 2007.

⁴² *Rudé právo*, June 1, 1968, v. 48, n. 150, p. 3.

⁴³ *Prohlášení politických vězňů Svobodné slovo*, 4 June 1968, v. 24, n. 153, p. 1.

They had to rely on non-communist papers to speak up for them. The editor Petr Chudožilov, for example, wrote an article in *Literární noviny* entitled *Komu vadí K 231* (*Whom K 231 Bothers*), in which he stated that the articles against Rambousek “are not about Rambousek but an attempt to discredit K 231.”⁴⁴

Sympathy to K 231 was shown by Czech exiles that lived behind the Iron Curtain, followed the development in their homeland, and offered help. “We pay close attention to all events in Czechoslovakia and admire your bravery in the fight against injustice, oppression and all that has damaged our country so much in the international forum over the past 20 years,” said Chairman Papánek and Secretary Brym in a letter sent to K 231 on behalf of regional committee of the Czechoslovak National Council of America (*Československá Národní rada Americká*) in Chicago.⁴⁵ It was in this American city, where a large number of Czech exiles lived, that the Preparatory Committee of Former Political Prisoners of the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia Living in Exile was established and fully coincided with the aim and principles of K 231.⁴⁶ Exiled Jaromír Zástěra, sentenced to eighteen years of imprisonment in April 1950, released from Valdice Prison in May 1962 and subsequently expelled to the United States, where he studied and worked as an editor of Czech broadcasting for the Voice of America, offered financial assistance and application of documents collected by K 231 overseas, but also pointed to trifling disputes which faced the Czechoslovak exile.⁴⁷ For K 231, reactions from the other side of the Iron Curtain were a valuable encouragement in their actions in Czechoslovakia.

Throughout the Prague Spring, K 231 remained under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior. At first it might have seemed that the Interior Minister Josef Pavel, who had been persecuted himself in the 1950s, would have a good understanding of the efforts of former political prisoners, but it soon became apparent that the relationship would be ambivalent.⁴⁸ He acted correctly with the representatives of K 231 on the form of the statutes and tried to reform the security forces, but at the same time his department closely monitored the activities of K 231. In addition, in the secret police he encountered some resistance by dogmatic members who did not like the “reform process.”

State security often still had very detailed information on both the K 231 headquarters and the individual branches in the regions.⁴⁹ It evaluated the activities of K 231 in South Bohemia as follows: “The members of K 231 were mostly recruited from the elements with anti-socialist and anti-Soviet thinking. Throughout the region, they carried out strong

⁴⁴ *Literární listy*, 6 June 1968, v. 1, n. 15, p. 2.

⁴⁵ ANM, f. K 231, kart. 1, inv. č. 9, Dopis Oblastního výboru Československé Národní rady Americké v Chicagu from 20 June 1968, sent to HQ of K 231 in Prague.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, kart. 3, inv. č. 489, Dopis Přípravného výboru bývalých politických vězňů komunistického režimu v Československu v Chicagu from 1 May 1968 sent to HQ of K 231 in Prague.

⁴⁷ NA, f. SSVN, prison report on Jaromír Zástěra; ANM, f. K 231, kart. 4, inv. č. 649, Dopis Jaromíra Zástěry adresovaný Jaroslav Brodskému from 3 June 1968.

⁴⁸ Fifty-five-year-old Josef Pavel, who joined the Communist Party in 1932, was sentenced in December 1953 to 25 years of heavy prison for alleged treason. In October 1955, the Supreme Court acquitted him of all charges. For his negotiations with K 231 representatives (see J. Brodský, *Řešení Gama...*, pp. 106–109).

⁴⁹ E.g. ABS, f. A 34, II. správa SNB, inv. j. 2578, Činnost K 231 a KAN v Jihočeském a Severočeském kraji.

recruitment activity and thus gained a broad membership.⁵⁰ The inaugural meeting was held on 5 May 1968 in České Budějovice in the presence of 486 members. Following the election of the Board, Radovan Procházka, a representative of K 231 headquarters, said that the primary task was to rehabilitate all prisoners and stressed the determination to fight until full democracy was established. A letter from Bishop Josef Hlouch was read. The letter “calls all members of K 231 heroes”, and it also promised “that [our] common pain will be rewarded.” Individual members who “strongly attacked the socialist system and the leading role of the Communist Party” appeared in the discussion. Former political prisoners encouraged a search for State Security officers involved in their prosecution in the 1950s. One of the contributors compared the republic to a concentration camp because it was surrounded by wire. Another asked for the full rehabilitation and return of property to all of the punished.⁵¹

At the central level, K 231’s activities were dealt with by the State Security Main Administration, namely its analytical department that both defended the existing activities of the security apparatus and created misinformation campaigns against former political prisoners in the media.⁵² From their point of view, officials and many members of K 231 promoted anti-socialist tendencies quite publicly and very often in a rough form. One example was the speech of Jan Šmíd, M.D. at the inaugural meeting on 3 May 1968, in Litoměřice. There he presented a paper in which he said that the past thirty years had been years of horror, a terrible lack of freedom, and years when totally incompetent and spineless people had been ruling. “Today, lawyers in Prague are clearing sewers and paving the streets. We must strive to get them back to their places,” informed Šmíd and also said that everyone would meet one’s fate one day, but it would take patience because many evils had been done. Those in power, let them go to the construction industry where people are needed. “We have never lost [our] honour, unlike State Security and the apparatus,” Šmíd said.⁵³ Another former political prisoner, František Zahrádka, a member of the preparatory committee of K 231 in Příbram, asked K 231 to establish a political party called the “Non-Party,” which would be a counterweight to the Communist Party and other “collaborating” parties of the National Front.⁵⁴

Reports and findings on the activities of K 231, which State Security was sending to ÚV KSČ, influenced the decisions of the reform Communists led by the first secretary Alexander Dubček. Their hostility towards K 231 thus further intensified; former political prisoners were considered a right-wing anti-Communist force that threatened socialist

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, Činnost K 231 a Klubu angažovaných nestraníků – zpráva.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*. Josef Hlouch was appointed bishop of České Budějovice in June 1947, but soon came into conflict with the communist regime. From May 1950 he was interned in his residence and from March 1952 outside the diocese, to which he could not return until the Prague Spring.

⁵² *Ibidem*, inv. j. 2575, Zpráva o činnosti tiskového skupiny analytického odboru HS StB from 3 June 1968. For more details see T. Bursík, *Klub 231, ministerstvo vnitra a jeho analytický odbor v roce 1968*, [in:] *Bezpečnostní aparát, propaganda a Pražské jaro*, Praha 2009, pp. 101–106.

⁵³ ABS, f. A 34, II. správa SNB, inv. j. 2575, Zvláštní zpráva.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*. For the life story of František Zahrádka see J. Rokoský, *Radiomechanik František Zahrádka – Jak se převádělo přes hranice, o životě v komunistických lágrech, fárání v uranových dolech*, [in:] *Hovory o Československu* (DVD). FF UJEP, Ústí nad Labem 2006.

development and the process of socialist revival. No wonder, then, that political prisoners generally kept a sober distance, not being abandoned by the vigilance against a regime that sought change for the better.⁵⁵

The main program objective of K 231 was the rehabilitation of all former political prisoners. The reform Communists showed their willingness and interest in drawing up a rehabilitation law, which was to be approved by the National Assembly. The question, however, was what form and parameters the new law would have; in this both parties already differed.⁵⁶

Among the former political prisoners were particularly active the pardoned social democrats, who had discussed this before the establishment of K 231: hence the attempts to restore the Social Democratic Party.⁵⁷ According to their ideas, the prepared law was to annul all judgments of the State Courts (Prague, Brno, Bratislava) and the Supreme Court collegia in politically motivated judgments after February 1948. The guilt was to be proven by the state authorities, not the convicted, who would not have to prove their innocence. The General Prosecutor's Office had the right to propose the continuation of criminal proceedings within six months; if it did not do so, the proceedings should be discontinued. Some former Social Democrats watched the events from a distance (journalist Přemysl Janýr, university professor and constitutional law expert Zdeněk Peška), others in seclusion (prosecutor František Tržický), others worked in K 231 (lawyer Josef Kovarovic), and some were active in both organizations, both in the Social Democracy and in K 231 (philosopher Jaroslav Kohout, journalist Josef Veverka).⁵⁸

The 60-year-old Josef Kovařovic, who was in charge of the agenda related to rehabilitation in K 231, intended in particular to introduce into the rehabilitation law the principle that all judgments that have been already handed down for serious political crimes should be abolished. Exceptions should be only cases where, for example, killing or injury to health, espionage, or disclosure of state secrets had occurred.⁵⁹ The intention was obvious: to rehabilitate all 128,000 former political prisoners who, after February 1948, had been in compliance with Acts No. 50/1923 Coll., No. 231/1948 Coll. and the laws that had replaced them. The result was a draft of a Conciliation Act consisting of a preamble and three chapters agreed by former political prisoners and submitted to the

⁵⁵ The Bishop of Litoměřice, Štěpán Trochta, who was sentenced to 25 years of heavy prison in July 1954, was one of the skeptics, for example. He wrote to the Secretary of K 231, Jaroslav Brodský, "The future will show how we should act. I do not like the situation so far. I think we still have a lot of work to do" (ANM, f. K 231, kart. 4, inv. č. 648, Dopis Štěpána Trochty from 22 June 1968).

⁵⁶ On 9 April 1968, the Communist Party's Action Program was published, in which the Party announced the building of socialism with a human face. In accordance with the Action Program, the government declared in a program statement on 24 April to prepare and propose a rehabilitation law that would quickly and effectively remedy the injustices caused.

⁵⁷ For more details see J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68...*, pp. 45–134.

⁵⁸ For more details see *ibidem*. From the memoir literature see for example E. Veverková, *Znovu bych mu ruku podala!*, Středokluky 2004.

⁵⁹ In these cases, the prosecutor could issue an order to investigate them. Failure to do so was followed by a discharge and then the judicial rehabilitation was completed.

Constitutional Law Committee of the National Assembly on 23 May 1968, to be made available to lawmakers when discussing the form of the rehabilitation law.⁶⁰

The conciliatory and generous K 231 proposal did not find a favourable response from the reform Communists. The Rehabilitation Act was prepared by the Ministry of Justice (the minister was Alois Neumann, after the reconstruction of the government it was Bohuslav Kučera), then it went to the constitutional-law committee of the National Assembly (led by Viktor Knapp from mid-April 1968). The then parliament had 300 members (225 were members of the Communist Party, that is three quarters, chaired by Josef Smrkovský); Peter Colotka held the post of Deputy Prime Minister for Legislation in the Oldřich Černík Government, and Miloš Čerovský was the Attorney General. The government proposed and resolved to recommend to the deputies an individual revision of the verdicts, inter alia for compensation (estimates ranged from 1 to 5 billion crowns).⁶¹

Individual revisions were not favoured by K 231, political prisoners did not want to defend themselves in court and open old wounds, there was a fear that everything would go on for years, and, moreover, the reviews would have to judge other judges who were operating in the fifties. But it was a futile and unsuccessful attempt. They did not significantly influence the legislative process, let alone the voting in the National Assembly, where a variant approved by the Czechoslovak government and consecrated by the ÚV KSČ prevailed.⁶²

The preamble to the Law on Judicial Rehabilitation No. 82/1968 Coll., adopted on 25 June 1968, said: “However, it is not possible to remove acts of revolutionary legality, weaken or even deny the socialist legal order. Rehabilitation cannot concern enemies of socialist construction who have violated the applicable laws by crimes against the Republic or any other criminal activity and were rightly punished.”⁶³

The Reform Communists in no way wanted to raise the question of February 1948 and how to view it, and considered it an unbeatable landmark. The main principle of the law was an individual review of a criminal case by a court on the basis of a petition by a convicted person or a relative. The judgments in the main proceedings ruled by the Supreme Court, the State Court, the Regional Court or the Higher Military Court between 24 October 1948 and 31 July 1965 were to be examined.⁶⁴ Thus, a large part of cases tried by district courts remained unreviewed, for example the District Court in Ústí nad Labem met for only 435 cases in 1950–1955, then sentenced 413 persons to unconditional sentences and 134 to conditional sentences.⁶⁵ The application for revision of the

⁶⁰ See J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68...*, pp. 270–272.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 283–286.

⁶² Act on Judicial Rehabilitation No. 82/1968 Coll. was adopted by 218 votes from 219, with one abstention. *Národní shromáždění republiky Československé 1964–1968* [online]. Library of PSP ČR, Praha [2000] [accessed 12 July 2019]. Chamber of Deputies, steno minutes of the 24th sitting, Tuesday, 25 June 1968. Available from <http://www.psp.cz>.

⁶³ Act on Judicial Rehabilitation No. 82/1968 Coll.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, f. Okresní soud Ústí nad Labem 1850–1984, individual cases.

case had to be submitted no later than one year after the date of entry into force of the Act, which entered into force on 1 August 1968.

The adopted Rehabilitation Act was fundamentally different from what K 231 had proposed and demanded and they could not be satisfied with it, yet they accepted and supported it. This was the first attempt to rectify the repressions and crimes of the past two decades. However, forensic rehabilitation had clear limits: instead of all 128,000 former political prisoners, only about 30,000 of them were covered by the new law.

One of the outstanding events of the Prague Spring was the ceremonial requiem for the victims of violence during the previous twenty years of unfreedom, which took place on 20 June 1968 in the Cathedral of St. Vitus at Prague Castle. It was organised by K 231 and 5,000 people came to the cathedral. The main celebrant was Bishop František Tomášek and a number of priests, bishops and abbots, who had been imprisoned in the 1950s, met at the altar. Among them was a Catholic priest, Antonín Bradna, who wrote in a letter to K 231 that the requiem had been beautiful and dignified: "I am used to many things and I am touched by a few things. But when I looked, from the altar of St. Vitus, where I had received priesthood ordination from Joseph Beran on that day twenty years ago, at that thousand-strong crowd of all who had come to pray for our brothers and sisters – I was moved."⁶⁶

However, the media campaign against K 231 continued. Communist papers, which did not hesitate to use State Security materials, sought to discredit political prisoners in the public eye. K 231, on the other hand, was supported by non-communist journalists who helped to defend their right to exist. Writer and translator Vilém Hejl, a member of the K 231 press committee, wrote in the *Literární listy* at the end of June, 1968: "However, K 231 is only a part of society – and it does not determine how much space it will have. It can be ignored by the authorities and by the press, suppressed, and it can also be liquidated. But then more than one of the organisations newly-emerged during the 1968 national spring disappears. The fate of K 231 became the fate of Czechoslovak democracy."⁶⁷

K 231 still unsuccessfully tried to legalise its doings. Negotiations with the Interior Ministry continued, but led nowhere. Instead, political prisoners were watched and called upon to dissolve their organisation by leading reform Communists.⁶⁸ For example, František Kriegel, chairman of the National Front Central Committee (*ÚV Národní fronta*), said that after the adoption of the Rehabilitation Act, K 231 would lose its meaning and justification.⁶⁹ The president of the National Assembly, Josef Smrkovský,

⁶⁶ ANM, f. K 231, kart. 4, inv. č. 552, Dopis Antonína Bradny z 2. července 1968. On the life story of Antonín Bradna see J. Rokoský, *Mons. Antonín Bradna – O katolické církvi, komunistickém krimínálu a přátelství*. [in:] *Hovory o Československu* (DVD). FF UJEP, Ústí nad Labem 2005.

⁶⁷ Znovu v podezření. *Literární listy*, 27 June 1968, v. 1, n. 18, p. 13.

⁶⁸ The presidium of Central Committee of the Communist Party ordered František Kriegel and Evžen Erban to set up a workplace in the secretariat of the Central Committee National Front, that would monitor the development of political forces in the country and lead a qualified fight against various organisations such as K 231 or KAN. The cadre was to occupy him with erudite Marxists (NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-02/1, sv. 77, arch. j. 106/16, Usnesení 87. schůze předsednictva ÚV KSČ ze dne 16. července 1968).

⁶⁹ Současnost a perspektivy Národní fronty. *Lidová demokracie*, 25 June 1968, v. 24, n. 174, p. 3.

answered very similarly when asked by the editor why K 231 had not yet been granted club status.⁷⁰ However, the political prisoners among whom there was a debate on how to oppose these efforts did not intend to dissolve their organisation.⁷¹ They continued to say that a political prisoner was one who had committed a “crime” of high and honest motives. They declared their fundamental position: we are creditors, not supplicants!

The Reform Communists began to quietly prepare two legal norms that would prevent the establishment and operation of new organisations outside the National Front, that is outside the control of the Communist Party. Zdeněk Mlynář, secretary of the ÚV KSČ, proposed a constitutional law on the National Front, which, however, the Czechoslovak Parliament refused to discuss. His second initiative on “temporary measures in the areas of press, association and assembly” also failed. The Reform Communists decided to prepare a modified constitutional law on the National Front, on the basis of which it would be possible to officially ban K 231, as well as KAN and social democracy. In negotiations with K 231 representatives, however, the reform Communists asked them to act with reserve and not deteriorate their position in negotiations with the Soviets, for whom K 231 was a proof that counter-revolution had broken out in Czechoslovakia.⁷²

The supreme representative of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev stepped up pressure on the Czechoslovak Communists. He criticised them for not accepting the existing “reservations”. And when ÚV KSČ received a letter from Moscow on 7 July with a proposal for a joint meeting to discuss the Czechoslovak internal political situation, they politely refused. Representatives of the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the GDR held talks on 14–15 July in Warsaw about the “danger of counter-revolution” in Czechoslovakia. After the meeting they sent an ultimatum letter to Prague and a group of KGB officers arrived in Prague. The last attempt at an agreement was made by the Soviets when they arrived to negotiate (from 29 July to 2 August 1968) in Czechoslovakia, albeit on its borders only, to Čierná nad Tisou, from where they always went to sleep over on their way to the Soviet homeland. Brezhnev imposed harsh conditions, including the abolition of various „clubs” and the re-introduction of censorship. Brezhnev is believed (it is undocumented, yet it aptly expresses the Soviet stance) to have said: “With your democracy you will not stay in power for half a year.”

The question is, however, whether the Czechs and Slovaks really wanted to exchange power sloppiness for democracy? Opinions still differ. The reform Communists themselves spoke of democratisation, not of democracy. The extent of civil destruction of society was so great that the Czechs and Slovaks did not even want to admit to it, and in the West they did not realise that at all. The year 1968 respected the limits of power from

⁷⁰ Dva tisíce a Tisíce slov. *Svobodné slovo*, 3 July 1968, v. 24, n. 185, p. 1.

⁷¹ Some members of K 231 around Jaroslav Brodský argued that they must not make it difficult for reform Communists, they must be as inconspicuous as possible in order not to irritate the Soviet Union. Most insisted on a cautious stance, claiming that Brodský was seeking some post within the “reform process”, especially when he proposed to run for the National Assembly in Litomeřice, a vacant post after General Jan Šejn, who in February 1968 as the highest ranking officer of the Warsaw Pact had emigrated to the West. O. Rambousek, “Vznik K 231”. *Západ*, 1985, issue 1, vol. 7, p. 24.

⁷² See J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68...*, pp. 287–296.

February 1948. But what happened then were not errors but crimes. Czechoslovakia had become a dysfunctional, unfair society after twenty years under a Communist regime. What was it about during the Prague Spring then? It was about shattering the illusions of February 1948. And those who still harboured some were deprived of them by the arrival of the occupation troops.⁷³

On the night of 20–21 August 1968, troops of five Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia. The invasion armies were comprised of 27 divisions, 300,000 soldiers, and the action was given the code name Danube. “I was woken up by a phone at about half past midnight,” Ota Rambousek recalled the critical moments of the country’s occupation.⁷⁴ He was called by former political prisoner Ota Kobyłka, who worked as a waiter and had just returned home and heard on the radio that an occupation had started. Czechoslovak Radio was silent, but the city radio was still broadcasting. “Within a quarter of an hour I was ready. Everything you need either in exile or in jail: a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, towel, toilet paper and few items of clothing,” continued Rambousek. In twenty minutes, Kobyłka arrived by car and they drove to Karlova street. “The streets were empty. Silence all around. We were about five who had the secretariat keys. I opened the iron grating and walked into the basement. In the dark, just by my memory and in dim light of the street lanterns, I loaded everything I was responsible for into two large suitcases. I closed the grating. For the last time I looked at the blue, glass board that read: K 231, Central Secretariat.”⁷⁵

They were not the only ones who immediately arrived at the Secretariat at 17 Karlovo náměstí: shortly afterwards Jaroslav Brodský and other members of K 231 leadership arrived. They took the documentation to keep it out of the hands of the occupiers, and most of the documents, such as registration cards, applications, lists of members and management, were immediately destroyed. The sign “K 231” was removed from the house. There could be no trace left. Tanks with Soviet soldiers then stood on the waterfront at Mánes, where a large banner hung over the entrance: “Club of Socialist Culture.”

Ota Rambousek took the documentary commission’s archive and placed it in a safe place. At two o’clock in the morning he and Ladislav Gruber set off on a journey to the state border. While the Czechs and Slovaks were waking up and learning about the occupation, they were already at the border. Although they were not allowed to enter Austria, they were not arrested. Members of the Ministry of the Interior and the border guards were so disoriented that they just sent all without valid passports and visas back from the border.⁷⁶ They returned to Prague where the leadership of K 231 met in the evening. František Falerski, who was in charge of running the organisation, had a particularly

⁷³ French historian and sociologist Françoise Mayer has so far best described what the Czechs did with “their” Communism, and aptly analysed their relationship to the regime from different perspectives – from the position of former political prisoners of the 1950s, then communist builders, normalisers, dissidents or historians (F. Mayer, *Češi a jejich komunismus. Paměť a politická identita*, Praha 2009).

⁷⁴ O. Rambousek, “Vznik K 231”..., p. 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

important role in this crisis situation. He provided connections between members, determined and secured meeting places and hiding places for leading members who could not return home. They feared arrests and repressions as they were deemed to be exponents of the “counter-revolution” in Czechoslovakia.

There was no doubt that the occupation had ended the almost five-month-old K 231. All hopes collapsed. In the occupied country, the activities of the organisation were not possible at all. The Soviet leadership dragged the leaders of the Communist Party, headed by Alexander Dubček, to Moscow, where, after heavy pressure, they forced them to sign the so-called Moscow Protocol, which effectively halted the reform development and opened the way to “normalisation” in the country. The fourth point of the Moscow Protocol, which the reform Communists were supposed to put into practice after returning home, stated that it was necessary to “stop the activities of various groups and organisations standing in anti-socialist positions”.⁷⁷ Of course, this meant the new civic organisations K 231 and KAN, which were now supposed to be promptly disbanded. At its meeting on 28 August 1968, the government decided that the relevant government documents and decisions of the Ministry of the Interior and the National Front would be prepared in order to ban the activities of these two unacceptable civil organisations.⁷⁸

On 5 September 1968, the Ministry of the Interior issued a decision not to approve the statutes of K 231.⁷⁹ The reason for this was that, following the adoption of the Rehabilitation Act, the preconditions for effective protection of the interests of rehabilitated persons had already been created, and all issues related to rehabilitation should now be addressed by national committees and other state administration bodies. The very existence of K 231 was identified as superfluous and thus lost the right to continue any further.⁸⁰

The very next day, on 6 September 1968, the K 231 Central Preparatory Committee sent out a circular to all district branches, calling for the ceasing of operations and settling of all obligations.⁸¹ The Ministry of the Interior set a deadline of 19 September 1968 – the organisation complied with this deadline. Chairman Karel Nigrín wrote a letter to the new Minister of the Interior, Jan Pelnář, that he had transferred the funds available to K 231 as a gift to the account of the Fund of the Republic. The secretariat furnishings were handed over to the original tenant. In the letter he tried to defend the whole activity of the organisation. He reminded the Minister that from the first moment they had met with distrust in the openness of their attitude and in the honesty of their goals. As far as they had been able to, they had tried to dispel these unjustified doubts under conditions that had been absolutely inadequate for the proper and uniform functioning of the organisation. Considering the new post-August reality, he expressed the hope that even: “the most responsible goal of our organisation to never repeat what we had experienced with our people twenty years ago had so far become a conscious intent of our society

⁷⁷ J. Vondrová, J. Navrátil (eds.), *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967–1970*, 4th part, 2nd volume, doc. no. 169, p. 272.

⁷⁸ NA, f. MV ČSR/ČR, kart. 11, Podklady pro schůzi vlády 28. srpna 1968.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, Rozhodnutí o neschválení stanov 5. září 1968.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ O. Rambousek, “Vznik K 231”..., p. 25.

and, above all, of those who represented it, and that he had the guarantees that it had been our best endeavour.”

And he had no choice but to state that “today, K 231 is becoming a thing of the past”.⁸²

The question is how many political prisoners were actually rehabilitated? Incomplete data varies. Between 1 August 1968, and 1 August 1969, about 24,000 people applied for rehabilitation; in 1968, about 270 people were rehabilitated. By the summer of 1970, the original court decision was overturned for about 2900 people, about 182 of who received less severe penalties. On July 8, 1970, the Federal Assembly amended the law because the normalisation Communists considered it too generous.⁸³ The period covered was narrowed to the years 1949 to 1956, and it was becoming more and more difficult to obtain an annulment of a judgment. In addition, in 1860 cases prosecutors of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic attacked the revised sentence for violating the law and in 1714 cases the Supreme Court of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic concurred. Only a fraction of political prisoners saw rehabilitation during the Prague Spring – about 1,500 people.⁸⁴

Numerous representatives of K 231 went into exile. Ota Rambousek wrote about his departure: “On the first of October at midnight, I stood with some small baggage by the express train to Sofia. [My] second time to emigrate. In the morning, [I was on] the border at Komárno, around noon in Budapest, in the evening in Belgrade. Goodbye Sofia, I never wanted to go there. To the other side, via Zagreb, Ljubljana, on to Gorica. In the evening of 5 October my wife, my friend from K 231 and I climbed the fence at Gorica railway station and set foot on the ground of a free world.”⁸⁵

Meanwhile, State Security was trying to provide an accurate overview of who of the K 231 leaders and members had emigrated to the West after August 1968. It was only confirmed that Jaroslav Brodský was in Switzerland, that Lubor Havel had emigrated to Austria with his family and that Toronto, Canada, had become a kind of centre of K 231 members. “This unclear situation was caused by the prohibition of active operative work into this problem and by free passage through the Czechoslovak borders to the West,” as State Security justified its hitherto fragmented findings.⁸⁶

After 21 August 1968, numerous representatives of the Slovak Organization for the Defending of Human Rights, including Chairman Emil Vidra, left to emigrate.⁸⁷ Other leaders, especially the retired generals Jozef Marko and Jozef Kristín, tried to negotiate the legalisation of the movement in post-August conditions, but in vain. When they

⁸² ANM, f. K 231, kart. 3, inv. č. 545, Sdělení o zlikvidování veškerých závazků K 231 ministerstvu vnitra z 19. září 1968.

⁸³ Government proposal amending and supplementing the Act on Judicial Rehabilitation No. 82/1968 Coll. was adopted by 173 votes in favour, no one against and no abstentions. *Federální shromáždění Československé socialistické republiky 1969–1971* [online]. Library of PSP ČR, Praha [2000] [accessed 15 July 2019]. Chamber of People, steno minutes of the 9th sitting, Wednesday, 8 July 1970. Available at <http://www.psp.cz>.

⁸⁴ J. Hoppe, *Opozice '68...*, p. 286; Cf. I. Gaďourek, J. Nehněvajsa, *Žalářovani, pronásledování a zneuznaní*, Brno 1997.

⁸⁵ O. Rambousek, “Vznik K 231”..., p. 25.

⁸⁶ ABS, f. A 34, II. správa SNB, inv. j. 2575, Zpráva o Klubu 231 from 14 November 1968.

⁸⁷ Emil Vidra emigrated to Austria and lived in Vienna.

visited a competent official of the Slovak National Council on September 30, 1968, they were curtly informed that from 1 October 1968, the organisation and its activities were officially prohibited and they were urged to hand over all the materials from any of the previous activities.⁸⁸ State Security in Slovakia later stated that it was an organisation that had opposed the Communist Party's policy to bring about a change in the social order in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and with this intention the organisation had contributed to "maintaining unrest, slowing down the consolidation process and provoking undesirable moods". According to the secret police, the Slovak Organization for the Defending of Human Rights was one of the best-known unauthorised organisations in Slovakia, "bringing together the most extreme right-wing forces".⁸⁹

In Czechoslovakia, the die-hard Stalinists, opponents of reforms, supported by various means from Moscow and by the command of the occupying Soviet troops, regained their lost positions in the Communist Party. On 2 October 1968, the daily newspaper *Práce* published a report by the Soviet press agency TASS that K 231 had illegally elected a new leadership, chaired by a Dr. Nigrín, and that members of this illegal organisation were setting up terrorist groups.⁹⁰ On the same day, Karel Nigrín objected to this in a letter to the Attorney General, stating that, "this report is totally fabricated from the beginning to the end and belongs to the category of messages maliciously distributed about our state".⁹¹ For the occupiers, however, K 231 was "one of the centres of counter-revolution", which had to be tackled in principle. The position of the Stalinists was strengthened by an agreement on the "temporary stay" of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia on 16 October 1968, which in no way defined the temporality of the stay. Soviet troops remained in the country permanently, with the strength of 70 thousand men.⁹²

The Communist secret police soon re-constructed the picture of the origin, development, and state of the already banned K 231, concluding that it was necessary to conduct an active operational elaboration of this organisation. In the emerging normalisation situation, it presented three basic reasons why this should be the case. Firstly, some functionaries and members of K 231 deviated from the original proclaimed purpose by "switching to anti-socialist positions and applying [their] power aspirations more and more" – this was apparently evidenced by their efforts to liquidate the Communist Party, to abolish the People's Militia and the State Security, and their efforts to penetrate into the Czechoslovak armed forces. Secondly, a significant part of K 231's members in the headquarters, regions and districts did not respect the ban and continued to operate illegally. "The association of K 231 with some organisations in capitalist countries, the attempts to illegally associate with foreign power, the activities of emigration abroad, the distri-

⁸⁸ AÚPN, f. KS ZNB Správa ŠtB Bratislava, B 8 II, inv. č. 174, Zpráva o činnosti osob a organizací vyvíjejících nepřátelskou činnost.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*. Manifestations of hostilities in the fields of culture, science, education, radio, television, writers, academies of science, churches and sects, DKO, SNOEP, the relationship of persons to Israel, leaflets, inscriptions and anonymous

⁹⁰ ČSSR na stránkách tisku. *Práce*, 2 October 1968, v. 24, n. 269, p. 1.

⁹¹ ANM, f. K 231, kart. 3, inv. č. 547, Dopis Karla Nigrína generální prokuratuře from 2 October 1968.

⁹² E.g. P. Pithart, *Osmadesátý*, Praha 1990.

bution of anti-state documents, the acquisition of weapons,” stated State Security. All of the above mentioned showed dangerous tendencies towards illegal activities and these were “confirmed” by their efforts to obtain financial support from the West. Thirdly, the findings should have shown that some officials and members of K 231 chose a tactic of linking legal and illegal activities and began to operate in the authorised organisations of the National Front, especially in its non-communist parties, and that they were penetrating the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters.⁹³

Although State Security, shaken by events in the Prague Spring, sometimes exaggerated, for example K 231 had never hoarded weapons, its position strengthened again. The top party leadership of the Communist Party accepted that it was necessary to secure and permanently monitor its illegal activities by all operational means, and to ensure perfect knowledge of illegal meetings, the content of these meetings, emigration of K 231 members, and distribution of threatening letters and other hostile materials. The Party also had to obtain, through internal and foreign intelligence agencies, accurate information on the emergence and activities of K 231 branches abroad, the links to K 231 in Czechoslovakia, the financial and other support for the activities of K 231, and the locations and activities of members K 231 in emigration.⁹⁴

Indeed, K 231’s leaders dispersed all over the world to find their second home. Many never returned to their homeland. Václav Paleček died in California (1970). Jan Šmíd, who had emigrated to Switzerland, was sentenced to five years in prison unconditionally and to forfeiture of his property for his unauthorised leaving of the Republic in 1972, like many others, and died in exile in 1983. Jaroslav Brodský died in Toronto (1981), where he had worked as a librarian at a local university and had published a book of memories, *Řešení Gama (Gamma Solution)*.⁹⁵ Vilém Hejl died in Munich (1989), where he had worked in the analysis department of Radio Free Europe.

As long as it was possible for them, the former K 231 members sought the return of freedom and democracy to their homeland. In 1970 they founded the Association of Former Czechoslovak Political Prisoners Abroad (*Sdružení bývalých československých politických vězňů*). They had originally intended to use the name K 231 as they highly esteemed the name. However, at the explicit request of former chairman Karel Nigrín, who had been reported in Geneva by a committee member Felix Nevřela, they had abandoned this idea. There was a fear that the remaining members in Czechoslovakia would be persecuted for the conduct of the exiles, which the State Security intelligence carefully monitored, and through disinformation campaigns would cause misunderstandings and disputes among them.⁹⁶

The K 231 leaders who had stayed retreated into seclusion. They remained convinced democrats, but mostly no longer openly opposed the normalisation regime. Some seemed

⁹³ ABS, f. A 34, II. správa SNB, inv. j. 2575, Zpráva o Klubu 231 from 14 November 1968.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ For more on Jaroslav Brodský see *ibidem*, inv. j. 2584, Jaroslav Brodský, tajemník K 231 – report from 8 January 1970.

⁹⁶ On the work of political prisoners in exile in the second half of the 1980s see J. Halla, *Organizace bývalých politických vězňů: Klub K 231 v exilu (1985–1990)*, Masters Thesis, Historický ústav FF MU, Brno 2001.

to have lost their desire to live; for example, František Falerski did not obey doctors' warnings and died prematurely in September 1969 at the age of forty-two.⁹⁷ "In the 1970s, the State Security constantly reminded me of my membership in K 231," recalled the abbot of the Želiv Abbey, Vít Tajovský, who had been the district chairman in Havlíčkův Brod: now he was again referred to as a "Vatican spy."⁹⁸ Men and women from the K 231 association became "interesting persons" for the secret police; they were watched and repeatedly invited for questioning. They remained as hostile persons under close scrutiny; for example, the State Security gathered evidence and documents under the code name "Chairman" on Karel Nigrín until his death in June 1982.⁹⁹

Former political prisoners in Czechoslovakia again became citizens of the second category. The normalisation media defamed their "counter-revolutionary efforts" during the Prague Spring. "K 231 was an organisation that did not hide its goals from the beginning. To overthrow the existing power, to avenge for February, to restore old order," the Communist *Pochodeň* said after twenty years. The normalization regime claimed that K 231 officials had lost in the year sixty-eight, but the ones who had not emigrated did not give up. "They just change their tactics and meet again "secretly", waiting for an opportunity and evaluating their mistakes," said an article about Josef Čech, who had been a secretary of the revision committee of K 231. Party propaganda traditionally portrayed him as someone who was "an irreparable, hateful enemy of Communism."

The symbol of the anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary organisation was thus presented as K 231 until the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia. In fact, its several months of existence had shown the possibilities and limits of the Prague Spring. It was a chance for the entire Czech and Slovak society – the former political prisoners had still been strong and the organisation had great potential, not only moral, but also ideological and educational. Strong personalities, strong stories – the first organisation of political prisoners in Czechoslovakia.

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⁹⁷ L. Šmidová, *Tři životy. František Falerski – skaut, politický vězeň a osobnost K 231*, Praha 2018.

⁹⁸ During the normalization, Vít Tajovský was again called a "Vatican spy" (B.V. Tajovský, *Člověk musí hořeti*, Praha 2009, p. 360).

⁹⁹ ABS, personal file "Předseda", arch. č. 681897 MV.

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K 231. Association of Former Political Prisoners in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968

The Prague Spring of 1968 represents the most extensive attempt at reform Communism. Delayed destalinisation brought various changes, and socialism was to be given a “human face.” At the end of March 1968, K 231 was established, associating political prisoners convicted under Section 231 for “subverting the republic,” and over three thousand of them from all over Czechoslovakia gathered in Žofín, Prague. They were called “former people” or “hostile persons” by the ruling Communist regime. Political prisoners stated that they did not want to be a political party. They actively built their organisation – they established local, district, regional and provincial branches. They were headquartered on Karlovo náměstí (Charles Square) in Prague, eight commissions were active, and their mission was to achieve legal, civic and social rehabilitation. Around 80,000 members subscribed to the “reform process,” demanded the removal of all discriminatory measures and emphasised that they were not seeking revenge, but justice. Political prisoners from Slovakia became involved in the establishment of K 231, but soon decided to go their own way and set up their own organisation. The Slovak Organisation for the Defending of Human Rights, a sister organisation of K 231, was founded on 7 April 1968 in Bratislava. Although former Czech and Slovak political prisoners acted amicably, they became as undesirable for Dubček’s reform Communists as the Klub angažovaných nestraníků (Club of Involved Independents) or the preparatory committee of the Social Democratic Party. Throughout the Prague Spring, they tried to legalise their activities, but in vain. Instead, they remained under observation by the secret police, and under pressure from Moscow, hostility and media attacks against them escalated. With the occupation of 21 August 1968, when all hopes were shattered, their five-month tenure ended. On 5 September 1968, the Ministry of the Interior refused to register K 231, and the association ceased all operations. Numerous representatives went into exile; those who remained in their homeland became “people of interest” to the State Security, were monitored, called for questioning, and their “counter-revolutionary efforts” were denigrated. In fact, their work showed the possibilities and limits of the Prague Spring. Former political prisoners were still strong enough and their association had great potential, not only moral, but also intellectual and educational. Strong personalities, strong stories – the first organisation of political prisoners in Czechoslovakia.

KEYWORDS

K 231, political prisoners, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Prague Spring 1968, State Security, The Slovak Organization for the Defending of Human Rights

JAROSLAV ROKOSKÝ – historian and university teacher. He studied Czech language and history at the Faculty of Education of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem and he received his PhD. at the Institute of Czech History, Faculty of Arts, Charles

University in Prague. He specialises in the history of Czechoslovakia, with a special focus on the period of the First Republic, and the history of the Agrarian Party, and the resistance against Nazism and communism. He is the author of numerous studies and articles, monographs *Rudolf Beran a jeho doba. Vzestup a pád agrární strany* (Praha 2011), *Dvakrát otrokem. Paměti agrárníka Oldřicha Suchého* (Praha 2014) and the co-author of books *František Udržal, sedlák a politik* (Praha 2016, together with Jiří Urban et al.), *Za svojí ideou, za svým cílem* (Brno–Ústí nad Labem 2018, together with Martin Veselý et al.). He teaches at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. As part of the *Hovory o Československu – pamětníci* project he records stories of various prominent individuals. He also works at the 1945–1989 Research Department at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes.