

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Juraj Lajda - Remembering Unificationists Imprisoned and Tortured by Communists

Knut Holdhus
October 10, 2024



From the vernissage in Bratislava 2nd October 2024

Communist prison ordeals suffered by 19 members commemorated by Bratislava exhibition

by Dr. Juraj Lajda



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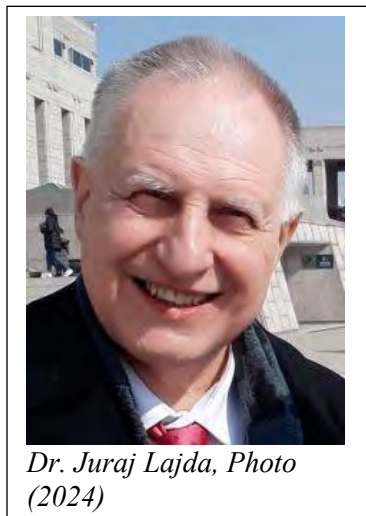
"The Principle People - History of an Uncommon Story" was the title of the vernissage [Editor's note: preview of exhibition] and exhibition held at the Peace Embassy of Bratislava on October 2, 2024. The exhibition commemorated the 50th anniversary of the persecution and conviction of the first members of the Unification Movement in what was then Czechoslovakia.



The "Principle People" movement arrived in Czechoslovakia from Austria following the occupation in 1968. Its ideas rapidly spread throughout the country, especially inspiring the youth. Due to the anti-Marxist orientation of their teachings, members quickly attracted the attention of the State Security (StB).

In 1973, the State Security launched an unprecedented action resulting in the prosecution and sentencing of over 30 young individuals to prison terms ranging from one to nearly five years. It was the largest political trial in Czechoslovakia at the time. The vernissage featured authentic testimonies from the first members and their prison experiences.

The exhibition opened with a performance by a female trio consisting of Ernestína Lajdová, Marcela Magušinová, and Dorota Šimeková, who sang songs from that era.



Betka Danišková, the national leader at the time, served 4 years and 4 months in prison. During her speech, she recalled her time in pre-trial detention and her last meeting in the prison corridor with Marie Živná, who died a few days later in her cell under unexplained circumstances. She recounted how she was devastated by the news of Živná's death and often cried into her towels, with her prison roommate cautioning her against crying too much to avoid headaches.

Anton Uhnák, another group member sentenced to 3 years and 8 months, remarked that the Principle People followed certain rules and laws differing from those of Marxism-Leninism. It was a struggle between absolute materialism and theological idealism. "We did not want struggle, but cooperation," he stated. The Marxists planned to establish a communist society by 2000, but they failed to consider that there was also a divine plan. The regime tried to silence us. Our main distinction from other groups was our status as an international

movement.

Juraj Lajda, who also acted as the MC, spent 3 years and 2 months in prison. He described the story as one of incredible faith, hope, and determination among young people searching for life's meaning and possessing ideals to improve society. Unfortunately, they lived under a totalitarian regime that suppressed divergent views during a period of emerging normalization. Their faith and conviction, coupled with their determination, made totalitarianism seem like an insignificant obstacle compared to the ideals they championed.



Barbara Grabner. Photo (2024)



Dorota Šimeková

Miroslav Rybár, the current president of the [Family Federation](#) in Slovakia, expressed gratitude to the group's first members for their dedication. "Without their foundation, we would not be here today," he said. He also mentioned Emi Steberl, the first missionary who brought these ideas to former Czechoslovakia, despite the dangers, when it would have been easier to stay in Austria. The strength of the Principle People's ideas endured beyond the fall of communism. "Creating a world of peace centered on God and good families is not easy," Rybár concluded.

The last speaker, Dr. Jerguš Sivoš, Chairman of the Board of the Nation's Memory Institute, said that it was the greatest repression of a religious group at that time. Yet, the Principle People stood up to this arduous test, defending their religious convictions and inner freedom. The investigation file is over 3,000 pages long. He then read out the names of 18 convicted individuals.

Dorota Šimeková recited her own poem, written on the day (10th October 1974) the Supreme Court in Slovakia announced the final verdict. The MC then introduced the 15 exhibition panels and lectures prepared for the following days of the exhibition. Barbara Grabner presented the trailer for the documentary video "The Struggle for Truth and Justice".

The vernissage concluded with a citation from President Václav Havel on the last panel of the exhibition:

"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something is worthwhile, no matter how it turns out."

Afterward, approximately 70 participants had the opportunity to view the exhibition.

Text: Dr. Juraj Lajda

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18 Survived Years In Communist Prison, 1 Did Not

• April 18, 2024 • Knut Holdhus

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A brave martyr in the former Czechoslovakia – 50th anniversary of the death of Marie Živná in a communist prison cell

Part 2 of a series commemorating Marie Živná. See [part 1](#), [part 3](#)

by Dr. Juraj Lajda, publisher.

On 13th April 2024, we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the passing of Marie Živná, a **Unification Church** martyr in the former Czechoslovakia.

To mark the occasion, the Czech chapter of the **Family Federation**, together with the municipal authorities of the Czech village of Svojanov, where Marie was born, organised a memorial meeting in the Town Hall. Distinguished guests and village residents participated.



Dr. Juraj Lajda, Photo (2024): Personal

The large Czech online newspaper Novinky.cz reports,

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"From an early age, Marie Živná was shaped by the environment in which she grew up. Her father was a castellan in a medieval castle, where she watched him paint pictures on winter evenings. It was her love of history and art that led her to study art history at the Faculty of Philosophy in Brno. She was just about to graduate, and she had also written her diploma thesis, in which she researched a set of Gothic churches in the Svojanov region. In the end, however, everything turned out differently." (Novinky 15th April 2024, translated from Czech. [Original article](#))

In 1972 Marie met members of the [Unification Church](#) at the university in Brno and soon joined this new and fast growing movement. It didn't take long before it attracted the attention of the secret services. They realised the movement from South Korea was opposed to communism.

The first member was arrested on 11th September 1973, and one week after that, many believers in Bratislava and other cities were taken into custody. A trial took place months later where 18 young men and women were found guilty of "subverting the republic". They received unconditional prison sentences of up to five years. 19 would have been sentenced, but one of them, Marie Živná, died in her prison cell before the trial took place.

The mayor of Svojanov emphasized in his opening speech that during the time of communism, people could not freely practice their religion.



Theatre critic Jiří P. Kříž. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Theatre critic **Jiří P. Kříž**, who met Marie during joint activities at the Society of Philosophy Listeners, said:

"Marie Živná's heroism is not a showy standing on the barricades. She was a pure girl from Svojanov who managed to resist and until the end not give in. To this day, nobody knows anything about this."

The next speaker was **Milena Blatná**, BEng, the president of the *Confederation of Political Prisoners in the Czech Republic*. She described the atmosphere of the 1950s and 1970s under the communist regime. Marie lost her life for her ideals, and no one causing this tragedy was punished, Mrs. Blatná said.



Milena Blatná, BEng, the president of the *Confederation of Political Prisoners in the Czech Republic*. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Dr. Juraj Lajda, the moderator of the event, who himself spent 3 years and 2 months in communist prison, recalled:

"In 1990, I visited Marie's parents in Svojanov, together with Dr. Andrew Wilson, an American professor. The father of Marie showed us a telegram that had come from Bratislava. It said, 'Your daughter has died; come and get her things immediately.'"

Lajda declared with emotion that Marie must not be forgotten. "She is a role model; she represents noble values and a noble character," he added. Then he gave a short presentation describing the history of the Unification Movement.



Alžbeta Danišková. Photo: Erna Mae Leskovjansky

Afterwards, a short video was shown in which **Alžbeta Danišková**, leader of the [Unification Church](#) at that time and the main person in the trial, spoke about Marie Živná. Alžbeta was given a four years and four months prison sentence by the totalitarian regime.

Another speaker was **Anton Uhnák**, BEng, who served three years and eight months behind bars. He recalled that in 1968 there was the *Prague Spring* movement, but Soviet tanks soon interrupted the reform process. At that time, [Reverend Moon](#) founded *International Federation for Victory over Communism*.



Anton Uhnák. Photo: [FFWPU](#)



Mária Uhnáková. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

"We need young people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for **God**. We need to find the logic of love," Uhnák concluded.

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Dorota Šimeková.
Photo: FFWPU

Dorota Šimeková, the next speaker, was jailed by the communist rulers for three years and eight months. She pointed out that true freedom means freedom of the soul, and added that Marie ought to have been crowned for her humility.

Mária Uhnáková was held prisoner for three years and two months. For her, Marie Živná had a deep heart. When Maria prayed for hours and thought of Marie Živná, images of flowers always came to her.

"Marie left this world with a radiance emanating from her, like the 'princess of Svojanov'", Maria Uhnakova said.

With a touching deep inner feeling, she recited a poem she herself wrote, dedicated to Marie Živná.

Marcela Gregůrkova, MD, a medical doctor who joined the [Family Federation](#) after the fall of communism in 1990, said that many young people at that time searched for the meaning of life and for [God](#). After the fall of communism, it was possible to speak about [God](#) freely. But this was not possible for those who lived before that time. Marie Živná lost her life because of her faith.

Finally, **Suzana Strkulová**, the current president of the [Family Federation](#) in the Czech Republic, said that she had not experienced hardline communism. Everybody has the ideal to have a good family, to have children and to be happy. Marie Živná was never allowed to have that, and that made her sacrifice all the greater.

In the next part of the program, others in the audience had the chance to speak. Many expressed that they had known Marie since childhood and described her as the best person they had met. One woman recalled going to school with her. She remembered Marie as a great girl.

Novinky.cz included the words of František Beneš, a friend of Marie from her university days, who helped Marie photographing churches for her thesis,

Novinky.cz

"When that terrible telegram arrived, I was at the factory. It was a shock throughout the village. It spread like wildfire: 'Maruška died in prison.'

One person commented on it saying: 'Well, what did she want? Society gave her an education, and she joined anti-state groups.'

My blood started boiling. I shouted at him: 'Do you approve of this?'

Shortly after, my supervisor called me, 'Hey Franto, watch your mouth. I've got a report against you for insulting the party.' That's how it was back then."

Afterwards, the participants went to the local cemetery where Marie is buried. Here they laid wreaths, sang, and prayed.

The memorial meeting was attended by over 90 people, mostly local residents who for many years had not been able to talk about this case.

Those who attended the meeting expressed their appreciation, because it allowed them to learn more about the circumstances of Marie Živná's life and death. Guests also came from Slovakia and Austria.

Marie Živná's brother attended the meeting with his wife and daughter.

On 15th April, the largest Internet newspaper Novinky.cz covered the event. Their article was penned by a regional journalist who attended the commemorative meeting.

"18 Survived Years in Communist Prison, 1 Did Not" – text: Dr. Juraj Lajda, 16th April 2024

Part 2 of a series commemorating Marie Živná. See [part 1](#), [part 3](#)

Featured image above: Marie Živná in the communist prison Autumn 1973. Photos taken by prison authorities. From the archive of [FFWPU Slovakia](#).



From the grave of the Živna family. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

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