

Berman Driml's Shame

MencI Commission Inquiry: Final Report, addendum 162 iii: Contents- Role of Czech citizen BERMAN DRIML, August-1968-September 1969.

This document serves as the conclusive statement with regard to the activities of Berman Driml, citizen of Zamek, and editor-in-chief of Zemedelske Noviny, with regard to accusation of treason and disloyalty against the people of Czechoslovakia during the days following the Soviet invasion of this land in the late summer of 1968.

Inquiry performed and reported by Frantisek Pekarek, 2nd Deputy for internal research, MencI Commission, Prague.

Respondent (through interviews with all principles and eyewitnesses available (subsequently mentioned and quoted)) and all available materials held in storage at Statni Ustredni Archiv has determined the following report to be the accurate detail of the activities of Berman Driml, citizen of Zamek and currently accused of crimes of high treason and disloyalty against the Czech people.

In August of 1968 B. Driml served as editor-in-chief of Zemedelske Noviny, a position entrusted him by the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) from February, 1966 forward. All respondents declare that this was granted to Driml

due to the sense that said subject was in full sympathy with the growing KSC faction that desired further autonomy for the Czech people. He was nominated by Zdenek Mylnar, associate of party leader Alexander Dubcek, and sponsored by foreign minister, Jiri Hajek, and party advisor Josef Smrkosky.

Each of these men have testified, under oath, that it was their full and faithful belief that Driml was loyal to the cause of freedom for the Czech people.

Not all events referred to hereafter have been completely documented nor independently verified but it is the belief of the respondent that they serve as fair presentation of Driml's activities during the time in question.

For more than two years it was the evaluation of the leadership of the KSC that Mr. Driml faithfully discharged his duties in disseminating the truth with regard to the activities within Czechoslovakia that led up the "Prague Spring". His clarity, in large part, assisted the leadership of the KSC in their attempts to keep the Czech population apprised of the various decisions and actions which were leading them to greater freedom and the inevitable crackdown by Moscow within their land.

At no time during that phase of his service in this role was there any reason to question his sincerity with regard to his dedication to the people of this land. Indeed, to many he was an honored hero for what was deemed to be a courageous stand in the face of imminent Soviet response. Of course, all things changed with the approach of August. The glorious spring and its heady freedom faded when the heavy boot of Moscow swiftly crushed the movement. Soviet ground forces under the direction of Ivan Pavlovskii, Commander in Chief, rolled into Prague and it became the duty of Deputy Commander Ivan Ershov (currently residing in Rhode Island, USA) to hunt down and arrest all leadership of the Czech freedom movement.

Ershov has testified to this singular failure in his mission. The arrest and detention of Dubcek, Smrkosky, Hajek, Mylnar, et. al., went without incident but Dpty. Commander Ershov's recollection has been independently confirmed with many witnesses with regard to his inability to capture Berman Driml.

It seems that Driml was dining with various of his compatriots in the Valtrice Restaurant (within the Hotel Hubertus in Zamek) when word raced through the streets that Soviet troops were approaching the city. Knowing that he would be certainly targeted for detention Driml immediately approached the hotel manager, one Brodce' Sprosty, asking for safe keeping from the Soviet troops. Mr. Sprosty spoke of several areas of the building where Mr. Driml might hide and he accompanied Driml to a closet in the kitchen area whose access was almost completely obscured by barrels of soiled linens from the guest rooms. From this closet there was a small vent which might serve as egress near the ceiling. This vent led directly into the room in which the dishes of the hotel and restaurant were cleaned.

According to Sprosty, Driml hid in this closet for nearly two days. Then, on the third day of the invasion Ershov commanded (as per the Moscow Protocols) that all doors of the hotel be broken down so that there might be no area of the facility hidden from immediate inspection. As Driml heard the soldiers pulling the barrels of linen aside he quickly climbed up to the venting and squeezed through the opening and lowered himself into the dishwasher room. At that time Czech citizen Prusa Milevsko was working in the room alone. Mr. Milevsko assisted Driml in climbing down to the floor and then Driml realized that he had no route of escape out of that room as it opened directly into the area where the Soviet troops were knocking over barrels of linens.

With no hope of escape it was suggested that Driml climb into the dishwasher and wedge himself up into the canopy and remain there until the danger was passed. Having no alternative Driml agreed and Milevsko assisted him in climbing into the chamber. "I will do my best to protect you in there," Milevsko admonished as he slid the door shut on the unit.

Within moments the Soviet troops entered the room and began looking behind bins and cart racks throughout the site. It was at that point that a Soviet demanded of Milevsko, "Are you alone in here?"

Milevsko looked around the room and shrugged his shoulders, "There is no one else."

The Soviet then asked, "And what are you doing in this room?"

"I am washing dishes," Milevsko replied.

"Then be about it!", the rough soldier raucously laughed and pushed Milevsko up against the machine. "Be about it quickly for if I must eat the swill of this place I at least demand that it be on clean plates!" When Milevsko delayed (due to Driml's presence within the machine) the soldier slapped him once more and shouted, "Be about it!"

Milevsko sensed that the only hope of retrieving the moment was to obey and he pushed the black switch which turned on the spray inside the machine. The temperature of the machine was set to sanitize and he knew that Driml would be scalded but he saw no other way to please the soldier so that he might leave the room. After the machine had been running for 45 seconds or so the soldier laughed and said, "That's more like it", and left the room.

Immediately Milevsko hit the red switch to stop the flow and slid up the door. Driml was biting his lip in agony for the scalding of the water. Gently Milevsko lifted the burned man out of the dish chamber and laid him on the floor behind one of the overturned carts where he might be somewhat hidden from easy view. "I am so sorry," Milevsko said, "I had to turn on the machine."

"Yes," Driml replied in agony, "I know."

"Let me see if I can sneak into the freezer and I will get ice to rub on your burns," and with that Milevsko left the room, hoping to be unnoticed by the soldiers who continued to ransack the hotel.

For several hours Milevsko applied ice and butter to the burns of the man. Late that August evening, well after sunset, Milevsko hid Driml in some old heaps of rubbish which were piled on a garbage cart in the alley. He pushed the cart through the darkened streets and eventually, by a circuitous route, got the wounded man to his home on Moravski Zemske street where he and his wife, Magda, nursed Driml for weeks.

Following a period of recovery Driml was assisted to safety as refuge was given in the abandoned home of Milevsko's maternal grandmother near the village of Kohn. For several months after that either Prusa or Magda Milevsko would make the 17 kilometer journey to Kohn in order to take supplies and staples that Driml might stay alive though the bitter blast of winter.

Finally, when spring arrived it was determined that Driml might safely begin to venture out of the house and could plant a garden of his own. Prusa and Magda brought seed from the town and assisted in the work as Driml's hands were still exceedingly tender from the scalding of the water.

As time past Driml realized that the Soviets had probably long given up on finding him, in fact, there was some rumor that they believed him to have escaped to the west. This belief was confirmed within his own newspaper which now was controlled as the voice of Moscow for the region. In late July, 1969, there was a commentary on the front page of the Zemedelske Noviny speaking of how the "traitorous former editor, Berman Driml, had escaped in cowardly fashion, rather than face the anger of the Czech people for having led them in a course of delusion that inevitably would have led to complete decadence as is seen in the west." (It may be noted here that there was not one line in that paper with regard to an event that dominated other newspapers around the world that week, the mission of Apollo 11 to the moon.)

That very evening it was agreed that it might be safe for Driml to venture, occasionally, into town. The Soviets thought he was dead or long gone and the scarring of his face from the scalding in the dishwasher had changed his image sufficiently that he might not be recognized, even by former acquaintances, let alone foreign troops who had only seen pictures of him from before the accident. It was reported that Driml seemed pleased to have the new opportunity of freedom.

By the time of the harvest Driml transversed the 17 kilometers between Kohn and Zamek with impunity. He found that he could pass Soviet troops any time of the day or night and was only deemed to be a peasant farmer from the countryside. This led to the freedom which enabled him to perform his treasonous deed against the faithful people of this land.

During the days of the harvest Driml came, along with a few other families from the farmland, to the people's market of Zamek. It was at that location

that they would sell their produce to the suppliers of the city commissars. As the various families were unloading their carts of the stores of produce, Andrushki, nephew of the Milevskos and the young son of the widow Goshka, sought to assist Driml in lifting the heavy bags of turnips and radishes from his cart. As he did this Driml noticed that young Andrushki took one of the smaller sacks of produce and set it down by his left foot instead of his right one. That was where the boy's mother had her store of produce set on the platform.

Immediately Driml went into a rage. He sensed that the lad was only offering to assist him in order to take this bag from him and not out of any sense of generosity. He jumped down from the cart and began to scream, "How dare you? You think you can take advantage of me? Do you think I am blind?"

Driml grabbed the small sack and moved it toward his pile and continued to rage, "Do you think that somehow you can take advantage of someone crippled like myself?"

Andrushki began to protest and sought to explain that it was an honest mistake but Driml would hear nothing of it. He grabbed the boy and began to drag him from the platform and across the railroad tracks toward the office of the Polizei where Soviet troops kept their local presence highly visible. "I'll show you for taking advantage of me!", he raged as he dragged the child toward the guard station.

Mrs. Goshka ran after the two of them pleading, "Please, let him go! He meant no harm, he's only a boy!", but Driml would hear nothing of it. He dragged the young lad into the door and threw him down on the floor in front of the soldiers.

The Soviets scattered and one of them tripped and spilled his steaming coffee on the boy as he tried to keep from falling down. The boy screamed in pain as the liquid hit his face and neck. The leader of the soldiers jumped up and demanded, "What is the meaning of this? Why do you drag this boy in here and interrupt our breakfast?"

Driml responded quickly, "I caught him stealing from me and he deserves to be punished. I demand that you make an object lesson of him for any who would take advantage of an honest citizen such as myself!"

There was no trial. There was no opportunity for the widow or her frightened son to make any defense. The occupying troops decided this was a good opportunity to remind the local populace that they were now in control and so their response was quick and brutal. Young Andrushki was taken into the street by the side of the tracks and beaten with rifle butts until he lay still in a pool of blood.

His grieving mother embraced her boy and as she sobbed some of the other farmers gathered the two of them and placed them on their cart where they were transported back to her small hut in the countryside. To this day her son, now 37, remains in Kohn, an invalid and confined to a wheelchair.

This ends the report to the events in question as to the activities of Berman Driml on September 29, 1969 in Zamek.

I, Frantisek Pekarek, respondent for the Mencil Commission, do recommend that Berman Driml be bound over for trial on the charge of treason and crimes of disloyalty against the Czech people for his activities of that day.

Signed and attested this day, March 11, 1995, in Prague.

*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you,
if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

-Matthew 18:35