

Jiri Franek At Graduation Ceremonies At Charles University



This photograph is from graduation ceremonies at Charles University, taken after my return from Germany, shortly before they expelled me from the faculty, in 1970.

I became Mathesius' successor, then I was in Germany for four years, where I had significant successes. I went to Germany in 1966, when they were looking for someone to lecture on Soviet literature.

First they invited Soviets, but were unhappy with them because all they did was Soviet propaganda. So they invited emigrants, but they on the other hand did nothing but political anti-Soviet propaganda.

This they didn't like either, so they wrote to Prague. Here they decided that I would go there for three months. I was very successful there, because I presented it as a unified whole.

For me it was simply Russian literature. So they were satisfied with me, I got a professorship there, and wanted to stay for as long as possible, but I didn't want to emigrate. Then I received a one-year Humboldt scholarship.

During that year I was allowed to work on only my own things, then I went to Tübingen. I worked at the foremost German universities, and lectured for a total of four years.

In 1970 they wrote me from the CSSR that I have to decide, to either immediately return, or be considered an emigrant. I was in Germany with my entire family, so I guess it was my free choice that we returned.

After we returned from Germany, they very quickly threw me out of the Faculty, threw me out of the Party, but that I had already been thrown out of. In the critique they wrote: 'Associate professor Franek comes from a rich jewish family from Prague.'

In those days that was the worst thing you could be. Meanwhile we hadn't been rich, when my father died, my mother sometimes didn't know if she'd be able to put dinner on the table, and I'm not exaggerating.

I wasn't born in Prague, but in Vysoke Myto, but 'rich jewish family from Prague' sounds better. I never denied being from a jewish family. At that time jews were being persecuted, so they wrote from a jewish family.

How did I find out about it? It was all top secret, but somehow they made a mistake in my critique and had to write a new one. They took it out of the typewriter and threw it in the wastepaper basket.

One day the cleaning lady knocked on my door and said, 'I have something for you.' I said to her, 'What do you have for me?'. 'It's your vetting review, from the garbage.' I have it stored away to this day.

I know exactly what they wrote about me. I had been away on official business, but despite that, when I returned they threw me out of the Faculty as a German spy. I

worked in the Lidove Publishers, in fact as the assistant chief editor, but because I had been thrown out of the Party, someone had to vouch for me.

One acquaintance of mine did vouch for me, the literary critic Vladimir Dostal, but when he died the director of the publishing house immediately threw me out, and I ended up working for the railway.