

## Chapter 6

1948

### 1948, January 1 to February 19

The New Year started sadly for us. My man's mother Helena Rychlíková, born on 29 October 1857, suffered a stroke on the very first day of the year, and died next day without regaining consciousness. She was Těšany's oldest inhabitant, had brought up six children, and had lived with us for 28 years. She was good, and sought to be helpful right up to the last minute. Her funeral was held on Sunday January 4, in the afternoon.

This year there was no real cold. The temperature in January ranged between 2 and 11 degrees above zero.

People were preparing the fields for the planting of new vineyards. Everyone was planting seedlings grafted on to American rootstock, at a price of 12–15 crowns each according to variety (the price before the occupation was 0.90–1 crown).

In the second half of January it snowed, but rain and sleet followed and the snow soon melted. The temperature was always around 10–12 degrees above zero. As a result of this warmth, nature started to come back to life. On February 2, I found a dandelion in flower by the ditch.

February 6. We celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Těšany smithy. The current master smith was Josef Nádeníček of No. 207. All the smiths who had been his apprentices congratulated him with music, and jointly bought him a diploma which had been painted by Frant Rotnágel of No. 27.

February 16. It started to freeze, and snow fell. Animal fodder was in very short supply, and the government was trying to alleviate the situation by importing from abroad. Some maize straw from Yugoslavia arrived at the local agricultural co-operative and was issued to milking cows at 120 crowns per quintal. But there were very few cattle and pigs. Some people had had to sell off their livestock for want of fodder, and many animals had perished through brittle or softened bones.

The winter became more severe, with frosts to 15–18 degrees below zero.

### 1948, February 20 to March 10

February 20. The resignations were announced of twelve ministers from the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, the People's Party, and the Slovak Social Democratic Party. A governmental crisis had broken out.

February 25. A new government took office, in which the People's Party and the National Socialists had only two ministers each, the rest of the government being entirely from the Communists. There was a take-over everywhere, in the villages as in the towns. With immediate effect, the activity of the People's and the National Socialist parties, and the Slovak Social Democratic party, was stopped, and the publication of their newspapers was suspended. And after a few days, there was a purge in all government offices, in regional and local offices, in commercial enterprises, in factories, and in banks. Everywhere, non-communists were dismissed from the leading positions, and communists were installed in their place. In many hospitals, consultants and doctors were dismissed, likewise superintendents on the railways, postal officials, and teachers in schools.

In parliament, the nationalization was announced of all agricultural land holdings over 50ha, and of all enterprises with more than 50 employees. People were promised that there would be a review of land reform with a new division of land, and that the land would be given to those who worked on it.

March 1. By order of the new government, an "Action Committee" was elected, and on the same day the previous village council was dissolved and a new one elected [see next page].

Members of the action committee

Chairman	Vincenc Chaloupka	No. 122	Communist
	Barnabáš Sedláček	No. 266	"
	Alois Hrupička	No. 157	"
	Jan Vrba	No. 114	"
	Jan Petula	No. 165	"
	Jaroslav Zahálka	No. 140	"
	Karel Ardély	No. 263	Political Prisoners
	Alois Štěpánek	No. 195	Land-workers' Union
	Rudolf Liška	No. 41	Friends of the USSR
	Pavel Ryšánek	No. 74	People's Party
	Jan Kostrhon	No. 259	National Socialists

[The house numbers have been inserted in a later hand.]

Members of the new village council

Chairman	Karel Ardély	No. 263	Communist
Deputy chairman	Josef Sedláček	No. 128	"
	Barnabáš Sedláček	No. 266	"
	Frant Štěpánek	No. 2	"
	Josef Štěpánek	No. 2	"
	Štěpán Chaloupka	No. 109	"
	Vincenc Chaloupka	No. 122	"
	Rudolf Liška	No. 41	"
	Alois Dudek	No. 121	"
	Jan Vrba	No. 114	"
	Jaroslav Zahálka	No. 140	"
	Jan Kostrhon	No. 259	Socialist
	Filip Svoboda	No. 231	"
	Antonín Svoboda	No. 80	People's Party
	Josef Dostal	No. 86	"
	Vratislav Jílek	No. 132	"
	Alois Štěpánek	No. 195	Social Democrat
	Robert Růžička	No. 28	"

[Some of these party allegiances have been inferred from the layout of the original, and not all of them, in particular that of Robert Růžička, are one hundred per cent certain. Rudolf Liška is additionally described as "teacher", and Robert Růžička as "estate manager".]

March 10. During the morning, Dr Jan Masaryk, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, died suddenly. According to the official communiqué, he committed suicide by jumping from a window of the third floor into the courtyard of the Čermínský Palace. [This paragraph, which is slightly out of sequence, comes at the bottom of a left-hand page, and my interpretation is that the writer, having written out the list of council members, started March 2 at the top of the facing page, continued at least until the note about the departure of winter, and then made use of the gap to slot in this item when the news arrived.]

March 2. The newspapers reappeared but with different titles. The paper "Word of the Nation" of the Czechoslovak National Socialists disappeared, and in its place appeared "New Politician". Likewise, the People's Party paper "National Revival" disappeared, and in its place appeared "People's Revival".

March 6 was the last day in office of Leopold Vahala as chairman of the village council, his place being taken by Karel Ardély. Even in our own village, men of rare quality were being expelled from the leading places, and their places taken by people of little intellectual ability and by self-seekers.

March 8. The activity of the gymnastic association "Orel" was officially terminated, and its property

confiscated.

March 9. Secondary school director Stanislav Pavliček (a former political prisoner) was deposed and reduced to the rank of an ordinary teacher. Rudolf Liška of No. 41 was named as provisional director in his place.

By what was now happening, we could say that freedom had died on February 25, and that the diktat of the proletariat had taken over the government.

### **1948, March 11 to May 31**

Winter was departing. There were still frosts at night, but during the day temperatures were rising to 12–15 degrees above zero.

March 13. People started sowing spring wheat.

March 14 was Passion Sunday. I noticed that this year the schoolgirls did not go around and sing the “Passion Sunday” carol, with little trees saved since Christmas Eve and decorated with paper ribbons and painted eggshells. The girls used to go from house to house and sing, and the housewives would give them a little flour, an egg, a little lard, damson-cheese, money, or what they could. Thus yet another lovely old custom had fallen into disuse, and the next generation would know nothing of it. [It appears from other sources that “Passion Sunday” was the fifth Sunday of Lent before the Vatican changed the calendar in 1970, and Easter Day in 1948 did indeed fall on March 28. The name varies widely from language to language and in Czech it is “Smrtná neděle”, “smrt” being “death”. The carol will be found in Appendix A.]

Times were changing. From time immemorial up to the time of the battle, every day throughout the year fifteen to twenty girls would walk to work on the manor estate. In every house in the heart of the village, there was a farm-girl and a groom for the horse. Now, no girls went to the manor estate, and no tract-holder in the whole village had a girl or a groom for his horse. Nobody wanted to work on the land, they all preferred to go to the factories in Brno.

From March 16 onwards, sowing was in full swing, but there was a great shortage of seed for spring wheat. Potatoes were also in short supply, and it was announced that the acknowledged allowance of 22 cents of seed potatoes per hectare had to be reduced to 18 cents, a reduction of 80kg per measure. It appears that we would have to plant the seed potatoes more thinly, and relinquish the 80kg to the co-operative for public consumption.

March 28. All sporting and gymnastic associations, such as “Orel”, “Workers’ Gymnastic Federation”, and so on, were closed down apart from “Sokol”, with which the others had to amalgamate.

April 7. The apricot trees in the vineyard came into bloom.

For the third year running, nobody came forward to fill the post of field watchman. The last had been Stanislav Sedláček of No. 175 in 1945.

Sunday April 11. Two women and two girls came from Brno to Těšany, and went from house to house intimidating and threatening people and making them join the Communist Party. Teachers and officials were threatened with loss of their positions, tradesmen were told that their businesses would be taken away, land-holders that those who did not join the Communist Party would not share in the distribution of land from the manor estate. And so people flocked to join.

Monday April 19. There was a call-up. Eight boys were called up, including Alois Rychlík at No. 180, the son of my brother Tobiáš.

April 21. The co-operative delivered perhaps a hundred cows and heifers. People were without animals, and therefore had to buy. The price for a cow was 14,000–20,000 crowns, for a calf 7,000–12,000 according to weight.

April 23. A wood was planted around the new chapel, and in the common field on Rotnágl’s hill. The seedlings were planted by students from the final year in the secondary school and from the agricultural college.

As in the previous year, April finished without rain. Potatoes and maize had been planted, and beet singled.

May 4. People were already taking the first cut of hay for fodder.

May 5. There was a thunderstorm with rain, which was very beneficial especially to the corn. The situation regarding root crops was worse. There was a plague of beetles, which completely ravaged the first planting of beet. People ploughed it back and planted again, but there was a great shortage of beet

seedlings.

May 10. A distribution commission parcelled out land from the manor estate. Those who worked on the land and had none of their own would receive 25 measures, or as much as would bring their holding up to 25 measures. Factory workers and tradesmen would have no right to land. But alas, things here did not go as ordered. Factory workers and tradesmen received up to 10, 15, and 20 measures along with the rest, but only those who had been old communists (since 1945, earlier there had been none here). Those who genuinely worked on the land received from two and a half to five measures, and at most seven measures.

May 16. The first cherries were already ripe.

May 30. There were elections to the national assembly. These were wholly different from the elections in previous years. All parties were combined into a so-called "National Front" and had a common list of candidates, and there were also blank papers. There was no pre-election campaigning in the newspapers, only that people were exhorted not to submit a blank paper. And now the newspapers were not allowed to criticize or print polemics, everything was examined by the communist censor. Furthermore, editors and writers from the People's and National Socialist Parties, and some Social Democrats, had been purged.

As had been announced in advance, the elections were conducted in public. True, the voting place was divided by a curtain, but it was announced in advance that anyone who went behind the curtain would be assumed to be submitting a blank paper and would be taken to be an anti-government reactionary. And so we all put the candidates' list into the envelopes in sight of the whole electoral commission, and dropped the envelopes into an urn beside which was sitting Barnabáš Sedláček from No. 266. There were just 15 courageous people who went to vote behind the curtain. The election resulted in 762 votes for the National Front and 25 blank papers. The members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party went to the elections in procession, with a band at its head. It rained in the morning and was overcast in the afternoon, weather which matched the mood of the majority of the inhabitants resulting from the fact that they were not being allowed to vote as they wished.

The weather during May had been favourable, with several spells of rain. Corn was doing very well, but beet was being planted for the third time. Beetles were again eating the growing shoots.

### **1948, June and July**

June 7. It was announced on the radio and in all the newspapers that President Dr Edvard Beneš had resigned.

Resignation letter of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic to Chairman of Government Klement Gottwald.

Prague, 7 June 1948.

Mr Chairman.

On May 4 of this year, I informed you of my intention to stand down from the office of President. We discussed my decision in the light of the problems of the whole political situation, and I disclosed to you that my doctors had advised me to take account of my current state of health.

In reference to our discussion, I ask you to inform the National Assembly of my decision and to ask it kindly to take notice of my resignation from this responsible office, with which they honoured me by unanimous vote on 19 June 1946.

I thank it for its trust, and I am grateful for the trust and love of our people, which has always been an immense support to me and which I have tried not to disappoint.

I wish to all my dear fellow-countrymen, their responsible delegates, and their government, that the Republic remains safe from all disasters, that all live and work together in toleration, love, and forgiveness, that they wish for freedom, and that they consciously experience it.

I believe in the good genius of our people and in the bright future of our dear republic.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Edvard Beneš (written in his own hand)

People were deeply shocked by these events, and firmly believed that he had been forced to resign just as in 1938. And just as in 1938, many people fled across the frontier to Western nations for fear of imprisonment for political reasons.

June 13. The chapel which the political prisoners had started building the previous year on the hill

above Hastrmánek was consecrated. A great number of people came from the surrounding region, but unfortunately the ceremony was not as happy as had been hoped because the events of February had cast a shadow even here. The chapel had to be consecrated without the statue of Virgin Mary the Helper, to whom it was dedicated. The statue should have been brought from Olomouc by sculptor Pavel Juříček, political prisoner, native of Těšany and one of the builders of the chapel, who had carved it with his own hands, but he did not arrive.

The chapel was consecrated by ... [gap left for the name and never filled in], the sermon was given by theology professor Father Voda from Brno (political prisoner), and further addresses were given by Father Oldřich Drábek and by the communist delegate Marie Syrovátková from Brno (political prisoner). [There is a half-line gap in the manuscript after "Oldřich Drábek" which may have been left for another name to be inserted.]

A few days later, news came from Olomouc that two days before the ceremony, Pavel Juříček had been arrested at his flat by the criminal police, and taken into custody for political reasons.

June 14. There was an election for a new president. Chosen was Klement Gottwald, born on 23 November 1896 at Dědice near Viškov. [Other sources give "Vyškov". This is a town about thirty kilometres ENE of Brno, and Dědice is a village some three kilometres NW of it.]

June 15. People were sowing beet for the fourth time. The growing beet, and also the maize, was now being ravaged not only by beetles but also by grey caterpillars, of which there were great numbers.

June 24. Many people were sowing beet and maize for the fifth time. The caterpillars were also attacking the potatoes, and were eating not only the leaves on the tops but also the little plants in the ground that were starting to grow on the seed potatoes.

There had been plenty of moisture during June, but it had been cold. The maize and potatoes which had escaped the caterpillars were doing very well, but beet was ninety per cent destroyed. Corn was also in a good state, except that some wheat was eighty per cent covered in smut. The second cutting of hay was very poor, because the long absence of rain after the first cutting caused it to dry up and the later rains didn't help.

July 4, 5, and 6 were the chief days of the national Sokol gathering in Prague, and many participants went from Těšany. After their return from Prague, some young participants were interrogated by members of the NSC (the police). In Prague, this gathering caused the new government a lot of trouble. Masses of Sokol members marched in procession through the streets of Prague praising President Beneš and shouting slogans like "We want President Beneš" – "Beneš is our good father and will draw us again out of the mire" – "Without Beneš, without Hana, we do not want Hradčany" – "In Prague we love Beneš and now he is missing" – "Long live President Beneš" – "Slovaks ask when they will have Beneš". And when the procession marched across the old town square around the platform on which President Gottwald and the ministers were standing, and the leader shouted "Eyes Right", the members of the procession started whistling and turned their eyes to the left. Thus the people showed their feelings. Many Sokol members in Prague were rounded up and thrown into prison, and here also they were interrogated, but they held together, they revealed nothing, and nobody could be arrested. [Most of the slogans shouted by the marchers form rhythmic rhyming couplets in the original Czech or Slovak, but I have not tried to reproduce this in the translation. "Hradčany", in the context, is roughly equivalent to "Parliament" or "Westminster".]

July 13. Several land-holders went to cut rye.

July 25. There was a thunderstorm from Borkovany passing towards Brno, with hailstones as large as hazelnuts. The hailstones damaged the vineyards only in places. Our own was damaged from the shed down to the track.

July 28. Engineers arrived and measured up the estate land that was scheduled for distribution, and to confirm the distribution people placed stones between the allotted divisions.

The weather in July had been up to 20 degrees, wet and very cold, but now for the first time we had hot harvest days.

### **1948, August to October**

August. The harvest was already almost complete. People were bringing the stooks from the fields to the barns and to the threshing machines, all three of which were standing in the market place opposite the cemetery. And the inhabitants were exhorted to take their prescribed quotas to the co-operative. We took 100kg of barley, 150kg of wheat, and 120kg of rye.

August 27. The land and buildings from the local manor estate, which had been ordered to be placed in the hands of the people, were distributed. People were very dissatisfied that the land was not divided equitably. Šinkvice Dvůr was divided between Stanislav Sedláček of No. 175, Jan Novotný of No. 62, Frant. Novotný of No. 47, and Jan Buček of No. 135. Each of these received part of the living quarters, cowsheds, and barns, and 40 measures of land. Other people received 25–20–15–10–5 down to 2½ measures and some received nothing at all, depending on whether they were in the good or bad books of the local communist party.

September 1. Chief of police Tomek, who had been here since 1945, was dismissed from office, totally without compensation and without the right to the pension for which he had to serve only one year more. The same was happening to all who were not communists.

September 3. At ten minutes past six in the evening, the radio announced the death of our second President, Dr Edvard Beneš, known to the people as “The Builder”. Thus departed a man of rare quality, who had dedicated his whole life to working and fighting for the freedom and prosperity of his country. The nation mourned its president, who had twice wrested its freedom, and people were convinced that the events of February had shortened his life now that his life’s work lay in ruins.

September 6. A commission arrived which wanted to buy up part of the fields behind the poplar trees and divide them among the houses backing on to them so that each of these houses would have a bit of garden. But the owners of the fields refused to let them be taken away, and so the allocation of gardens came to nought.

September 7. The constable announced with the drum that all keepers of poultry had to report to the village office, where they would be told how many kilogrammes of poultry they had to deliver. And those who had a breeding goose had to deliver 8kg whether it had many goslings or few, and from a breeding duck 2kg. Those who had no breeding duck, but only young birds hatched in the spring, were assessed at ½kg each, so for example someone with eight ducks had to deliver 4kg. A lorry would come from Brno with hutches at a stated day and time. The price, whether for geese or ducks, fattened or not fattened, was 43 crowns per 1kg live weight.

In view of the fact that the parcelling out of estate land had left some people with more land than their draught animals could cope with, a tractor was sent to Těšany from the state machinery depot at Hustopeče to help with the autumn ploughing. The price for the ploughing of one measure was 105 crowns.

Saturday October 2. The cinema opened for the first time since the battle.

October 3 and 4. The grapes were gathered, and even though the vineyards had been partly damaged by hail the harvest was good.

Sunday October 24. A working party of local tradesmen dug holes into which the poles for a local loudspeaker system would be put. This system had to be in operation by October 28. (The members of the working party were not paid.)

October 28. The loudspeaker system was unveiled, and the age-old banging of the drum by the village servant came to an end.

“Be it publicly known that...”

A loudspeaker announcement would cost 35 crowns, whereas with the drum it had cost 10 crowns to members of the village and 20 crowns to non-residents.

October 28, Freedom Day, was not celebrated as in previous years. People were exhorted to decorate their houses and windows with banners, but few took notice, and only the leading communists put them up. In the afternoon, the local cultural council held a party at Rotnágel’s tavern, but apart from a few schoolchildren and the leading communists nobody went. Thus did people show their unhappiness and lack of agreement with the governing class.

### **1948, November and December**

November 1. National insurance was instituted for workers on the land. In future, retired smallholders would receive a pension of 700 crowns monthly, and it would be paid for by a levy on the owner of each measure of land. A measure of vineyard would pay at fourteen times the rate for arable land. [The actual rate was specified on 25 January 1949.]

December 3. The village council moved to the manor house, which had been reserved for communal use in the parcelling out of estate land. The village office and loudspeaker control station were arranged in the balcony room and the room next to it. [The “balcony room” was a prominent room on the first floor. The front door was covered by a small projecting arcade, three arches wide and one arch deep, and the balcony room opened on to the roof of this. Vermouzek has a photograph.]

Christmas Eve was not celebrated as in previous years. There was no torchlit procession nor the same firing of guns, just a few shots. People were struck cheerless.

December 26, St Stephen’s Day. Another old custom vanished. No children went around singing carols, and nowhere was the old children’s carol “Koleda koleda” to be heard [this also will be found in Appendix A]. There also used to be “Pásli ovce valaši” [“The shepherds were watching over their sheep”] and other carols.

The quota of corn which Těšany had to deliver amounted to 36 waggonloads (one waggonload equalled 100 cents). Maize 620q, wine 20hl, the quota per producer amounting to 7l per are.

This year, the village rebuilt the public weighbridge which had been destroyed in the battle.

Even though it was now three years after the war, the black market was still continuing.

Item		Black market price (crowns)	Official price
Wheat	100kg	1200–1500	390–400
Rye	"	1200–1500	375–380
Barley	"	1000	321–400
Hens	each	250	
Chickens	pair	300	
Hens and chickens	1kg		45
Geese or ducks	1kg	250–300	43
Geese, not fattened	each	1000	

Other foodstuffs, butter, meat, sugar, lard, were on sale on the black market at almost the same price as in previous years. Textiles and clothing were expensive even at the official price, for example a pair of men’s coarse cotton everyday trousers cost 450 crowns (22–25 crowns before the war) and a pair of working boots 320 crowns (49 crowns before the war). But 100kg of wheat then fetched 160 crowns, and what could a producer buy then, and what now, for 1q of corn? So people were being forced to sell on the black market.

The winter was not severe. In the first half of December, perhaps 10 centimetres of snow fell and lay. Frosts varied between 2–14 degrees below zero.

1948 had brought a national upheaval. The government had been taken over by a working class which ruled harshly, and people were escaping to the West. Our joy at freedom had been short-lived, and the prisons were full of people who had somehow expressed their disagreement with communist rule. Before, it had been the Germans who were imprisoning and executing us. Now Czechs were doing it to each other, and it was hurting much more from our own people than from foreigners.