Czech Grandmothers with Ukraine

written by Dan La Botz | November 10, 2022

[Prague] Anna Ŝabatová knows what it is to fight Russian imperialism. In the 1970s she and her husband Peter Uhl, who died last year, were active in Czechoslovakia in the movement for democracy, human rights, and national sovereignty. Both served time in prison for their opposition to the government. Today Ŝabatová has joined a group of women who are fellow veterans of the fight against the Czech Communist government and the Soviet Union's domination of their country in a network called Grandmothers with Ukraine.

As a student activist in the early 1970s, Ŝabatová was arrested by the Communist government for her involvement in distributing leaflets during the parliamentary elections and sentenced in November 1971 to three years in prison, but was paroled in December 1973, though she could no longer continue her university studies in philosophy. In 1977 she signed Charter 77, a citizens' initiative criticizing the "political and state power" for violating human and civil rights that it had promised to respect when it signed the final act agreement of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975. In 1978 she became co-founder of the Committee in Defense of the Unduly Prosecuted.

While her husband was imprisoned from 1979 to 1984, she continued their political work, publishing the movement's newspaper *Informace o Chartě 77*. While working and raising three children she continued to be active as the spokesperson for the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity campaign.

After the Velvet Revolution, the mass movement that ended Communist rule in December 1989, she worked at the independent East European Information Agency and also returned to her studies at the university. In the Czech Republic, she served in government in 2001 as deputy public defender of human rights. She continues her political work today.

"I tend to be a pacifist," said Ŝabatová, "and I was on 24 February when Russia invaded Ukraine, but when I saw what was happening, I thought, Ukraine has to defend itself. The Ukrainians must defend themselves and we must support the Ukrainians."

When Ukrainian refugees from the Russian war on Ukraine began to arrive in the Czech Republic, Ŝabatová volunteered to take in a Ukrainian woman and her child. They stayed with her for five weeks until she and her fellow solidarity activists were able to find the woman an apartment of her own.

As the war went on, Ŝabatová and a group of other like-minded women of her age who had long been involved in the fight for democracy and national sovereignty in Ukraine decided to form Grandmothers with Ukraine. She says that the majority of Czechs support Ukraine. The Social Democratic Party supports Ukraine, but the Communist Party is ambivalent. Neither party is currently in government.

The Czech left is weak, she says, with no seats in parliament at present. While the Pirat party is sometimes described as the country's left party, she says they are not really. Still there are leftwing publications online such as *A2LARM* and *Denik Referendum.* Ŝabatová is currently involved with people in the Social Democratic and Green parties to form an alliance, officially approved by those parties, to run a slate in the Prague municipal elections.