

Jaroslav Nemec

There is no question that without Dr. Jaroslav Nemec there would not be an SVU. He was the originator of the idea, the one who actually realized it, its first Secretary-General and later President.

Dr. Nemec was born in Orechov near Uherske Hradiste on March 23, 1910. He attended Masaryk University's School of Law at Brno where he received the degree of Doctor of Law in 1937. He was first employed by the District Court in Uherske Hradiste but soon had to leave the "Protektorat" to escape the Nazi Gestapo, because of his underground resistance activities.

He succeeded in getting to France where he joined the Czechoslovak Army Abroad, first as an officer in a machine-gun company and later as a Military Justice. After the fall of France, he moved with the Czechoslovak military units to England where he was engaged as a Military Field Prosecutor until 1944, when he was appointed General Field Prosecutor of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces in USSR.

After returning to Czechoslovakia after the war, he continued in that function until fall 1945. Subsequently he transferred to Ministry of Interior, having been appointed chief of the section on re-emigration and repatriation (1945-48). From 1948-50, he served as a documentalist at the Ministry for Utilization of Laws. After the communist pouch in February 1948, he was dismissed from his post and without waiting, he crossed the border to Western Germany to seek political asylum.

After immigrating to the US in 1952, he decided to go back to school and enrolled at the Catholic University where he studied library science, receiving his Master's degree in 1956. Afterwards he became legal research librarian at the American Medical Association, where he remained until 1959. Subsequently, he accepted the position of reference librarian, specializing in medical jurisprudence, at the National Library of Medicine (NLM) which moved into a new facility in Bethesda, a part of the National Institutes of Health. Since this was quite close to the place where I worked, I frequently met him for lunch in their cafeteria during which we discussed the SVU matters.

Dr. Nemec was a prolific writer, having started with fiction as a young man. Already in 1942, during his stay in London, he published a collection of his short stories under the title *Starecek spominaju* and in 1943 a novel *Hneda nenavist*, His subsequent publications were professional studies dealing with history and history of law.

Thanks to the influence of his father, who was a principal of a school in his native Orechov, Jaros Nemec decided to write a detailed history of his native village. The results of his efforts was a four-volume work, the first volume of which was published in 1972, under the title *Orechov u Uherskeho Hradiste, leta 1131-1649*. The follow-up two volumes brought the history of Orechov and the neighboring villages up to date, and the Index constituted the fourth volume.

Other publications were mostly articles published in professional journals dealing with medical jurisprudence or legal medicine. Of particular interest is his *Highlights in Medico-legal Relations* which became an important resource for the researchers.. For his *International Bibliography on Medicolegal Serials 1736-1967* (1969), Nemec was awarded "Regents'

Award for Scientific and Technical Achievement. As his most important publication, Nemeč considered his *International Bibliography of the History of Legal Medicine*, published in 1974. It contained over 1600 annotations in 25 different languages. Among smaller works of interest is his brochure on *Witchcraft and Medicine (1484-1793)*, written on the occasion of a special exhibit which he organized at NLM. ´

Nemeč' greatest love was, however, SVU. Apart from playing the key role in its establishment, there are only a few people left who still remember that practically all the organizational responsibilities during the Society's formative years laid on his shoulders, in his capacity as the Secretary-General of SVU.

He was not only a dreamer, he was a doer, in contrast to "do-gooders," whom he characterized as "melo by se", meaning "somebody should do it", but not me. We knew each other well and became close friends. He was my mentor and I was his understudy. It can be said, without any exaggerations, that I was his longest and closest collaborator. I was quite young in those days, yet, he seemed to trust my judgment.

It goes to his credit that he persuaded Professor Vaclav Hlavaty to accept the Presidency of SVU when the Society was first established in 1958 which gave the Society a name and an important spokesman. It was also Nemeč' insistence which kept SVU out of politics and, because of its non-political character, the Society got its academic image and clearly ranked above the other organizations Czechs and Slovaks had abroad. To be sure, it was not easy in those early days to push forward with the Society's aims against the prevalent opposition, particularly from the exile politicians who viewed the Society with suspicion and as their threat.

Jaros Nemeč was the first SVU Secretary-General in 1958-59 and again in 1960-62. Having relinquished his position when he became sick, he continued working and maintained the official SVU files. Even though his activities were invisible, the results of his work were clearly evident to everyone, so that he became known as "grey eminence." In September 1958, he was elected the seventh SVU President, after Vaclav Hlavaty (1958-59, 1959-50 and 1960-61), Rene Wellek (1962-64, 1964-66) and Vaclav Hlavaty again (1966-68). When later became need for someone to edit *Zpravy SVU*, he obligingly assumed the Editorship and held it from 1980-85.

Nemeč considered his work for SVU the most important fulfillment of his life, as he expressed, in his farewell message to SVU Congress in Prague in 1992, with the following words: "My greatest thanks belong to those SVU members who have not given up their work for the Society, and in which I have found satisfaction and fulfillment of my life." He wrote those words upon learning that he was recipient of the Czech Academy's Hlavka Medal in recognition of his efforts for SVU. He died soon after, on October 7, 1992.

Miloslav Rechcigl