

Anthony Harrigan

UTC's Dr. Hujer Voice For Czech Freedom

"When the communists come in, the corn stops growing."

Dr. Karel Hujer, Guerry professor emeritus of physics and astronomy at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, told me this Czechoslovak proverb as he showed me mementos of the homeland he left long ago.

Dr. Hujer, who is in his eighties, is an extraordinary scholar and human being.

By

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There's hardly a place in the world he hasn't visited. In 1934, for example, he spent time in the home of the Indian poet Tagore, after a 25-day voyage from England.

His journey in life began in a small city in Czechoslovakia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He speaks of the hardship experienced as a boy in World War I, walking at night through the forest with a sack of rye on his back, carrying it to a mill in the darkness so the grain wouldn't be confiscated.

After World War I, he eked out a meager living in Paris. He recalls that he had a great treasure, a quarter of a pound of coffee which he put in hot water a grain at a time.

The year 1938 brought him to San Pedro, California, where he heard the news that Hitler had invaded his country. He decided to settle in the United States, where he has had a distinguished academic career. He continues to prepare papers for international conferences on astronomy.

Like so many other refugees from totalitarianism, Prof. Hujer has an especially keen awareness of the liberties enjoyed by Americans. He is dismayed at the lack of understanding of the

grim reality of life in the Soviet empire. He has seen it with his own eyes in recent times and in his travels across the USSR on the Trans-Siberian Express during Stalin's time.

He has written of the great famine of 1933, "planned and deliberate, not due to any natural catastrophe like the failure of grain but an administrative famine brought on by forced collectivization and deportation of uncounted thousands of peasants, owners of the land, carted in cattle cars to an oblivion in Siberia." He reminds us that "only recently did the world obtain some shadow of the indescribable barbarism and tragedy in exiled Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn's epic work, *The Gulag Archipelago*."

Prof. Hujer's knowledge of the contemporary Soviet empire is very up-to-date, for he is in close touch with scientists in Central and Eastern Europe. His writings also appear in a Czech language journal in Chicago which publishes current information on life in captive Czechoslovakia, a subject that receives skimpy coverage in the major metropolitan media.

If there is any tragedy in the life of Prof. Hujer and other refugees from totalitarianism, it is that the American people don't pay sufficient attention to the story the refugees have to tell.

The network news shows are awash with "foreign policy analysts" who have obtained their alleged expertise from books, not from bitter experience under totalitarian rule, analysts who know little or nothing of the human suffering and political and cultural deprivation that exists in the unfree world of Central and Eastern Europe.

After a long lifetime of scholarly achievement, Karel Hujer's dedication to the cause of freedom and emancipation of the captive peoples of Europe burns as brightly as when he came to these shores.

