

Storming of the Stasi Headquarters (January 15, 1990)

Abstract

On January 15, 1990, more details about the work of the GDR state security service leaked to the public. In the early evening, several thousand Berliners stormed the headquarters of the Ministry for State Security (MfS, commonly known as the Stasi) in East Berlin's Normannenstraße as part of a demonstration organized by the New Forum to prevent the destruction of files and to demand the dissolution of the Stasi. The MfS officers on duty offered no resistance, but had already removed or destroyed numerous files since the end of November 1989. Citizens in other cities in the GDR also successfully saved Stasi files and thus made an important contribution to the subsequent archiving and studying of these documents.

Source

/Newsreader: The headquarters of the former State Security Service in East Berlin was stormed by an angry crowd today. Tens of thousands forced their way into the building in the afternoon and wreaked havoc. Temporarily, the situation became so heated that the GDR television program was interrupted to broadcast a government appeal for calm.

In the meantime, the situation seems to have eased again after Prime Minister Modrow spoke to the demonstrators on location. Horst Hano reports.

/Reporter: Shortly after five, the gate was broken down and the headquarters of the State Security Service, the center of nationwide surveillance and spying, was stormed.

"Stasi out!", "Stasi into production!", shouted the demonstrators. And now the people are coming. Today was the last working day for the remaining employees of the Stasi; by three in the afternoon, everyone had left the building.

No violence, demanded the citizens' committees, organizers of the demonstration in front of the Stasi headquarters.

But the crowd could no longer be contained. Windows were broken, doors were kicked in, the rooms of the hated secret police were opened and ransacked. The crowd was unable to get hold of the important files that could shed light on the true work of the Stasi; they had been taken to safety by the military prosecutor's office and the People's Police since the beginning of December, at least according to official information.

/Newsreader: From tomorrow, according to the plan accepted by the government, citizens' committees, the People's Police and the Military Prosecutor's Office will begin to work together on the history of the Ministry of State Security. The GDR government's call for prudence was shown several times in the current television program. Here is an excerpt.

/Newsreader on GDR television: Democracy, which is just beginning to develop, is in grave danger. The government of the German Democratic Republic calls on all citizens to remain calm and level-headed in this difficult hour and to demonstrate civic awareness. The government places all its trust in the responsibility of the citizens towards our community.

/Newsreader: Due to the storming of the Stasi building, the talks at the round table were put on hold. In the morning, the government had given the representatives of the parties and citizens' movements an insight into the security apparatus of the old state and party leadership. After that, the GDR had been increasingly developed into a surveillance state. According to the government, the Stasi had 85,000 full-time employees and 109,000 informers. The security service was equipped with 124,000 pistols and revolvers and more than 76,000 submachine guns. The budget of the Ministry of Security amounted to

3.6 billion marks last year. Manfred Dziemballa reports on today's round table talks.

/Reporter: The surprise of the day: Prime Minister Hans Modrow. He came to the round table today and scored points. He once again presented himself to the GDR population as a politician who governs for the good of the country and not in the interests of his party, the SED.

His appeal: it is worth staying in the GDR. And his message to the round table:

/Modrow: It is my particular concern that the government remains capable of acting with your support.

/Reporter: Modrow expects concrete proposals for his planned meeting with Chancellor Kohl. Numerous members of the Round Table were unable to deny the Prime Minister their respect. The politician, who is considered hesitant, tried to take the reins again today. Modrow then largely left the subject of the old state security to his government commissioner Sauer. What the GDR population, but also the journalists, heard here almost went beyond the realms of the imaginable, leaving only one interpretation: the GDR only narrowly avoided a bloodbath in November.

/Sauer: As the GDR became increasingly unstable, the surveillance mechanisms of the Office for State Security were perfected and put into practice. The former minister demanded that the growing influence of so-called dissidents be curbed. That is why, it has to be said, the aim was to achieve total, comprehensive surveillance.

/Reporter: After the report, members of citizens' committees said that even today not all the facts had been brought to light, for example the links between the State Security and the SED.

Source: Tagesschau news broadcast, January 15, 1990. tagesschau.de

<https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/video/video-ts-49344.html>

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