

The Storming of the Stasi Headquarters (January 16, 1990)

Abstract

The PDS-led government's plan to merely restructure – rather than disband – the hated secret police [Stasi] prompted angry citizens to storm its headquarters. Their goal was to force the complete dissolution of the Stasi, but also to preserve the organization's voluminous records, which contained incontrovertible evidence of its repressive activities. The following account of the storming of the headquarters appeared in *Neues Deutschland*.

Source

First Stormed, then Ravaged

Calls to Remain Calm Go Unheeded/ Hans Modrow Appeals to Reason

From our Reporters Klaus Morgenstern and Wolfgang Richter

Berlin. At 5 P.M., the first demonstrators climbed the gate. Under pressure from the masses, the police opened the steel entry gate to the headquarters of the former Office of State Security in Berlin. Tens of thousands stormed the entrances on Rusche and Normannen streets. On banners and in chants they expressed their indignation at the hesitant dissolution of the state security service in Berlin, crying “Stasi to the mines,” “Down with the Stasi,” and “No pardon for the Stasi or there’ll be trouble.”

The New Forum had called for a peaceful “demonstration against Stasi and Nasi^[1]” last Thursday during a demonstration at the *Volkskammer*. But as events progressed on Monday, the organizers gradually lost control.

The first to enter charged to House 18, a block of offices and supply rooms. Stones smashed the glass entrance, clearing the way into the building. A large, howling crowd stormed the multistory building. Papers and furniture flew to the pavement from shattered windows. Rioters destroyed the rooms and plundered anything not tied down in offices, the cafeteria, a book store, and a theater box office.

Appeals for non-violence and calm remained unheeded for a long time. Equally ineffective at first were pleas from members of a citizens' committee who, in a security partnership with the *Volkspolizei* and the military prosecutor's office, had already begun to take charge of rooms in the large complex that afternoon. Committee members profited from experience already gained in dissolving offices in their home districts. Members of the citizens' committee appealed repeatedly for maintenance of the security partnership. They said they intended to have the buildings occupied around the clock by Wednesday.

In House 18, organizers and demonstrators who felt the destruction had gone too far attempted to restore order. They insisted over and over that people leave the building, and stopped the rioters. They confiscated plundered inventory such as books, computer disks, telephones, uniform parts, documents, etc. Those who behaved calmly in this way were subjected to insults such as “Are you the new Stasi?” and “They persecuted us for forty years, now we can smash all this.” Others had smeared the walls with oil paint and spray cans. There were also slogans on the outer walls and windows. Side by side on House 21: “We don't need anyone listening in on us” and “The VEB Steremat urgently needs lathe operators. Telephone 27 14/221.” Symbolic walls were set up in the inner courtyard and outside both entrances.

Shortly after hearing of the events, GDR Prime Minister Hans Modrow proceeded immediately to the scene of the action along with SPD spokesman Ibrahim Böhme, Pastor Rainer Eppelmann from Democratic Awakening, and the press spokesman of Democracy Now, Konrad Weiss. In front of the complex on Normannen Street, he appealed to the demonstrators to keep order and remain calm. "I came here to carry out my responsibilities as Prime Minister of our country." He said the awakening that began in November should remain nonviolent. He entirely understood, he said, why spies were condemned. But non-violence and level-headedness went together. In every democracy, there will be people who think differently. No one must endanger the democratic awakening. He said all those who destroyed things here should be aware that they were in fact harming themselves.

NOTES

[1] * Nasi: Office for National Security, created by Modrow government to replace the Stasi – ed.

Source: Klaus Morgenstern and Wolfgang Richter, „*Erst gestürmt, dann verwüstet*. Aufrufe zur Besonnenheit gingen unter/ Hans Modrow appellierte an Vernunft“, *Neues Deutschland*, January 16, 1990.

Translation: "Neues Deutschland on the Attack on the Stasi Headquarters" (January 16, 1990), in Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944–1993*. Translated by Allison Brown and Belinda Cooper. Berghahn Books: Providence and Oxford, 1994, pp. 101–02.

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