

Clips from the Show Trial against Ernst Jennrich (August 25, 1953)

Abstract

Ernst Jennrich became a victim of the GDR dictatorship after he was involved in the events of the June 17 Uprising and was sentenced to death and executed by the GDR criminal justice system. Jennrich, a gardener and family man from Magdeburg, was arrested shortly after June 17 and accused of shooting a policeman during the uprising. He vehemently denied this, but was put on trial and initially sentenced to life imprisonment in a one-day trial solely on the basis of witness testimony. However, GDR Justice Minister Hilde Benjamin intervened and insisted that Jennrich should be sentenced to death as an alleged participant in the riots. As a result, the case was retried and this time Jennrich was sentenced to death in a trial lasting just 15 minutes. He was executed on March 20, 1954. In 1991, Ernst Jennrich was posthumously acquitted and his conviction declared unconstitutional. Most court hearings in the GDR were recorded on tape. In this excerpt from the first trial, the prosecutor's reading of the indictment can be heard first, followed by Jennrich's last words before the verdict was announced.

Source

/Prosecutor: The defendant had taken part in the demonstration here in Magdeburg on June 17 as a ringleader. Some provocateurs had already succeeded in taking away the carbines of five police officers, and the accused took possession of one of these carbines. He then shot the People's Police officer Schneider through a window of the detention center with this carbine - he had loaded the weapon beforehand. The member of the People's Police Schneider was killed on the spot. It should also be noted that the defendant constantly shouted abuse and threats during his entire stay in the city and during the riot in front of the detention center. When the Soviet friends finally arrived with their tanks, the accused was one of the last to leave the field.

/Jennrich: I was never willing to become a tool of these people, or a tool of provocateurs from the West, of people who were trying to exploit the workers. [Sobs] I did ... I can only say one thing, that I never wanted to become a murderer and I never committed murder, because I know for a fact that I never fired a shot at a member of the People's Police in the right window.

Source: Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv / MDR Aktuell

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/ein-halber-tag-freiheit-der-volksaufstand-am-17-juni-1953-in-der-ddr/der-angebliche-polizistenmoerder-schauprozess-in-magdeburg/mdr-aktuell/94540678/>

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