

Fleeing to the British Sector under Fire from the Barracked People's Police (June 17, 1953)

Abstract

On June 16, 1953, East Berlin construction workers abandoned their work sites on Stalinallee and at Friedrichshain Hospital to protest increased work quotas. The workers came together in a spontaneous march, which wound through East Berlin, gathering size and strength along the way. By the time the demonstrators reached the House of Ministries (at the corner of Wilhelmstraße and Leipziger Straße), their ranks had swelled to about 10,000. There, they gave voice to extreme discontent and demanded the resignation of the government and the scheduling of free elections – all of which occurred without any intervention by the People's Police [*Volkspolizei*]. On the next morning, June 17th, tens of thousands of demonstrators, apparently encouraged by the lack of police response on the 16th, assembled in the streets of East Berlin and in front of the House of Ministries. This time, military-style police units [*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*], which had been deployed to protect the House of Ministries, repelled the crowd with rubber batons and warning shots. Soviet tanks rolled into East Berlin, and the Soviet military commandant declared a state of emergency. Many of the demonstrators fled down Leipziger Straße and across Potsdamer Platz into the adjacent British sector.

The day's protests were not limited to East Berlin: strikes and protest demonstrations spread to more than 700 East German localities, bringing more than a million people to the streets. Demonstrators demanded extensive political and social reform. In the course of the violent suppression of the uprising, thousands of protesters were arrested and many were killed. Newer estimates on the number of victims vary widely, ranging from 55 to 300 deaths.

Source



Source: East Berlin People's Police firing live rounds at Potsdamer Platz – people fleeing to the safety of the British sector. Unknown photographer.

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