

Women during the May Day Rally in Berlin (May 1, 1946)

Abstract

According to the Soviet zone newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, more than 500,000 people took part in the May Day rally on May 1, 1946, including many women who – like those shown in the picture – gave voice to their demand for full equality. (The sign in the foreground reads: “For the full equality of women.”) Käthe Kern, a member of the SED executive board, spoke at the rally: “We women must make our own contribution to achieving full equality. The women who have proven their worth in rebuilding the country also have the right to claim full recognition of their equal labor.” Although the SED promised equal status for women, it robbed many of their political rights as it expanded the party dictatorship: anti-fascist women’s committees were dissolved in 1946 and were replaced on March 8, 1947, with the officially non-partisan Democratic Women’s League of Germany [*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands*]. Instead of representing women’s specific interests, though, the league eventually became a mass organization that served as a conduit for SED policy. As early as 1950, the GDR revised marriage and family laws to accommodate working mothers. The GDR opened up opportunities in higher and vocational education in a push for broad female participation in the labor force, which helped further gender equality.

Source



Source: Demonstration, May 1st, 1946, in the ruined landscape of Berlin, with the demand for full equality for women. Unknown photographer.

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