

Protest by Dissidents at the Memorial March for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (January 18, 1988)

Abstract

Regime opponents tried to use the annual SED-sponsored memorial demonstration for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht to call for more human rights in the GDR. They quoted Luxemburg's famous phrase, "Freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently," and were subsequently harassed by the secret police.

Source

You Are Not Wanted at This Demonstration

"Brooothers, to the suuun, to freedom . . ."

A rattling loudspeaker provides musical accompaniment as the "combat demonstration" for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht proceeds along its route through East Berlin. The bold, steady marching beat of the music is out of sync with the steps of the "workers" as they make their way to the memorial in Berlin's Friedrichshain district. The cold is to blame, the puddles on Frankfurter Allee, the drizzling rain.

Way at the back, at Frankfurter Gate, talk of the sun and freedom can no longer be heard that well, but one can read: "Freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently." In front of the HO department store for sports and leisure,^[1] a group of young people from the peace and human rights movement hold up a homemade banner with this Luxemburg quotation, but only for a few seconds. Two dozen middle-aged men in conspicuously inconspicuous GDR garb pounce upon them, tear down the banner, grab three or four young men from the group, and drag them by their arms to a police van parked nearby.

At the same time, other civilian security forces with large banners that obstruct the view stand in front of the cameras of Western television teams. Shouts from those being dragged away can only be heard a few times: "Freedom!" Someone in the group of protesters calls out, "See, that's how this state treats its citizens."

There is no echo in the crowd, no reaction. Even when another rabid Stasi action prompts two small children in the group of protesters to start screaming in fear and someone else is arrested, there is no response from the onlookers. As if nothing had happened.

After a few minutes, it looks as though everything has calmed down on the surface of things. The remaining members of the group of protesters, maybe twenty or thirty women and men with children on their shoulders, stand with their backs to the wall, wedged in by the organs of the state. Among the "workers" at the square, the situation is intolerably calm. No one causes a stir when the Stasi is around. It's not that no one witnessed the officers' actions; it's just that they're omnipresent in the crowd.

When, after an hour, the independent group starts moving to join the official demonstration, they don't make it very far. About fifty Stasi men encircle the group. "You are not wanted at this demonstration," a gentleman with a beige-colored windbreaker says quietly. He points his arm to the side. "Please assemble over there." A woman in the encircled group refers to the official appeals in *Neues Deutschland* that called for participation in the "demonstration of struggle" for the revolutionaries who were

murdered in 1919. “Why are you stopping us?” she asks.

“You will be told at the proper time and proper place” is the windbreaker’s unflinching message. “Assemble over there.” They do as they are instructed. The tone of the conversation is decidedly friendly. But whenever someone in the encircled group tries to slip out of it at the edge of Frankfurter Allee, he or she is immediately jostled roughly and shoved back into it by the windbreaker’s subordinates. They don’t get caught up in the arguments of those arrested. “We know more about you than what you say here,” announces the Stasi commander. He gets laughter when he wants to know who in the group “organized the whole thing.” “Someone here must be ‘wearing the hat,’” he says. There must be one person with whom he can “enter into discussions to clarify the situation.” Heads shake in the group. “Here, everyone can speak for him- or herself. They don’t understand that something can happen without being organized.” For a short moment, the windbreaker is slightly perplexed, but then he’s back in his element.

The police truck has arrived. The IDs of the arrested people are collected, and the vehicle disappears in a black cloud of diesel smoke; it’s off to deliver the involuntary passengers to the “proper place” at the “proper time.”

NOTES

[1] HO: *Handelsorganisation* or trade organization, state-run retail store—trans.

Source: E. Mielke (Pseudonym?), “Sie sind bei dieser Demonstration unerwünscht,” *tageszeitung*, January 18, 1988. Republished with permission.

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