

Rudi Dutschke Demands the Expropriation of the Springer Press Empire (July 10, 1967)

Abstract

In light of the role of the conservative press in the killing of Benno Ohnesorg, the charismatic student leader Rudi Dutschke justifies the protests and demands the expropriation of [Axel Springer](#), the owner of the tabloid *BILD-Zeitung* and a staunch anti-communist and critic of the student radicals.

Source

We Demand the Expropriation of Axel Springer

[...]

DUTSCHKE: Demonstrations and protests are a preliminary stage in the process of making people [politically] aware. We need to raise people's consciousness more and more and mobilize them politically. This means bringing them over to the antiauthoritarian camp, which presently consists of only a few thousand students. And we have to do more than simply protest. We have to move on to direct action.

SPIEGEL: What are direct actions?

DUTSCHKE: I'd have to start by describing the specific situation in Berlin.

SPIEGEL: Go right ahead.

DUTSCHKE: First there's the situation at the Free University—overcrowded seminars, declining educational standards, professors overwhelmed by the bureaucracy, the threat of shortening the period of study and forced exmatriculation, restrictive policies by the university administration, and last but not least increases in student fees. This caused a strong antiauthoritarian psychological disposition in many students.

SPIEGEL: But this was not the only cause. You and a whole series of radical-minded students popularized this basic mood.

DUTSCHKE: Yes. We tried to educate the students politically about their situation through systematic education—through informative events and various forms of demonstrations. But there is also the general situation in West Berlin, which has been clear at least since the death of Benno Ohnesorg: a headless Senate, a de-democratized police department—the consequence of decades of training for the Cold War. Furthermore: Berlin's parties, as in the Federal Republic, have lost contact with the people. Berlin as a city is politically dead. It never took advantage of its historical chance to be a mediator between East and West.

SPIEGEL: And now students want to fill this political void?

DUTSCHKE: Why not? We students have an opportunity that is systematically denied to the masses of society: We can transform the specifically human power of intellect into critical reason. This means politicizing the university as a starting point for politicizing and thereby transforming society.

SPIEGEL: So far, society, especially in Berlin, has—to put it euphemistically—shown little willingness to be politicized by you.

DUTSCHKE: That's true. But that can change, especially under the conditions in Berlin. Mobilization of the antiauthoritarian camp among students has occurred irrespective of economic difficulties. The tight labor situation in Berlin, the antiquated industrial structure, the aging of the population, the city's dependence on subsidies: all of these are starting points for the possibility of politicizing certain segments of the population outside of the university.

SPIEGEL: The workforce?

DUTSCHKE: The dispute we started could be brought into the factories ...

SPIEGEL: Do you want to organize strikes?

DUTSCHKE: That's something that cannot be brought in from outside. We can't go to the workers in the factories and say, come on, go out on strike. The strike option emerges only on the basis of the existing contradictions in the economy and politics of West Berlin.

SPIEGEL: But you just said that you want to take the *dispute* into the factories.

DUTSCHKE: By that I mean that by working together with mid- and lower-level union representatives—since the leadership, that is, Sikkert (sic!), the chairman of the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and the president of the Berlin parliament, is a social fascist—we can show that workers and students have the same interests.

SPIEGEL: We'd like to repeat the question, what are direct actions for you?

DUTSCHKE: If the workers were to start a spontaneous defensive action against management interference, a huge wave of solidarity among the politically conscious students would emerge.

SPIEGEL: Could you please clarify what that is: spontaneous defensive action, wave of solidarity?

DUTSCHKE: Defensive action is a strike, and solidarity is participation in the strike.

SPIEGEL: You would help organize the strike?

DUTSCHKE: Organization of the strike lies in the hands of the autonomous work councils, shop stewards, and union members who truly represent the interests of the workers. If asked, we would assume an auxiliary function—by supporting the strike through fundraising, teaching the public about the premises and conditions of the strike, and setting up childcare services and soup kitchens.

SPIEGEL: Those would be direct actions in this case?

DUTSCHKE: Exactly. And they would have considerable political repercussions. There has not been a workers' strike in Berlin for years. It could come to pass that the unification of workers and students in the organizational form of [revolutionary] councils would raise the question of dual power.

SPIEGEL: Seizing power?

DUTSCHKE: The spread of a strike action through solidarity strikes in other industries and expanded by the wave of student solidarity that I mentioned would, in fact, be a radical challenge to the social structure of West Berlin. For East Berlin as well, since a West Berlin that has been democratized *from the bottom up* could also set an example for workers and students in the GDR.

SPIEGEL: Are you planning other direct actions?

DUTSCHKE: Yes. We are demanding the expropriation of the Springer Corporation based on the expropriation clause in the Berlin constitution.

SPIEGEL: And what is the corresponding direct action?

DUTSCHKE: I think the expropriation of the Springer Corporation will also be supported by larger segments of the population. For us, this point is a strategic transmission belt between students and other parts of the population. The student action centers that were established over the last few weeks at the Free University will carry out direct actions during the next semester to prevent the delivery of Springer newspapers in West Berlin.

SPIEGEL: What kind of actions?

DUTSCHKE: We want thousands of people to stand in front of the Springer Press and prevent the delivery procedure through passive forms of resistance. On the day of this action, which we will announce in advance by leaflets, we want to publish critical and informative newspapers ourselves for all sections of the population. [...]

SPIEGEL: Does the arsenal of direct actions also include the attempt to set up a counter-university, as has been talked about recently in student circles?

DUTSCHKE: Yes, there are two models. One form of counter-university is conceived as an appendix, a supplement to the existing university. That means we will try to initiate lecture classes next semester led by Ph.D. students, other well-trained students, research and teaching assistants, as well as professors. The classes will include discussion, oral reports, and seminars on subjects that have not been discussed within the university up to now.

SPIEGEL: Such as?

DUTSCHKE: Such as the Chinese Revolution and its consequences for current debate.

SPIEGEL: So you mean a Marxist appendix to the university?

DUTSCHKE: A critical appendix to the university, not necessarily a Marxist one. Let's put it this way: The politicization of the material would be revolutionary scholarship, scholarship that bases its analysis on present-day conflict situations throughout the world.

SPIEGEL: How many students, assistants, and doctoral students could you recruit for such a project?

DUTSCHKE: I think there is already enough interest from people with sufficient training to carry out this appendix model and to educate our antiauthoritarian students—that is, the camp of about 4,000 to 5,000—about existing mechanisms of rule and about the liberation movement.

SPIEGEL: And the second concept for a counter-university?

DUTSCHKE: That would be to establish a university outside of Dahlem in an area between factory workers—such as the Spandau area or near the AEG [corporation]—and middle-class districts. Departments could be set up in barracks to teach blue- and white-collar employees, and high school and university students. We could also offer continuous medical instruction, in particular sex education, for wide segments of the population, especially young working-class men and women. We could also offer legal counseling for people without means, organize rent strikes, and so on. Such a university would serve a consciousness-raising function. But there is the question of whether it is possible to support this

model financially.

SPIEGEL: Is throwing tomatoes or smoke bombs also a form of direct action?

DUTSCHKE: Tomatoes and smoke bombs are nothing more than impotent methods to signify protest. No one can delude themselves into believing that that is a means of effective protest.

SPIEGEL: Are stones more effective?

DUTSCHKE: A systematic provocation by throwing stones is absurd. Stones as a means of debate or carrying out a conflict are no different in principle from tomatoes. Tomatoes are powerless. Stones are powerless. They can only be seen as preliminary forms of true confrontation.

SPIEGEL: We have examined a number of your speeches to see how you perceive these confrontations. They usually sound sibylline, like this: (*Spiegel* turns on a tape recording of a Dutschke speech) “When, ladies and gentlemen, will we finally take a closer look at the factories in Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg, or West Berlin that directly or indirectly supply the American army in Vietnam with chemical and electronic installations?”

Can you please tell me what that means: “When will we finally take a closer look at the factories?”

DUTSCHKE: It means that if we are serious about supporting the liberation struggles in the Third World, on the one hand, and about changing our present social order here, on the other, then we have to take a very close look at how these factories are operating. Not to blow them up, but to make it clear through outreach to minorities in these factories that one cannot agree to supporting oppression in Vietnam. Mario Savio, the leader of the student revolts at the university in Berkeley in the United States, suggests the other side of possible resistance when he says that we have to pit our bodies against the extermination machinery, in other words: passive resistance, mass refusal.

SPIEGEL (turns on a tape recording of a Dutschke speech) “When, ladies and gentlemen, will we finally end our subjugation to those who rule over us? Why do we not respond to the emergency exercises on the occasion of state visits, that is, the emergency exercises of the state authority machinery, why don’t we respond with emergency exercises of our own?”

What is that supposed to mean?

DUTSCHKE: It is supposed to mean that emergency legislation is being openly debated in the Federal Republic, but basically it is already being practiced at an everyday level, in particular during state visits. And emergency exercises of our own would be attempts, precisely under these specific exceptional conditions, to apply the most elementary forms of democratic freedom—whether freedom of assembly or freedom to demonstrate—as was the case on June 2 [1967] in Berlin, when the police brutally clubbed demonstrators.

SPIEGEL: Because of that kind of wording, your speeches are sometimes interpreted as hidden appeals to use violence. Do you preach violence?

DUTSCHKE: To call for violence, murder, and killing in the cities of highly developed industrial countries—I think that would be wrong and virtually counterrevolutionary. Because in the metropolises there is basically no one to hate. The government leaders at the top—a Kiesinger, Strauss, or whoever—are bureaucratic character masks. I reject them and fight against them, but I cannot hate them like a Ky in Vietnam or Duvalier in Haiti.

SPIEGEL: This distinction—violence there but not here—where does it come from for you?

DUTSCHKE: From the difference in principle in the state of the historical struggle. In the Third World: the people hate the form of direct oppression that is represented by puppets, so they fight against them. Here: assassinating members of our government would be absolute madness. Because who does not understand that here the people at the top are interchangeable? Terrorist violence against human beings is no longer necessary in advanced countries.

SPIEGEL: So you don't condemn violence categorically but only under the prevailing conditions?

DUTSCHKE: Certainly no one could claim that there will be absolutely no violence within the process of change. Violence is an element of rule and has therefore to be answered from our side with demonstrative and provocative counterviolence. The form of response is determined by the form the conflict assumes. In Berlin violence from the side of the Senate executive has in fact been demonstrated by the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg. But within this confrontation we cannot say, let's take up the machine guns and wage the final battle.

SPIEGEL: So what can you do?

DUTSCHKE: We have to see very clearly that our chance to revolutionize the present order exists only in our consciousness-raising among ever-growing minorities. The antiauthoritarian camp is continuing to grow and is starting to organize itself and find its own forms of living together: a counter-university in Berlin, for instance, or communes or whatever. The existing order must be undermined and new forms need to be created at the same time.

Source: Rudi Dutschke, "Wir fordern die Enteignung Axel Springers," *Der Spiegel*, July 10, 1967, pp. 30–33; reprinted in Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed., *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung. Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail 1946–1995*. Hamburg, 1998, vol. 2, pp. 268–69.

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