

## The Death of Benno Ohnesorg (June 2, 1967)

### Abstract

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On the evening of June 2, 1967, protesters in West Berlin demonstrated against the Shah of Iran's state visit to Germany. Plainclothes police officers attended the demonstration with the intention of arresting its organizers. Street fighting ensued and a shot was fired from the gun of West German police officer Karl-Heinz Kurras. The bullet struck 26-year-old German literature student Benno Ohnesorg in the back of head. In this now iconic photograph, student Friederike Haumann, who happened to be on the scene at that very moment, tries in vain to help the fatally injured Ohnesorg. On November 21, 1967, a court acquitted Kurras of the shooting. After Ohnesorg's death, the student movement and the extra-parliamentary opposition (APO) expanded and became radicalized. Students at the time, as Friederike Haumann observed in retrospect, feared that they were "staring an incipient fascism in the face." In May 2009, researchers at the German government agency in charge of the former GDR's Stasi files discovered that Kurras was a committed socialist in the service of the East German Stasi at the time of the shooting. While there is no evidence that Kurras was acting on Stasi orders, the revelation sparked intense public discussion and caused many people to rethink an event that galvanized the left-wing protest movement in West Germany.

### Source

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Source: Student Friederike Hausmann tries in vain to save student Benno Ohnesorg, who was hit from behind by a police bullet, Krumme Straße in Berlin-Charlottenburg, June 2, 1967. Image 1 of 9. Photo: Bernard Larsson.

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Recommended Citation: The Death of Benno Ohnesorg (June 2, 1967), published in: German History in Documents and Images,  
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:image-2391>> [April 18, 2024].