

Ulrike Meinhof Calls for a Move from Protest to Resistance (May 1968)

Abstract

The leftist journalist Ulrike Meinhof appeals to the student movement to move from protest to open resistance in order to combat right-wing agitation and repression by government authorities. In doing so, she justifies the use of violence that eventually led to the terrorism of the Red Army Faction.

Source

From Protest to Resistance

“Protest is when I say I don’t like this. Resistance is when I put an end to what I don’t like. Protest is when I say I refuse to go along with this anymore. Resistance is when I make sure that everybody else stops going along too.” That could be heard—not verbatim—from a Black man in the Black Power movement at the Vietnam Congress this February in Berlin.^[1]

The students are not rehearsing a revolt; they are exercising resistance. Rocks have flown, the windowpanes of the Springer tower in Berlin have shattered, cars have burned, water cannons have been seized, a *BILD* newspaper editorial office has been demolished, tires have been slashed, traffic has been brought to a standstill, construction trailers have been overturned, police cordons penetrated—violence, physical violence, was used. The delivery of Springer newspapers could nevertheless not be prevented; street traffic was never interrupted for more than a few hours. The insurance companies will pay for the windowpanes. New delivery trucks will be driven in place of burned-out ones; the supply of police water cannons has not been reduced, and in the future there will be no shortage of billy clubs either. So, what happened can happen again: the Springer press will be able to continue to agitate, and in the future [Berlin Mayor] Klaus Schütz will still be able to challenge people “to look these guys in the face” and to suggest punching them—which already happened on February 21—and finally to shoot.

During the protests against the attack on Rudi Dutschke during Easter break, the boundary between verbal protest and physical resistance was crossed, for the first time on a massive scale: by many, not just isolated individuals; for days, not just once; all over, not just in Berlin; for real, not just symbolically. After June 2, [1967], Springer newspapers were just burned; now an attempt was made to block their delivery. On June 2, only tomatoes and eggs were thrown; now stones flew. In February, only an amusing and funny film about the production of Molotov cocktails was shown; now things actually burned. The boundary between protest and resistance was crossed, but ineffectively nonetheless, and that which happened can still repeat itself. The power structures have not been changed. Resistance was exercised. Positions of power were not taken over. Therefore, was it all just meaningless, escalating, terrorist, apolitical, impotent violence?

Let it be established: those here who, from positions of political power, condemn throwing stones and arson, but not the agitation of the Springer press, nor the bombs falling in Vietnam, nor the terror in Persia, not torture in South Africa, those who could really bring about the expropriation of Springer instead form a Grand Coalition; those who could speak the truth about *BILD* and *BZ*^[2] in the mass media instead spread half-truths about students; their engagement on behalf of nonviolence is hypocritical, they have a double standard, they want precisely what those of us who took to the streets—with and

without stones in our pockets—do not want: politics as fate, sheep-like masses, a powerless opposition that disturbs nothing and no one, democratic sandbox games, and when things get serious, the [proclamation of a] state of emergency. [U.S. President Lyndon B.] Johnson, who declares Martin Luther King to be a national hero, and [Chancellor Kurt Georg] Kiesinger, who sends a telegram to express his regret at the attempted assassination of Dutschke, are representatives of the violence against which both King and Dutschke protested: the violence of the system that created Springer and the Vietnam War. They are missing both the political and the moral justification to protest the students' will to resist.

Let it be established: it has been documented that you can't simply shoot into a crowd here, that the protest by intellectuals against the mass stupefaction by the Springer media is serious, that it is not meant for the dear Lord and not for later, in order to be able to say at some point that you were always against it. It has been documented that common decency is a shackle that can be broken through if those wearing the shackles are beaten and shot at. It has been documented that there are still people in this country who do not merely condemn terror and violence and [who] are secretly opposed to it and sometimes take a risk and open their mouths and do not let themselves be frightened; and there are also people who are willing and able to resist, so that it can be understood that business cannot continue as usual. It has been shown that murderous incitement and murder itself are disruptions to the public peace and order, that there is a public that will not stand for it. That a human life has a different quality than windowpanes, Springer trucks, and demonstrators' cars, which were overturned and damaged by the police in absolutely arbitrary acts during the delivery blockade in front of the Springer skyscraper in Berlin. That there is a public determined not merely to call the intolerable intolerable, but to intervene to disarm Springer and his accomplices.

Now, after it has been shown that there are means other than just demonstrations, Springer hearings, and protest events, means other than those that have failed, because the attack on Rudi Dutschke could not be prevented; now that the shackles of common decency have been broken, the discussion on violence and counterviolence can and must be started anew. Counterviolence as it has been practiced during these Easter days is neither suitable to arouse sympathy, nor to draw startled liberals over to the side of the extra-parliamentary opposition (APO). Counterviolence risks turning into violence, where the brutality of the police determines the law of action, where superior rationality gives way to powerless rage, where paramilitary actions by the police are answered with paramilitary means. The establishment, however, the "gentlemen at the top"—to use Rudi's words—in the parties, governments, and associations have to comprehend that there is only one means by which to create lasting "peace and order," namely, by expropriating Springer. The fun is over. "Protest is when I say I don't like this. Resistance is when I put an end to what I don't like."

NOTES

[1] Loosely quoted from Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader—trans.

[2] *BILD* (nationwide) and *BZ* (Berlin) are two wide-circulation tabloid dailies published by the Springer corporation—trans.

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