

Ernst Thälmann Speaks at the Dedication of the Memorial to the Participants in the November Revolution (June 13, 1926)

Abstract

Labor movement leader and KPD functionary Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944), who had grown up in Hamburg's working-class milieu, joined the SPD in 1903 and later switched to the USPD, a splinter party. In 1920, he joined the newly founded KPD, where he quickly rose through the ranks. He was a member of the Reichstag from 1924 until 1933 and in 1925, he ran as the KPD candidate for Reich President. With direct support from Stalin, Thälmann became party chairman and carried out the party's "Bolshevikization," during whose course the Social Democrats were declared the communists' main enemy in the late 1920s. Thälmann did not, on the other hand, recognize the danger the rising National Socialists posed for communists and other left-wing parties. After the National Socialist takeover, he was arrested in March 1933. After eleven years of incarceration, he was shot at the Buchenwald concentration camp in August 1944. In the GDR, Thälmann was idolized as a hero of the communist resistance.

In this photograph, Thälmann stands in the foreground wearing the uniform of the paramilitary *Roter Frontkämpferbund* [Red Front Fighters' League], for which he served as chairman. He is shown here at the June 13, 1926, dedication of the Memorial to the Participants in the November Revolution at the Berlin-Friedrichsfelde cemetery. After the well-known SPD politician Wilhelm Liebknecht was buried at this cemetery, it became the main burial ground for Social Democrats and Socialists, including Liebknecht's son Karl, Rosa Luxemburg, and the left-wing victims of the Revolution. The KPD organized annual memorial ceremonies to honor the fallen revolutionaries, and it eventually commissioned the memorial pictured below. It was designed by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and was composed of several staggered cuboid structures built of dark brick. A Soviet star and a flagpole figured prominently in it. The memorial also bore the inscription "I was. I am. I will be." [*Ich war. Ich bin. Ich werde sein*], a quote by Ferdinand Freiligrath that aimed to establish a link to the revolution of 1848. In 1935, the memorial was removed by the National Socialists. The East German government had another memorial erected in its place in 1983.

Source



Source: Ernst Thälmann speaks on June 13, 1926 at the inauguration of the memorial for the murdered fighters of the November Revolution at the cemetery in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde. BA, Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst - Zentralbild, Bild 183-U0302-303, available online on Wikimedia Commons:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABundesarchiv_Bild_183-U0302-303%2C_Berlin-Friedrichsfelde%2C_Einweihung_Gedenkst%C3%A4tte.jpg

Bundesarchiv

Recommended Citation: Ernst Thälmann Speaks at the Dedication of the Memorial to the Participants in the November Revolution (June 13, 1926), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:image-4038>> [March 16, 2026].