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LEIPZIG RESEARCH TEXT

We Are the People': Leipzig and the Peaceful Revolution

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When the first people gathered after the peace prayers in St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig as early as 1982, nobody could have imagined that this would be the beginning of a revolution like there had never been before. The courage was infectious: As ever more people joined the Monday demonstrations, which took place after the peace prayers, the movement started which has made history.

For the first time in history, on **9 October 1989** about 70,000 people congregated in the streets of Leipzig. The demonstrators called out "Wir sind das Volk" ("We are the People") and "Keine Gewalt" ("No violence"). The Monday demonstrations remained peaceful and set the course for fundamental change in Europe: The Berlin wall fell only one month later.

9 October 1989: In the newspaper Leipziger Volkszeitung of 6 October 1989 Günter Lutz, Combat Group Commander, threatened publicly with violence: "We are ready and willing to protect effectively the work we have created with our own hands in order to end these counter-revolutionary activities finally and effectively. If necessary with weapons in the hand!"

When, however, on 9 October 1989 over 70,000 citizens marched along the inner-city Leipzig ringroad to protest against the SED (E. German Socialist Party) regime and demand reform, it was the beginning of an historic change with worldwide consequences. The 8,000-strong security forces were opposed not as expected by a few "gang leaders" but by a great part of the population. This made violent dispersal of the demonstration impossible. In the following weeks the SED tried in vain to hinder the public from further protests. The people of Leipzig were not satisfied with cosmetic changes. Through their courage, their determination and rejection of violence the people of Leipzig made history with the Monday demonstrations. Pictures of the protests of autumn 1989 spread throughout the entire world. Determined people demanded democratic basic rights in an encrusted community. Leipzig used non-violent means to express itself and laid the foundation for German reunification by means of a Peaceful Revolution.

Every 9 October Leipzig commemorates these events with a festive programme. Beside exhibitions, readings, discussions and the peace prayer in St. Nicholas Church, citizens and guests can enjoy an emotional commemoration of the historic events during the **Festival of Lights** with audio, video and light installations.

Tracing the Peaceful Revolution in Leipzig - Monuments, Museums, Locations

1) Federal official responsible for Stasi documents, Leipzig branch: The permanent and special exhibitions at the historic location show the almost complete monitoring, manipulating and persecuting machinery of the SED socialist dictatorship. (Dittrichring 24, www.bstu.bund.de/en)

2) Former central GDR place of execution This was located from 1960 in a separate part of the prison complex in Alfred-Kästner-Straße. This is where all death penalties handed down were performed under strict secrecy - a total of 64. The death penalty was not abolished until 1987. (Arndtstraße 48)

3) Memorial Museum in the „Runden Ecke“: This is the only museum worldwide dedicated to the repressions of the GDR State Security Service. The permanent exhibition „Stasi - Power and Banality provides information on the history, structure and methods of the GDR secret police. The collection consists of about 40,000 items. (Dittrichring 24, www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de)

4) Light Installation: The light installation „public light – öffentliches Licht“ by the artist Tilo Schulz is a metaphor for the active citizens' determination in Leipzig. It reflects the process of situational awakening of political awareness. (St. Nicholas churchyard)

5) Military Museum Kossa: As a result of a new military doctrine of the Warsaw Pact a bunker was built as shelter for the command staff of the joint armed forces. Today you can visit among other things the 4 military staff bunkers and the communications bunker. (Dahlenberger Str. 1, 04849 Kossa, www.bunker-kossa.de)

6) Museum in the Stasi Bunker This is the location of the former alternative command post (AfüSt) of the District Administration for State Security, Leipzig. The building was camouflaged to look like a holiday centre. The central point of the complex, about 5.2 hectares big, is the bunker built in 1968-1972. In case of mobilisation, the Stasi boss of Leipzig together with his staff of about 100 would redeploy his operational post to Machern. (Lübschützer Teiche, 04827 Machern, www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de)

7) Nicholas Column: The artist Andreas Stötzer sets a monument to the prayers for peace with the classical column motif from the church interior. The column is a symbol representing those supporters who were not able to get into the overfilled St. Nicholas church. The sculptor Markus Gläser designed and created the work. The bronze plate set into the paving is also designed by him. The footprints point towards Augustusplatz and symbolise unity with the feet at the Leipzig Ring. (St. Nicholas churchyard)

8) School Museum: Three stages in the history of Leipzig schools are shown on 800 sqm of exhibition area. Lessons in the form of role playing, e.g. in a polytechnic senior school in the GDR, are popular. (Goerdelerring 20, www.schulmuseum-leipzig.de)

9) Forum of Contemporary History Leipzig: The exhibition, documentation and information centre is dedicated to the history of division and unification, dictatorship and resistance in the Soviet occupied zone and the GDR. Particular reference is given to the history of the repressive machinery of the SED, resistance behaviour and the peaceful revolution of 1989. (Grimmaische Straße 6, www.hdg.de/en)

Further Information

- www.leipzig.travel/en
- www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/home.html
- www.leipzig.travel/en/discover/music-and-culture/culture