

The Open-Air Exhibition “Peaceful Revolution 1989/90”

2009 marks the twentieth anniversary of the events of the Peaceful Revolution, which brought about an end to dictatorship in Germany. To commemorate this occasion, the Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft e.V. is presenting an open-air exhibition at Alexanderplatz in Berlin, in honour and celebration of the events of 1989/1990. The exhibition “Peaceful Revolution 1989/90” will be held in collaboration with Kulturprojekte Berlin GmbH; funded by the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin and the Secretary of State for Culture and Media upon a decision of the German Bundestag.

20 Years since the Peaceful Revolution

In 2009, many national and international events and publications will commemorate the Peaceful Revolution and the end of Communist dictatorship in Eastern and Central Europe. The exhibition organisers acknowledge this interest and therefore the main feature of the Berlin Senate’s Theme Year 2009 “20 Years since the Fall of the Wall” will be the exhibition, which focuses explicitly on the peaceful and successful course of the social upheavals.

There is little evidence of the events of 1989/90 visible in Berlin’s public areas. Together with Leipzig, Berlin was central to the social upheavals in the GDR. An exhibition in the formerly divided city will therefore provide ideal conditions for illustrating the situation of the two German states and the international dimension of the conflict within the Eastern Bloc. The twentieth anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution is a fitting opportunity to draw attention to a joyous and successful chapter of German history in the capital of the reunified Germany.

The exhibition, with its special events staged at Alexanderplatz, will be a tourist attraction for German and foreign visitors and a highlight of the Theme Year 2009.

The Exhibition

In 1989 the Berlin Wall is still a symbol of a divided world, but as the year goes on, events begin to escalate. Central to this exhibition are the East Germans, who overcome their fear and take their fate into their hands. Initiated by just a few people, opposition activities quickly develop into a widespread uprising. More and more people protest against the hopelessness, decline and stagnation of society and demand freedom of travel and free elections. Citizens' movements and political parties are formed. Hundreds of thousands courageously take to the streets. The Communists in power have no choice but to look on.

While some East Germans want to reform the GDR, others vote with their feet, leaving the country. Together they defeat the SED dictatorship, force national politicians to take action and make history. The speed at which developments take place can be demonstrated by the fact that in the local elections of May 1989, approximately 90 percent of East Germans voted in favour of a unified list of candidates and then, barely six months later, hundreds of thousands take to the streets, challenging the SED's monopoly on power. But within a short time the demonstrators start changing their demands. This is most clearly seen when their slogan changes from "We are the people" to "We are one people". The flood of East Germans leaving the country for the West continues, even after the Wall has been opened. Five months later, the first free elections are finally held in the GDR. The majority vote for the parties promising the quickest route to reunification. The speed at which this takes place continues to be set by the citizens, who drive those in power towards currency union and unification. Only a few days before the unification treaty comes into force, the citizens demand that it be altered, ordering the disclosure of Stasi files. Courage to act does not simply arise like a phoenix from the ashes. There are causes and preconditions, as well as influences from neighbouring countries, which are illustrated in the exhibition. Signals coming from the Solidarity movement in Poland and the opening of the Hungarian border with Austria play an equally important role in the upheavals.

Family ties with Germans on the other side of the Wall are just as important as West German media coverage, which not only breaks the SED monopoly on information but also provides a forum for the opposition in the GDR.

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The exhibition will not only give an account of the chronological order of events, it will also explain the outcome of the new, restructured social order, the complexity of a developing political will, the citizens' aims, their motives and forms of action. The resulting picture is not homogenous. There are various and to some extent opposing interests. The intention of the exhibition is not just to portray the history but also to encourage critical discussion of the issues around a free and democratic society and at best to revive the spirit of 1989.

Structure

Since the exhibition is aimed at young people born after the Peaceful Revolution, it seems necessary to highlight the important historical events relating to the history of the division of Germany and Europe. The exhibition section: "Awakening" concentrates on the run-up to events in the 1980s directly before the Peaceful Revolution. The section "Revolution" covers the period between the summer of 1989 and the eve of the East German Parliament elections on 18 March 1990. The subsequent section, "Unity", describes the short path from the first free elections in the GDR to the first all-German elections in December 1990. In the exhibition pavilion there is a display of quotations taken from all sections of society illustrating the different opinions on the events that took place in 1989.

Realisation

The exhibition opened on 7 May 2009 in conjunction with the anniversary of the protests against the last rigged local elections in the GDR. The exhibition, in German and English, will be open twenty-four-seven from 8 May until 14 November 2009 and is free of charge. Some 700 photographs and documents will be exhibited in a space measuring 300 metres in length.

Original objects and ten interactive media stations showing films will provide a live impression of the growing intensity of the events at the time. The materials for the exhibition come from the extensive "Archive of GDR Opposition" of the Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft e.V., which has spent years collecting and cataloguing documents, photographs, audio recordings and films.

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Alexanderplatz is ideal as a historical location. In June 1989, a small group of courageous citizens gathered here to protest against the rigged elections. The protests continued on the 7th day of every month and grew in numbers until on 7 October 1989 the crowd of demonstrators filled the square and marched in protest to the Palace of the Republic, where the SED were celebrating their own victory. Critics of the regime often used the square as a meeting place in the days and weeks that followed.

Supporting activities

There will be a varied support programme on offer throughout the exhibition period, complemented by a wide range of guided tours. In addition to regular tours given by trained exhibition attendants, visitors can go on special tours with contemporary witnesses. Numerous events will also be held to complement the programme.

At the centre of the exhibition an information pavilion is open daily from 10 am, which houses a media station and bookshop. Visitors can watch various historical documentary films from Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg on the interactive media station terminals. The bookshop sells further reading material and tickets for the special tours with contemporary witnesses can be booked here. A large display screen is installed in the pavilion for the showing of longer documentaries and films. Visitors will also be able to register in a virtual guestbook, which is integrated into the exhibition's website, www.revolution89.de in both English and German. There is also a bulletin board where visitors are invited to write down their comments regarding the exhibition.

The magazine "Wir sind das Volk" is being published in conjunction with the exhibition and can be purchased in the bookshop for 5 euros.

An extensive educational programme, aimed at children of primary school age and older, is also on offer. Issues relating to dictatorship and democracy that still affect us today will be the main focus of the guided tours and workshops. School children can learn from the people who initiated and took part in the Peaceful Revolution and examine its causes, aims and achievements. You can book one-hour guided theme tours, such as "Escape", "Protest" or "Freedom", in a range of languages including German, English, Italian, French, Spanish, Polish, Hungarian, Turkish and Russian. Subsequent to the tours,

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creative or historical workshops provide further information on the subject matter. A series of events, including excursions and films, will also be offered during school holidays.

Adults can also book group tours in various languages. Every Saturday at 1 pm people who took part in the Peaceful Revolution and contemporary witnesses will give tours of the exhibition and provide information on their own experiences. These guided tours require a minimum of 5 and will comprise a maximum of 15 participants. Tickets costing 5 euros can be bought at the exhibition. It is not necessary to sign up for the tours.

Bookings and further information on guided tours and workshops

Tel: +49 (0)30 / 247 49-888, fax: +49 (0)30 / 247 49-883

From Monday to Friday 9 am to 4 pm,

on weekends and public holidays from 9 am to 1 pm

E-mail: fuehrungen@mauerfall09.de

www.mauerfall09.de / www.fallofthewall09.com / www.revolution89.de

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