



16.11.1989

Spontaneous demonstration by Bratislava university students for basic civil rights and freedoms

It was a damp and cold early evening on 16 November 1989. Small groups of university students from the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University gathered at Bratislava's Peace Square (today's Hodžovo Square). As on previous days, a secret message was spread about a student march through Bratislava. The idea to organise a student protest event originated during meetings in front of the Palace of Justice, where members of the Bratislava Five (dissidents Ján Čarnogurský, Hana Ponická, Anton Selecký, Miroslav Kusý and Vladimír Maňák) were tried for an offence. During the court case, many gathered outside to express their support.



Students with the will and the courage met at the agreed place at the appointed time. Small groups were forming. Passionate discussions were held. Everything was spontaneous, without an advanced fixed plan. One proposed putting flowers at the former Children's Confectionery; there Vladimír Clementis, the Slovak politician and lawyer executed in 1952, had a memorial. It was finally decided to lay flowers at Comenius University, where Soviet invasion troops had shot and killed a young girl – Danka Košanová – in 1968.



Approximately 200 university students met at Hodžovo Square. The national anthem was sung. Then in a large circle the students started to applaud. The first chants arose: 'Freedom! Democracy!' The circle gradually became a long column that headed towards Poštová Street while chanting: 'We want school reforms! Glasnost! We don't want the reactor!' They stopped briefly at SNP Square and shouted: 'Truth! Democracy!' Bratislava residents were surprised, not knowing how to respond. Everything was monitored and filmed by the police from Hodžovo Square. However, the students were still moving through the Old Town's narrow streets. A police car followed the column up to Vajanský Riverside, where students sang the national anthem – 'Štefánik! Štefánik!' – near the statue for the Czechoslovak Republic's establishment. They quickly headed to the university building on Šafárik Square – where they laid flowers for Danka Košanová. They continued to the nearby building of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Socialist Republic (in today's Dobrovičova Street) where they shouted: 'We want reforms! We want school reforms!' They were enveloped by the National Security Force on both sides of the street. The students became uncertain, yet continued to chant slogans. Gejza Šlapka, the Secretary of the Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, surrounded by several men was just leaving the building. The students insisted he stopped to briefly engage in a dialogue could

..... not be initiated on the street. For a while he heard the students' complaints,
..... ranging from refusing the official Marxist-Leninist ideology up to the poor
..... condition of colleges. The students demanded guarantees that the security forces
..... would not act against them. They finally agreed to send their representatives to
..... Šlapka for the dialogue to continue. The police did not intervene and the
..... demonstrators calmly dispersed. The next day, 17 November 1989 – International
..... Students' Day – was the key subsequent development, as the police acted against
..... demonstrators on Prague's Národná trieda Street, a response that initiated the
..... end of communist rule in Czechoslovakia. The events in Prague on 17 November
..... considerably overshadowed but never obscured the events of 16 November in
..... Bratislava.

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References: