

Information on the events of January 18, 1989 in Prague

On January 18, 1989 in the afternoon hours there was again in the area of Wenceslas Square a provocational assembly of anti-socialist elements which had the clear character of an anti-socialist political demonstration.

By 15:00 several small groups of persons had formed in the upper part of Wenceslas Square. Shortly before 16:00 these clumps began to grow to about 200 persons, who stood on the sidewalk by the Dům módy department store and waited. It was found that among them was the second secretary of the political section of the USA embassy Robert Norman. In other parts of Wenceslas Square, on Národní Avenue, Můstek, and the pedestrian zone there was normal everyday traffic. By 17:00 the group in the upper part of Wenceslas Square had grown to an estimated 600 persons, who filled the area around the statue of St. Wenceslas and the sidewalks in front of the Dům módy department store and the Dům potravin food store. Shortly after 17:00 the participants in the assembly began to clap; several dozen people attempted to sing the national anthem, and the cries were had "Release Havel", "Freedom, freedom", and "Long live the Charter". Members of the SNB [National Security Corps] who cleared the traffic lane for motor vehicles were verbally attacked by individuals shouting "phooey! shame!". These loud shouts attracted other persons who started coming to the upper part of Wenceslas Square from the direction of Opletalova Street. More chanting rang out of "Dubček, Dubček", "Jakeš out", "Štěpán out", "Long live Havel", "Tomorrow here again". By 17:30 the area in front of the statue of St. Wenceslas was completely full. The nucleus of the crowd consisted of around 800 – 1000 people, who were surrounded by around 2000 spectators. Traffic in both directions was stopped. Again chants rang out of "Down with the government, down with Jakeš, down with Štěpán", "Russians go home", "We're going to Můstek", "We're going to the Castle". At 17:45 the crowd slowly began to move towards the center of Wenceslas Square"

In view of the danger that the crowd might try to break through to the Old Town Square, Red Army Square, and over the bridges to Prague Castle, at 17:30 measures were taken in the streets Celetná, Železná, Melantrichova, Malé Square, U radnice, Pařížská, Dlouhá, and Red Army Square. Preparations were made to close off Old Town Square and Charles Bridge.

At 17:55 the crowd turned around and slowly returned to the constant chanting of slogans "They're afraid", "Tomorrow flowers!", "A plaque for Palach!", and "Palach Square". Shortly after 18:00 there were again around 1000 persons gathered by the statue of St. Wenceslas. At 18:15 those present were called on to disperse by Martin Věchet (an individual known to the security organs) so as not to give the SNB a pretext to intervene, and that on January 19 at 15:30 they would gather here again. Upon his appeal a portion of those present began to gradually disperse. At 18:30 there remained a group of 300-400 persons at the site. To this group, former Charter 77 spokesman Radim Palouš read a statement by the Charter on the measures taken by the state authorities against the demonstrators on 15.1.1989. Another man also spoke, who presented himself as Vosák, an acolyte from the church on Jiří z Poděbrad Square. He declared that the government is incompetent and must step down, and the rest would be seen at tomorrow's discussion at 16:00 on Wenceslas Square. Afterward the remaining participants dispersed, and at 19:05 Wenceslas Square was calm.

For the entire course of the demonstration the security units and equipment were deployed hidden at their readiness and reserve locations and prepared for immediate commitment.

Personnel from the [West] German TV station ARD filmed portions of the demonstration. Besides Norman, also present on Wenceslas Square were the first and third secretaries of the embassy of Great Britain Damian Toota and Patricia Holland. It was determined that participating in the demonstration, among others, were followers of the underground Václav Žufan and Jaroslav Ondrák, Charter 77 signatories Stanislav Devatý and Markéta Fialková, and actors Jiří Lábus, Oldřich Vízner, and Alois Švehlík.

In the area of Wenceslas Square identities were checked of a total of 213 persons, of which 60 % had permanent residence in Prague, 70 % were up to 25 years of age, and 11 had been previously checked while participating in unauthorized assemblies. Another 13 persons have files in the records of the security organs. The following 7 people were brought in for questioning: [...]