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October 5–6, 1989, Prague – Report from Charter 77 signatory Jan Urban on the second exodus of GDR citizens from Prague to the Federal Republic, published in the independent samizdat bulletin Information on Charter 77.

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Translation (extract) by Todd Hammond.

### **East German exodus (report by Jan Urban)**

On Sunday October 1 early in the morning it seemed to many that the refugee crisis was dispelled, and that Mikhail Gorbachev could come without problem for what would surely be a grandiose celebration of the GDR's forty years. Parked in the Malá Strana quarter were dozens of abandoned automobiles with GDR license plates. Everything looked like a peaceful Sunday.

In the morning, however, the first trains from Berlin and Dresden arrived; and groups of young East Germans reappeared in the streets of the Malá Strana, brash and agitated. More and more autos arrived and were hastily abandoned. During the day it became clear that the Czechoslovak police had surrounded the grounds of the embassy and its garden with a cordon, and were refusing to let German-speaking people come near it. The embassy protests; several people manage to get into the garden through the adjacent property of the embassy of the USA. In the evening there are maybe two hundred people sitting on the sidewalk in front of the closed building.

On Monday the flow of people increases from the morning on, and the police begin to lose control of the situation. The decisive moment came in the late afternoon. While intensive diplomatic negotiations were going on, around five-thirty the police in front of the embassy in Prague were given the order by someone to push the Germans out of the street. The police then began to move against the people with metal barriers. Later rubber batons were used. Amid the crowd mothers carried away dozens of small children, while in the back young people, among them a number of Czechs, were holding back the police. The police placed barriers at the entrance to the street. On one side stood several dozen policemen; on the other side were several hundred Germans, who were joined by more and more. By now trams and autos could barely on to Karmelitská Street. The chant of *Freiheit, Freiheit* rose up. Some Czechs from the neighboring houses brought tea for the children and offered places to sleep. The answer was always the same: We must stay here; we can't miss the moment when they let us in. They must let us in.

It seemed unbelievable, but just before nine o'clock in the evening the police barriers were approached by personnel of the FRG; the police open a path, and the first mothers with small children make their way the last couple hundred meters to the open gates of the embassy. Behind them come more and more. At 11 in the night there are still 250 or so people in front of the building, slowly proceeding inside. A large group of policemen loiter around and wait some distance away.

On Tuesday morning at least five hundred people now stand in front of an overflowing embassy. Once in awhile the gate opens and right behind it you can see cots set up in the entrance hall. It is clear that the building is already overflowing now. At 12 o'clock a Czechoslovak police officer estimates the numbers within at over five

thousand, and added that according to reports from the Czechoslovak-East German border, there is a line of more than a thousand vehicles on the German side in the direction of Czechoslovakia. He said, quote, The Germans have to close the border, otherwise in a couple hours no one will be able to control it. And that's what actually happened, around 15:00. We learn from people who came on the afternoon trains that since this morning the East German police have been pulling people off trains whom they suspect are going to emigrate.

In the evening the temperature drops. It's only six degrees, and an unpleasant wind has begun to blow. The overflowing embassy building cannot hold all the mothers with children; the little square in front of it is now filled with an uncounted mass of people. Around six o'clock all at once a cheer erupts and chants of *Freiheit, Freiheit*. Embassy personnel have just announced that agreement had been reached on the departure of all present to the FRG. Dozens of bottles of champagne appear; everything seems within reach now. Personnel of the West German Red Cross appear and slowly line people up in the direction from which at eight o'clock the first buses are to come, which are to gradually take all the people to the Prague-Libeň Station. From there 12 trains are to go through Dresden to Hof in Bavaria. At the lower intersection of Karmelitská Street, where according to plan people are to get on the bus, the first group is leaving, mixing with new refugees just walking up.

Now starts the long last night, but right now no one here knows it yet. Only after ten o'clock does the information appear that some kind of technical-organizational difficulties have come up on the side of the GDR which are holding up the departure of the trains.

[...]

Meanwhile [in the afternoon of the next day] it began to get around that the trains were not delayed because of an attempt by GDR officials to hold up the transport long enough to make them travel through the GDR by night, as many supposed, but because hundreds of people who did not managed to cross the border into Czechoslovakia before it was closed occupied the station and sat down on the tracks to prevent the trains from leaving.

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