

Year 1989

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Documentary "Sviečková manifestácia alebo Bratislavský Veľký Piatok"

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Documentary "Sviečková manifestácia alebo Bratislavský Veľký Piatok" 25th March, 1988 - Ondrej Krajňak.

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The Candle Demonstration of 25th March, 1988

Resumé

The peaceful gathering of mostly believers that took place on 25th March 1988 in Bratislava to demand religious and civic freedom represents the pinnacle of the activities carried out by an underground ecclesiastical and secular movement against the communist regime in Slovakia in the 80s. The burning candles the protestors were holding in their hands became its symbol.

The main demands concerned appointing Catholic bishops to the vacant seats, absolute religious freedom and total adherence to the civil rights. One of the major sources of inspiration was a signature collection campaign to support a set of 31 demands entitled "Incentives of the Catholic to solve the situation of the believers in ČSSR".

The request at the municipal authorities asking for permission to demonstrate was turned down. The Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior incited an emergency security operation giving green light to the police to prevent the rally. The communist regime launched a series of countermeasures and imprisoned the leading activists and organisers before the rally was due. The Central Committee of the Communist Party set up a political committee to hamper the demonstration that had both the police and the secret service trying to hinder the preparation and the course of the rally.

Some 10 000 people gathered spontaneously at the arranged time, 6 pm, carrying burning candles, singing and praying. This peaceful demonstration was brutally suppressed by the police and the secret service supported by emergency units, which did not hesitate to make use of batons, shields, dogs and, even, water cannons.

Tens of people, including accredited foreign journalists, were injured, taken to police stations and interrogated. This brutal intervention was condemned by Charta 77, priests, Cardinal Tomašek, Bishop Korec, as well as many international organizations, political forums and ecclesiastical authorities.

The moral winners of this confrontation were the believers. Due to the nature of its resistance, its demands, its courage and its suffering, the Candle Demonstration, also known as Bratislava's Good Friday, constitutes the prologue to the later fall of communism in Czechoslovakia in November 1989.

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