

Ladislav Porjes And Willy Brandt



As a foreign correspondent of Czechoslovak Radio, I was able to also work in West Berlin. In this photograph I'm at a press conference with the West German chancellor Willy Brandt (second from left) in 1967. I'm on the far right in the photo.

In West Berlin became a member of the 'Presseverein' - the Foreign Press Club in West Berlin. For me, as a foreigner and journalist, the otherwise impermeable Berlin Wall was permeable day or night. It was enough to show the East German border guards at 'Checkpoint Charlie' a foreign press card, and the barriers lifted. On the other side, the West German border guards saluted, and that was it. For me the Foreign Press Club was not only a source of important information, but also a place of interesting encounters. I met, for example, with the later West German chancellors Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, who gave me an exclusive interview. Members of the Foreign Press Club were not only well-known Western journalists like Alexander Korab, reporter for several Bonn papers, Peter Johnson of the BBC, or Jean-Paul Picaper, correspondent for the Parisian paper *Le Monde*. But also correspondents from socialist countries, who like me were accredited in both parts of Berlin.

In the West Berlin 'Verein der Auslandspresse' it was an unwritten rule that each year its rotating chairman was elected from members of the Western media, while a correspondent from the socialist camp was elected as deputy chairman. In the spring of 1968, I was elected by a majority in a secret ballot. Among the first colleagues that came to congratulate me were, to my astonishment, representatives of the Soviet Union - the TASS and Radio *Izvestia* correspondents. However one correspondent from the Soviet camp - a reporter from the central mouthpiece of the Communist Party Central Committee, 'Pravda' - pointedly ignored me. For he was my opponent, he didn't succeed and couldn't reconcile himself with his defeat. However, things were not to remain only at the level of ignoring me.

The next day after my election, my wife, two school-age daughters and I were woken early in the morning by the merciless ringing of the doorbell at our East German apartment. At the door stood

representatives of our embassy, a member of the NKVD and the last was the aforementioned reporter of the Soviet 'Pravda' whom I had defeated in the election. They claimed that my election to the function of deputy chairman of the West German 'Presseverein' had been manipulated. They insisted that I give up the position. I recommended to them that they should kindly verify how the correspondents from the RVHP countries voted. For my colleagues from the Soviet Union had boasted to me that they had as one voted for me. Further, I told them to kindly go see all of the about thirty members of the West German Foreign Press Club, and ask them if they agree with a review of yesterday's elections. For a while our uninvited guests still tried to convince me to give up the position in favor of the 'Pravda' correspondent, that it's after all my duty from a standpoint of international comradeship. But when they didn't succeed, they left without any further threats. For in Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring - both meteorological and political - was beginning