

# Munich 1972 - threads from 1971

*This letter links events of the 1969-71 period with what was to come at the Olympics a year after I left Germany. -- rwr--*

Steven Rosen, Movie Critic, *Denver Post*

Dear Mr. Rosen:

Your review of *One Day in September* made good points. Unfortunately, due to its limited performances in Denver, I won't be able to attend. The economics of the film industry are understandable, but frustrating. I would have liked to attend it with others.

As it happened, I walked all through the Munich Olympic Grounds unhindered in August 1971. Being interested in urban planning, I have slides of many of the buildings, either nearing completion or under construction. I had entered through the back side of the project, and exited at the front. There, for the first time, I saw a sign saying that access to the site was restricted. I was there for over an hour, chatted with people about what was being done, watched some athletes and the Soviet coach arriving at the nearly-complete Velodrome, etc. I can remember being surprised even then at how lax the security was-- I had originally supposed that once I walked in a way, I would come to a fence and just take some photos from the *Kein Eintritt* sign.



During that period, the West German police were notoriously ineffective on organized terrorism, and that seems to have extended to the Olympics. Part of the problem is that de-Nazification of the various police forces was made difficult because the Nazis had made great efforts at getting the uniformed police into their camp. That, combined with the death of much of a generation of young men in World War II, lost experience and thrust the next generation into command positions without the gradual transition that otherwise would have occurred. It was hard to discuss that problem in public without appearing to favor keeping the Nazis around-- and, in fact, those Nazis who were kept in police jobs were targets of criticism. I don't know enough about that to know if the criticism was justified, but I know that it was constant.

What I do know is that police mishandled cases involving both Left and Right radicals, including documented incompetence in letting prisoners from both sides of the political extremes escape from custody. It appears that they could not shift gears from what seems to have been a good job of dealing with "ordinary" criminals to the extra thought needed in dealing with politically-motivated people.

There also emerged a subset of the radical groups which was that of Left anti-Semites. They had their credibility raised by the Left's concerns about Palestine, which in turn were boosted by the Soviet bloc's interests in the Middle East.

While I was in Berlin, on 9 Nov 69, a synagogue was torched. One of the names of the three young men arrested turns up in the Internet today, attached to 'scholarly' articles from the Left anti-Semitic angle. After the synagogue arson, the same name joined the Baader-Meinhof faction, which had links to the Palestinians. You can read about these people in the outstanding website *This is Baader-Meinhof* at <http://www.baader-meinhof.com> , or some bits and pieces in a section of my website at: <http://www.berlin1969.com> .

And that leads to the question of East German involvement, in particular. This was discussed even as it was happening-- the nature of many of the Left radicals being as talkative as it was. As a U.S. Army enlisted man one rung up from the bottom level of things, I heard about it unofficially. One of my barrack mates, a Personnel Specialist, had been a student at the University of Kiel before he was drafted, was an ace in northern German, and he told us how left wing students bragged of one group or another receiving support. It was kind of a status symbol, receiving official recognition from the GDR.

In my unfinished website, I have started putting pieces into place that demonstrate this from circumstantial evidence. Historians are getting things out of the files and recollections of retired officials, but what I am doing is showing how this could actually be seen in open material, such as by relating one newspaper story to another. Our Berlin veterans and the Allied Museum in Berlin are also pressing to get more open access to Cold War records of our own government. At the moment, we have the irony of more information coming out of the East side than from our side.

Without having seen the film, then, I can tell you from open sources that:



1. The Olympic site was wide open a year before the events, and that some buildings were complete enough to have made photos of them very informative. That would have included areas that later should have been secured.

2. It was no problem at all to leave the GDR, travel into West Germany, and return. It would not have even required local agents to get much of the information needed to, perhaps, build a scale model of the target area for training. However, the GDR's intelligence gathering in the FRG was extensive, so it would not have been hard to get building plans filed with the many city agencies, power company, contractors, etc. without being noticed.

3. The GDR airline, Interflug, operated directly between Schonefeld Airport on the outskirts of Berlin, and almost every anti-Western capital in the Mideast. It was kind of the successor to the Berlin to Baghdad railway project that irked the British before WWI. The Germans prior to WWII were reported to have used their air lines as intelligence gathering entities. (The rapid expansion of German air service in Latin America was the stated reason for the FBI being given primary responsibility in that region for U.S. counter-intelligence work from WWII days.) It was easy to maintain connections that way. With the right identity papers, it was not even necessary to enter West Berlin through gray and boring East Berlin. The airport was in East Germany, but it had an airport bus service into West Berlin. News stories of the time establish that the GDR guards were selective in who they waved through and who they grilled.

4. Ironically, as the *Baader-Meinhof* website points out, many of the West German terrorists would have been caught up in the September 1970 attacks on Palestinian training camps by Jordan if they had not been kicked out of those same camps for their earlier flaky behavior. They would have known individuals, in some cases intimately, who were "victims" of the Jordanian

clampdown. Contacts between the groups continued, so there was a whole network that could have provided support for the Munich events: the direct participants, West German Left terrorists with an anti-Semitic slant (cloaked as anti-Zionism), the GDR government, and anti-Western Arab governments.

5. The GDR acted on its own in many instances. Many Americans did and do not understand this; I only learned it on the spot, so to speak, but from my perspective it is possible that the Soviet Union was not involved in the Munich events. They certainly had no compelling reason to upset the West Germans, with whom they wanted to do business, nor to trash the Olympics. As you can read in my website, the East Germans had a major sorepoint with the West Germans over their past treatment in the Olympic movement. As far as I know, all of the East German officials with a reason to hold a grudge were still around in 1972. Perhaps the film or some other source will prove that my current view is wrong, but it was only the GDR in the Soviet bloc that had clear motives to let this happen.

6. You will notice the semantics there-- let this happen. In the official GDR press, terrorist actions were condemned; Left radicals were told openly that they were risking being counter-productive. The GDR leaders were nervous about these people, who in turn would not have fit into the nit-picking, politically correct-or-else environment developed in East Germany. I have a GDR editorial commentary from that point in my website. Critics of our government's role in dealing with foreign radicals or police states tend to want to prove direction from Washington, DC. Similarly, many Americans tend to assume direction from governments in the East bloc. Sometimes it seems that governments loving violent "solutions" means having to say that they are sorry... while watching things happen or indirectly offering aid.

7. Prior to 1969, Western governments' intelligence gathering was mainly directed at the obvious Cold War participants. There is still very little that has been declassified to show how this effort might have been redirected or augmented in dealing with the terrorists. In my own observations, I saw ambiguous things from 1970-71 that might or might not have been a start on that. I know that my Army office was not interested, short of someone walking in the door and introducing themselves as a terrorist.

We do know that the FRG police were revamped, particularly after 1972. Bits and pieces show that the Mossad was digging around prior to 1969, as well. Perhaps one day there will be more information from that direction.

In the film world, obscure documentary *One Day in September* is linked with big screen *Lawrence of Arabia* and *African Queen* as well as sometimes-remembered *Spy Who Came in from the Cold* -- each of which includes elements of this continuing story stemming from the British and German rivalry in the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

A further nice touch in your Weekend *Denver Post* movies coverage was the parallel article on the release of *Glory* on DVD. It is the total opposite of the Munich Olympics story.

Robert W. Rynerson  
Denver, Colorado  
10 February 2001

[Richard Huffman's Baader-Meinhof pages focus on German terrorists.](http://www.baader-meinhof.com/)  
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