A Last Greeting to the Deceased – Secular Funeral Services in Leipzig, East Germany

Abstract:

Currently the majority of funerals in Leipzig are without participation of any kind of religious authority. The secular funeral service is the common way to bury the dead. Since the 19th century a huge number of inhabitants moved away from institutional churches in Eastern Germany. A secular funeral ritual had to be developed at the beginning of the 20th century, as freethinker and labour movements promulgated cremation as self-determined way of handling funerals. At the time of the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) these rites became the common way to bury the dead. After the political change the secular funeral service remained the most frequent ritual. The new ritual specialists are now the undertaker or funeral directors. They organize funerals for the comfort of the bereaved. The contemporary secular funeral services are adaptations of the Protestant funeral service.

Keywords: *undertaker, secularization, funeral ritual, socialism, post-socialism.*