

“People of the World, Look at this City!” – Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter's Speech on the Berlin Blockade (September 9, 1948)

Abstract

By September 1948 West Berlin had been blockaded by the Soviets for three months. The Western Allies supplied the city via the so-called airlift. West Berliners were determined not to be give in to Soviet pressure and demonstrated their will at a large rally in front of the destroyed Reichstag building attended by 350,000 people on September 9, 1948. The most important speaker was Berlin's mayor Ernst Reuter. His speech encouraged not only Berliners to remain resilient but also the Allies to maintain the airlift.

Source

Lipschitz coined the phrase that has found a vivid echo in all of us; he said: “We'll be back!” We are coming back to the eastern sector of Berlin, we are also coming back to the eastern zone of Germany!

Today is not the day when diplomats and generals talk and negotiate. Today is the day when the people of Berlin raise their voices. These people of Berlin are calling out to the whole world today. For we know what is at stake today in the negotiations in the Control Council building on Potsdamer Strasse, which have now come to a standstill, and in the negotiations later in Moscow in the stone palaces of the Kremlin. In all these negotiations, our fate is decided by throwing dice. When these negotiations began weeks ago, the Russian bear's appetite was greater than just [for] Berlin. He wanted the negotiations to cover the whole of Germany as well, and with the false slogan that the division of Germany had to be prevented, he was only disguising for others, not for us, his appetite for the other part of Germany, on which he also wants to get his hands.

Now the negotiations have returned to Berlin. The generals have come to a standstill. We are living in a pause. In this pause we believe that it is good for the world to see what the people of Berlin really want. Tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, there will be negotiations about the Italian colonies. I don't know what else will be negotiated then. We just want to make one thing clear: in all this bargaining and negotiating, we Berliners do not want to be a bargaining chip!

We cannot be traded, we cannot be negotiated, and we cannot be sold. It is impossible to reach a lazy compromise on the backs of such a brave, steadfast people. Of course, compromises are the substance of all living politics, but compromises must be genuine and honest compromises. They must not be made in the same way as those nighttime telephone agreements between the French general and the Russian general, where the Russian general breaks his word of honor.

Before the cock had crowed three times, the word of honor was smoke and mirrors, and decent, good, honest Berliners, friends of ours, were turned into White Guards and Black Guards.

We would like to give the SED just one piece of advice: If it needs a new symbol, please, do not use the handshake but the handcuffs they put on Berliners.

The handcuffs are in fact the symbol of these wretched cowards who want to sell themselves and their

people to a foreign power for thirty pieces of silver.

When the people of Berlin stand up here today in their hundreds of thousands, then we know that the whole world sees this Berlin. Because the generals can no longer negotiate here, the cabinets can no longer negotiate. Behind these political acts stands the will of free peoples who have recognized that a bulwark, an outpost of freedom has been erected here in this city, which no one can abandon with impunity.

Whoever would give up this city, whoever would give up the people of Berlin, would give up a world, and even more, he would give up himself, and he would not only give up the people of Berlin in the Western sectors and in the Eastern sector of Berlin. No, we also know that if only they could, today the people of Leipzig, Halle, Chemnitz, Dresden, all the cities of the Eastern zone, would be standing in their squares like us and listening to our voices.

And I know it deeply, I think of my old city of Magdeburg, which elected me as a member of the Reichstag and whose mayor I was before Hitler sent us to the concentration camps. These people would rush in their tens of thousands to our flags, to the flags of freedom, just as they did then, and unite with us and the peoples of the world in a great, indestructible alliance.

Therefore, when we call out to the world today in this hour, we do so because we know that the strength of our people is the ground on which we have grown great and will grow greater and stronger until the power of darkness is broken and shattered. And we will celebrate that day here. We will experience this day in this place, in front of our old Reichstag with its proud inscription "To the German people," and we will celebrate it with the proud awareness that we have brought it about through worries and hardship, through toil and misery, but with steadfast perseverance. When this day comes to us, the day of victory, the day of freedom, when the world will recognize that this German people has renewed itself, has changed and grown anew, has become a free, mature, proud people, conscious of its value and its strength, which has the right to have its say in the alliance of equal and free peoples, then our trains will not only travel to Helmstedt again, they will travel to Munich, to Frankfurt, Dresden, Leipzig, they will travel to Breslau and to Stettin.

And they will once again mount the second tracks on our miserable, wretched, shattered, old, ruined stations, which will be the symbol of our regained freedom, which we, Berliners, must and will fight for in the battles that lie behind us and in the hardships that lie ahead.

You nations of the world, people of America, England, France, and Italy! Look at this city and realize that you must not and cannot abandon this city and its people! There is only one possibility for all of us: to stand together until this battle is won, until this battle is finally sealed by victory over the enemies, by victory over the power of darkness.

The people of Berlin have spoken. We have done our duty, and we will continue to do our duty. People of the world! Do your duty and help us in the times that lie ahead, not only with the roar of your airplanes, not only with the means of transportation that you bring here, but with your steadfast and indestructible commitment to the common ideals that alone can secure our future and that alone can secure your future. People of the world, look at Berlin! And people of Berlin, be sure of this: we want to win this fight, and we will win this fight!

Source: SWR2 Archivradio

<https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/archivradio-geschichte-im-original/ihr-voelker-der-welt-schaut-a>

[uf-diese-stadt-ernst-reuters-rede-vor-dem-reichstag/swr2/94607838/](https://www.swr2.de/94607838/uf-diese-stadt-ernst-reuters-rede-vor-dem-reichstag)

Recommended Citation: “People of the World, Look at this City!” – Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter's Speech on the Berlin Blockade (September 9, 1948), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:audio-5007>> [April 28, 2024].