

The West German Government's Condemnation of the Wall (August 18, 1961)

Abstract

Speaking in the Bundestag, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer denounces the building of the Wall as proof of the bankruptcy of the East German dictatorship. He blames the Soviet Union for violating the Four-Power status of Berlin and calls for a solution to the German question through the "right to self-determination."

Source

Konrad Adenauer, Bundestag Speech of August 18, 1961

The rulers of the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany have brought traffic between the Soviet sector and the three Western sectors of Berlin almost to a complete standstill since the early morning hours of August 13. Barbed-wire entanglements have been erected along the sector border; large units from the People's Police and the border police have taken up position on the sector boundary in order to **block all traffic between East and West Berlin**. At the same time, troops of the National People's Army have been deployed in East Berlin.

These measures to cordon off [East Berlin] were taken on the basis of an August 12 resolution by the rulers of the Soviet-occupied zone. With the implementation of that resolution, the **Ulbricht regime** clearly and unmistakably declared the political bankruptcy of its sixteen-year reign of tyranny to the whole world.

(Applause from CDU/CSU and FDP.)

With these measures, the Ulbricht regime had to admit that it is not borne and supported by the free will of the German people living in the Zone. With these measures, the Ulbricht regime has confirmed that the exercise of the right to self-determination by the German people should no longer be delayed for the sake of maintaining world peace!

(Applause from CDU/CSU and SPD.)

These illegal measures, which the Federal Government has noted with concern and repugnance, stand in stark contrast to the **Four-Power agreements** on freedom of movement within Greater Berlin and to those Four-Power agreements that address the regulation of traffic between Berlin and the Soviet-Occupied Zone.

By blocking traffic between East and West Berlin, the regime in control of the Zone has unilaterally and brutally violated the existing Four-Power agreements on Berlin that are recognized by the USSR to this day.

The Federal Government notes with deep regret that this despotic act has been carried out with the approval of the **government of the USSR** as the leading power in the Warsaw Pact. By giving this approval, the Soviet Government has contradicted its own constant assertions that it will solve the problem of Germany and Berlin through negotiations. Whereas the American president, during his most recent press conference on August 10, newly expressed the readiness of the US Government to engage in negotiations on the problem of Germany and Berlin, the rulers of the Soviet-Occupied Zone reacted to

the Western desire for peace and negotiations with military measures. This reaction demonstrates to the whole world—more strikingly than words ever could—that the present crisis has been triggered solely by the Soviet policy on Germany and Berlin.

(Applause from CDU/CSU and FDP.)

[...]

On August 13, 1961, the world was witness to the first steps on the path toward the realization of the stated aims [of the Ulbricht regime]. The **Four-Power Statute on the City of Berlin**, valid under the regulations of international law, has been broken once more. The latest measure is at once the gravest and most brutal. The barricades set up within Berlin and between the city and the Soviet-Occupied Zone by its authorities at the behest of their masters are obviously meant to foreshadow the cutting-off of the free part of the German capital from the free world.

[...]

It seems like a macabre satire when the representatives of the Ulbricht regime stand up today and declare that the Germans in the Soviet-Occupied Zone have already exercised their **right to self-determination**.

The permanent **flow of refugees** in recent weeks and years tells a different story—i.e., the true story. It is instructive to call to mind the juncture at which this increased influx of refugees resumed. It started when the Soviet premier made massive threats to conclude a peace treaty with the Zone, which made the people living in the Zone fully aware of the hopelessness of their situation. For these people, the announced separation treaty was a nightmare they wanted to escape under all circumstances. In their emotional desperation these people saw no way out other than leaving their homeland in the Soviet-Occupied Zone, abandoning their possessions, and risking their lives to make a fresh start and build a new life in freedom in the Federal Republic. Their free decision to give up their homeland was the only way in which they could practice what remained of their right to self-determination. There was nothing left for them to do but “vote with their feet.” With that vote, these people have shown the world what they really want: they want freedom, not bondage [*Unfreiheit*].

(Applause from CDU/CSU.)

The Federal Government has reliable evidence that, despite sixteen years of a reign of terror by Communist functionaries in the Soviet-Occupied Zone, more than 90 percent of the Germans living there reject the regime that oppresses them, despise the slave state that was forcibly imposed on them, and have no more ardent wish than to be united with Germans who live in freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Soviet Union keeps asserting that the current **status of the city of Berlin** is one of the causes of the existing tensions. There is no need to reiterate that this assertion is incorrect. But it is certainly appropriate to emphatically point out that solving the German problem on the basis of self-determination is the best, if not the only, way to eliminate these tensions and difficulties.

(Applause from CDU/CSU.)

Such a solution would indeed be a genuine contribution to maintaining and securing peace in the world.

[...]

Nevertheless we are a long way from viewing military measures as a solution to this crisis, which has been artificially created by the Soviet Union. The Federal Government is not convinced that the Soviet

premier wants to trigger a war that would destroy his own country as well. In fact, the Federal Government believes that it is possible, now as before, to find a way out of the situation in which the world finds itself by means of **negotiations**.

(Applause from CDU/CSU.)

It is ready to support any starting point for negotiations between the Four Powers responsible for Berlin and Germany as a whole. The Federal Government regards it as absolutely essential, however, to point out that the unilateral action taken by the rulers of the Soviet Zone, with the consent of the government of the USSR, is a strain on the readiness to negotiate exhibited by the West.

The Federal Government, however, will not abandon the hope that negotiations may be started at once and that they will enable a solution to the German problem and thus to the Berlin question on the basis of the right of peoples to self-determination. The principle that all peoples should be given the right to determine their own system of government is making a triumphal procession throughout the world. The Federal Government is confident that this principle can also be implemented in the heart of Europe, where right now 16 million Germans are still being denied this right.

[...]

Let me finally say a few words to the residents of the **Eastern sector of Berlin and of the Soviet Zone**. *Your* misfortune and *your* trouble is *our* misfortune and *our* trouble.

(General applause.)

In your difficult situation you had at least found some consolation in the thought that, if your lot were to become unbearable, you could escape it by fleeing. Now it looks as though you have been deprived of this consolation as well. I ask our brothers and sisters in the Eastern sector of Berlin and the Soviet Zone, from the bottom of my heart: Do not give up hope for a better future for yourselves and your children.

(Applause.)

We are convinced that the efforts of the free world, and our efforts in particular, will succeed one day in giving you back your freedom.

(Renewed applause.)

[...]

Source: Konrad Adenauer, Bundestag speech of August 18, 1961, *Deutscher Bundestag* — 3. *Wahlperiode* — 167. *Sitzung*. Bonn, Friday, 18. August 1961, pp. 9769–72. Available online at: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/03/03167.pdf>

Source of English translation: *Berlin (1944–1962)*, file on Berlin affairs, prepared by A. Molter. Paris: Assemblée de l'Union de l'Europe occidentale, 1962, pp. 44–48. This translation was edited by the GHDI staff.

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