

Reply of the Soviet Commandant in Berlin (20 June 1953)

Caption: On 20 June 1953, in his reply to the US, British and French Commandants in West Berlin, the Soviet Commandant justifies the repressive policy of the Soviet Union and accuses the Western Powers of supporting the rioters in the Eastern sector of Berlin.

Source: Documents on American Foreign Relations. 1953. Dir. of publ. Curl, Peter V. 1954. New York: published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Harper & Brothers. "Reply of the Soviet Commandant in Berlin (June 20, 1953)", p. 171-173.

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Reply of the Soviet Commandant in Berlin (Dibrova), June 20, 1953

Confirming the receipt of your letter of June 18, I consider it necessary to draw your attention to the fact that in your letter the events in Berlin on June 17 are represented in a distorted way, and I decisively reject the protest contained in that letter as devoid of any basis.

In connection with this, I must inform you that the measures taken on June 17 by the military authorities in the Eastern sector of Berlin were completely necessary to curtail the burnings and other disturbances caused by groups of provocateurs and fascist agents from the Western sectors of Berlin who were sent here.

It has been determined that the instigators of the disorders, sent out from West Berlin, were supplied with arms and radio transmitters, and were especially instructed. Of the numerous proofs on hand, it is sufficient to indicate only the following. Investigative agencies of the German Democratic Republic published on June 19 the text of the interrogation of the arrested Werner Kalkowski, residing in the American sector of Berlin at Nauninstrasse 34, which showed that he was sent, in a group of 90 persons, into the Soviet sector of Berlin to set fires, loot shops, and create other disturbances, and which also showed that he, like other hirelings, performed this for money as mercenary agents of a foreign intelligence. So that you should have a fuller presentation of the matter, I enclose the text of the testimony of Werner Kalkowski of June 19.

In view of the above and of other specifically determined facts, your letter can only be appraised as a futile effort to remove the responsibility for the crimes of the hirelings-provocateurs of war and instigators of excesses from the representatives of the three powers in West Berlin.

In the circumstances cited, the Soviet occupying authorities could not remain inactive, nor afford freedom of action to the agents sent out from West Berlin. It is fully natural to ask you how the United States, English, and French authorities would have acted if agents-provocateurs had been sent out from East Berlin to set fires, conduct pogroms, commit murders, and other disturbances, and instigate acts of violence in West Berlin.

Of course, those guilty of the fires, looting, and other acts of violence will be brought to trial and severely punished.

So far as the re-establishment of communication between the Eastern and Western sectors of Berlin is concerned, I consider it necessary to draw your attention to the fact that the Soviet military authorities see no hindrances either as to transport or other communication between the two sectors of city, on condition that the Commandants of the three powers in West Berlin take all measures necessary to guarantee the curtailment of forays by provocateurs and other criminal elements onto the territory of East Berlin.

(Following is a summary of the Werner Kalkowski interrogation enclosed with General Dibrova's letter):

Werner Kalkowski arrested with other agents-provocateurs by the East German security police on June 17, 1953, made the following admissions:

He was a resident of West Berlin. On June 16, at 6 p.m. he had accepted the offer of a good reward from one Paul Gunting to stir up disorders in East Berlin.

On June 17, at 8 a.m. he joined a group of over 90 men. The leaders of the group were Paul Gunting, one Hans Jurgen, and an American by the name of Heaver. Heaver was in uniform and wore two stars on his "shoulderboards." Instructions were given to join the strikers in the Eastern sector, to incite them to demand the overthrow of the GDR Government, and to transform a peaceful demonstration into a riot. Furthermore, the group was to take an active part in the riot, raid government buildings, set fires, loot stores, knock down the VOPO's and rouse the mob against the lawful authority, using weapons if necessary. The group moved to Potsdamer Platz, joined the strikers and started shouting slogans against the government. Twenty men had bottles filled with gasoline which they had received from an American truck standing on the Potsdamer Bridge. On Potsdamer Platz, those who had bottles started to set fire to a number of buildings. Others threw

stones at the police and at the windows. The group then proceeded to Leipzigerstrasse where it continued to cause violence and shots were fired at the German police and crews of Soviet tanks. Kalkowski himself did not shoot because he did not have a weapon. His part consisted only in rousing the mob against the government. In this he was helped by the Americans who had set up two loudspeakers and continuously broadcasted incitement to violence.