

Speech by Otto Grotewohl (1 November 1948)

Caption: On 1 November 1948, Otto Grotewohl, Chairman of the Unified Socialist Party (SED), makes a speech in which he condemns the airlift organised by the Western powers and portrays the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin as a Western invention.

Source: GROTEWOHL, Otto. Im Kampf um die einige Deutsche Demokratische Republik, Reden und Aufsätze. Auswahl aus den Jahren 1945-1953. Band I: 1945-1949. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1954. 568 S. p. 282-288.

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The attempt made by the Western Powers to use the UN Security Council and the General Assembly to bring about a solution of the Berlin question was doomed to failure.

The Berlin question is inextricably linked with the entire problem of Germany and requires that the signatories of the Potsdam Agreement be reconvened to settle the matters in dispute and thus clear the way for the fastest possible solution for peace with Germany on the basis of democracy. It is true that this course of action presupposes that the Council of Foreign Ministers resumes its role. It has already been made known to the public, from the mouth of the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet zone of occupation, Marshal Sokolovsky himself, that the Moscow Conference was, indeed, a very appropriate forum for action to end the present state of affairs in Berlin. The Directive of 30 August, issued by the Soviet Government and addressed to the Commanders-in-Chief of the occupation forces in Berlin, also offered an opportunity for a settlement here, as did the agreement between the representatives of the four major powers, which was reached at the Paris Conference chaired by Mr Bramuglia.

If the Western Powers failed to grasp these opportunities and broke off the Berlin talks between the Commanders-in-Chief of the four zones with some paltry excuse, then this conduct justifies the claim that influential groups among the Western Powers do not want to find any solution to the problem of Germany which would comply with the decisions taken at the Potsdam Conference.

Acceptance of the proposals submitted by the representatives of the Soviet Union would have shattered the legend of the 'Berlin Blockade' at a stroke. This 'Blockade' supposedly forced the Western Powers to undertake the so-called Airlift. According to these proposals, transport links with Berlin should be set up immediately, the German Mark issued by the Deutsche Notenbank should be recognised as the sole currency for the whole of Berlin, and trade links with the Western zones of occupation should be directed in clearly defined channels which would satisfy all claims. This outcome would have led to compliance with the directive agreed in Moscow by the representatives of the four governments. Certain groups among the Western Powers, however, apparently have no interest in resolving the 'Berlin question', which they themselves have provoked. Rather, they are bent on using all possible means to prolong and to exacerbate the 'Berlin crisis'.

After the Western Powers had caused the Berlin talks between the Commanders-in-Chief to fail, they resolutely circumvented the Council of Foreign Ministers, which has sole responsibility for finding a solution to the German question. In order to justify this manoeuvre, the Western Powers are using the false argument that the population of West Berlin is being starved out. In actual fact, this Blockade is a pure invention of the Western Powers. It is well known that the Soviet Union has provided 100 000 tonnes of grain, over 10 000 tonnes of fats, heating materials and other commodities for Berlin. Fresh meat, fish, eggs, potatoes and other products are being imported from the countries of the people's democracies. This means that supplies are secured for the entire population of Berlin. The economy of West Berlin has an opportunity to continue its activities unhindered by cooperating with the German Economic Commission, the authoritative economic body for the Soviet zone of occupation and for the Soviet sector of Berlin.

The fact that this opportunity is not being exploited is primarily a consequence of the malicious political campaign being pursued by the reactionary British and American groups. The Western occupation authorities are preventing the residents of their sectors from taking advantage of the opportunities to acquire supplies offered by the Soviet sector. What is more, the behaviour of the Berlin City Administration is downright criminal in that it is doing its very best to further aggravate the situation. The resistance of the Berlin City Council, which is a slave to the Western occupation authorities, has resulted in the people living in the Western sectors being robbed of the opportunity to obtain supplies of food and other commodities provided by the Soviet Union directly in the shops in the Western sectors. The 'Airlift' invented by the Western occupation powers is an absolutely superfluous and purely demagogic measure which can in no way supply Berlin and what is more, is burdening the German people with not inconsiderable costs.

The policy of the Western Powers in the 'Berlin question' may primarily be explained by their imperialist

attitude towards Germany and its post-war configuration. The implementation of the agreements reached in Yalta and Potsdam has long been abandoned by the Western Powers. Instead of emulating the Soviet Union, which has created the conditions for the establishment of a democratic state and for a future policy of peace in its occupation zone by carrying out land and school reforms, by punishing war criminals and expropriating their factories, and by denazification and demilitarisation, they are taking the path of restoring German imperialism and militarism, the path of abandoning the decisions taken at Yalta and Potsdam. All the measures taken by the Western Powers are evidence of this. On 9 October 1948, the London *Times* wrote about this as follows:

‘The occupying powers have done little to change the foundations upon which society is built in West Germany or seriously to weaken the dominant groups which first welcomed Hitler, then served him and turned against him only at the very last minute. Coal and steel have not been nationalised, the civil service and the administration remained unchanged in many cases.’

Today, the imperialist forces of the Western Powers are in alliance with the rising reactionary forces in Germany. They are stirring up the Germans against the Soviet Union, unleashing the desire for war and the thirst for revenge and conducting a campaign of slander, which is unprecedented in its extent and its mendacity.

The German upper middle classes, the wealthy bourgeoisie, have betrayed the national interests of Germany. They are taking the side of the British and American monopoly and capital interests and supporting the policy of the Western Powers, which aims at the division of Germany. The moderate bourgeois parties in the Western zones of occupation and the right-wing Social Democrats headed by Kurt Schumacher have abandoned the interests of the German state. They constitute the bodyguard of the wealthy bourgeoisie and see it as their main task to prevent the German people from recognising the reality of the situation of the country. None of the numerous measures taken by the Western Powers, which work against unity, has led to a protest among these groups. Rather, they are opposed to the movement for a German People’s Congress begun by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and are weakening the struggle of the working class for the unity of Germany and for a just peace. They are supporting all plans for the British-American zone and the British-American-French zone, and have accepted without protest the recommendations of the London Six-Power Conference, the implementation of which turned the division of Germany into a tangible reality.

The separate currency reform of the Western Powers, which was the decisive step towards the partition of Germany and is diametrically opposed to the provision guaranteeing the economic unity of Germany under the Potsdam Agreement, was welcomed and supported by the German bourgeoisie and their henchmen.

The kings of industry are contributing to the transformation of the Ruhr region into a base for the war economy that is part of the aggressive policies of American imperialism. This is in line with their egoistic interests. By supporting this policy of the Western Powers, these upper middle classes and their Social Democrat lackeys are, as always, putting the interests of the monopolists before the national interests of Germany.

Nowhere is the malicious campaign of monopolist and capitalist interests reflected more clearly than in Berlin. The content of the newspapers licensed by the Western occupying powers is an indescribable flood of lies and puts the lies of the Goebbels propaganda machine in the shade. These deplorable rags will print anything as long as it is directed against the Soviet Union or against the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. There is no means that they will not use as long as the target is the Soviet Union or the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. The reactionary groups are attempting to shift the blame for the existence of two currencies and the difficulties resulting therefrom onto the Soviet occupying power. They are attempting to deny the obvious fact that the B Mark was introduced in Berlin by the Western Powers in order to discredit, to undermine and, ultimately, to ruin the currency and the economy of the Soviet zone of occupation.

This high-handed action by the Western Powers in implementing the separate currency reform for the

Western zones of occupation forced the Soviet occupation authorities to resort to defensive measures in order to prevent a flood of old notes from entering the Soviet occupation zone and coming into Berlin. Economic policy experts have acknowledged that the regulations issued by the Soviet occupation authority were an obviously necessary and completely justified defensive measure.

The working people of Berlin are increasingly seeing through the actual essence of the partition plans drawn up by the British and American imperialists and their German henchmen. They are recognising more and more clearly that, for the Western Powers, the importance of Berlin is merely as a means of hampering democratic development in the entire Soviet occupation zone and in the Soviet sector of the city.

The measures taken by the Western Powers, which obstructed the merger between the Social Democrats and the Communists in Berlin to form a unified workers' party and which led to the recognition of the entrepreneurial employers' associations in West Berlin, are consistently directed towards the dismemberment of Berlin. They are splitting up the administrative authorities, the parties, the unions, the cultural life of the city, the women's and youth movements and even the Berlin police force. There can be no doubt that there is also a systematic agenda to create a West Berlin City Council. The leadership of the right-wing Social Democrats in Berlin is developing a particular strategy here. It is moving the sessions of the Berlin City Council out of the Soviet sector and into the sector of a Western occupying power. It is taking 'unanimous' decisions and sending delegations to the conferences on the division of Germany in Frankfurt and Berlin which do not include any members representing the working population. These 'deputies' are closing their eyes to the fact that Berlin is located in the middle of the Soviet occupation zone. They cherish illusionary hopes that, with the aid of anti-Soviet propaganda, they would be capable of influencing public opinion and incorporating Berlin, or at least its Western part, into the West German state. The right-wing Social Democrats are deaf to the problems of increasing poverty among the people living in the Western sectors of Berlin. They are doing everything possible to prevent Berlin from developing economic relations with the Soviet occupation zone and with the people's democracies. They are generating frenzied chauvinist propaganda and inciting a pogrom against the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

This incitement is turning into overt terror, into disciplinary punishments, arbitrary arrests and blatant perversions of justice. The enemies of the working class have adopted the slogan 'Berlin is worth a war' and are spreading undisguised war propaganda which is already degenerating into bloody acts of provocation against the police force and against the Soviet occupying power. Their blind hatred towards the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement is leading them to support the division of Germany and the dismemberment of Berlin, without any concern for the vital interests of the working people of Berlin. Their next aim is to transform Berlin into a bridgehead for the war against the Soviet Union and the people's democracies.

The Socialist Unity Party of Germany is leading the struggle against the aggressive policies of the imperialists and their lackeys both in Germany and abroad with great rigour. It is only by intensifying this struggle that the German working class will be in a position to unite all the progressive and democratic forces in the country and to take the lead in an offensive aimed at establishing a democratic Germany and ensuring its democratic development.