

'Potsdam, Berlin and the Marshall Plan' from the Luxemburger Wort (26 June 1948)


Caption: The Luxembourg newspaper Luxemburger Wort considers what the Soviet Union hoped to gain by its blockade of access routes into West Berlin on 24 June 1948.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 26.06.1948, n° 178/179; 101e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Potsdam, Berlin und der Marshallplan", p. 1.

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Potsdam, Berlin and the Marshall Plan

What does Russia aim to achieve with its reckless action in Berlin? That is the question which arises again and again in everyone's mind as the situation there becomes more confused by the day. Is it to outmanoeuvre the three Western occupying powers? They do not seem inclined to give the Russians the pleasure of succeeding. The assessment of the situation in the British weekly magazine *The Economist* yesterday was that, ever since the Potsdam Agreement — that selfsame agreement which Russian policy has always taken as a precedent — the whole Russian tactic was clearly concerned just with making the partition of Germany become inevitable. How much more strange it must seem when the Warsaw Communiqué the day before yesterday — again with reference to Potsdam — turned completely against the division of Germany and put the blame for it on the Western Powers. In practice, Germany has already been partitioned for almost three years; today, this enduring situation simply demands what might be termed legal recognition. When, during the summer of 1945, the four occupying powers marched into Berlin and established themselves as the Allied Control Council for the whole of Germany and as the Allied Kommandatura for the city, the whole world looked on eagerly at this new specimen. It was said that Berlin would be not only a symbol of but also a measure of the possibilities for cooperation between the four great powers. Well, today this specimen has been tested. The Americans and the British spoke openly yesterday of reorganising the military government on a three-power basis. The four powers would become three. Russia would definitively be excluded from any further involvement and, with it, the Russian-occupied Eastern Zone of Germany.

This means, however, that the status of Berlin might not be decided for some time. Does the Iron Curtain come down this side of Berlin or go straight through it? That is the question. The British standpoint on this was clearly defined several weeks ago by Foreign Secretary Bevin: Britain will remain in Berlin regardless of any provocation. Yesterday, in the House of Commons, Bevin referred to this statement and said that he did not need to qualify it in any way. Incidentally, in December, the Minister responsible for the British-occupied zone at the time, Frank Pakenham, had already made exactly the same promise to the Mayor of Berlin, Mrs Louise Schröder. That was in the days immediately after the breakdown of the London Foreign Ministers' Conference, when the Berliners were worried about the consequences which might result for them from this startling news from London.

For the United States of America the situation is possibly even clearer. For them, a unilateral withdrawal from Berlin would mean a loss of prestige that would be felt far beyond the frontiers of Germany and would also, in practice, have immediate tangible consequences for them. Trust in the word and the power of America might well have been significantly shaken and the implementation of the Marshall Plan seriously jeopardised. This time, it would not be on account of some incomprehensible vote in the House of Representatives in Washington — something, incidentally, that the Senate could rectify to some extent — but because a majority of the 16 European Marshall Plan countries would no longer wish to take the risk of believing the word of the Washington Administration and, hence, perhaps provoking displeasure elsewhere.

It is, therefore, not just a matter of Berlin and the two million Berliners who live under Western occupation. Besides, Berlin is only the pretext, the tangible symbol. The entire American post-war policy is involved, a policy which is crystallised in the concept of the Marshall Plan.

Russia knows it just as well as the USA. The open antagonism between East and West dates from the moment the Marshall Plan started to take shape in practical terms. At that moment, the inhibitions fell on both sides. At all events, it was still only diplomatic inhibitions that had kept up appearances and preserved good manners. The order for Czechoslovakia to withdraw from the Plan was the first open expression of this confrontation. Ever since then, Russia has done its utmost to undermine the Marshall Plan. In the Warsaw Communiqué the day before yesterday, Russia again let fly against it as an introduction, as it were, to the new historical chapter that is now being written with the build-up of tension in Berlin.

It will not be the last, but simply one more of the many chapters written hitherto about the 'Cold War', which is, after all, still a peace, even though it is a peace of a very special kind.