

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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BERLIN

I have already laid on the table of the House a chronology of events since the end of the War and a collection of documents relating to the period from May, 1959, to the present time.

Copies of a comprehensive collation of papers prepared for the United States Senate and covering the period before May 1959 have been available to Honorable Members in the Library.

How the Berlin Situation came about

History of Western Rights

The two collections are not confined simply to Berlin but relate to the larger question of a post-war settlement in Germany, of which the problem of Berlin forms part.

How did the Berlin situation come about? It is a product of the unconditional surrender of Germany and of the arrangements made in the closing stages of the Second World War for the future occupation of Germany by the four principal victorious belligerent powers. These arrangements were intended to be temporary, and to govern the administration of Germany pending the negotiation of a German peace treaty.

Perhaps we might begin by looking at the situation in early 1945, when the Allied Armies were advancing into Germany. At that time, for military reasons which need not detain us now, the Western strategy was not to race for Berlin, but rather to concentrate on objectives which were judged to be of more importance for the early destruction of the German armies. Sir Winston Churchill, in his war memoirs, tells how he questioned this strategy, because of the political importance of Berlin. But it was adopted; and in consequence, the Western armies were halted along the general line of the Elbe, West of Berlin, and it was there that the meeting with Soviet forces advancing from the East took place. In some cases, Western troops were in fact withdrawn to this general line.

In the agreements worked out in the European Control Commission which gave each of the chief belligerents a zone of occupation in Germany, the zonal boundaries were so drawn as to leave Berlin as a special area within the Soviet zone of occupation, by which it was surrounded. For Berlin itself, arrangements were made for a special regime of joint four-power control. For administrative purposes, the area of Greater Berlin was divided into four sectors, each allotted to one of the four occupying Powers; but Berlin itself was to be administered as a unit by a Four-Power Kommandatura of the United Kingdom, United States, French and Soviet Military Commands.

These early agreements were made in the period from before the surrender of Germany until a time immediately after it. As I have said, they were intended to lay down the general lines of the arrangements that would obtain pending the conclusion of a peace settlement.

In addition to the rights of the Four Major Powers, these agreements also defined certain rights of the other belligerents against Germany. As one of these belligerents Australia was enabled to establish a Military Mission in Berlin, which it still maintains.

The rights of the victors include the right to maintain garrisons in Berlin and the right to free access to the city for this purpose. Such a right is essential to the Western position in Berlin. Without it Western forces cannot be maintained there, and without these forces there would be little physical obstacle to the extension of Communist control over West Berlin.

The manner in which the Western powers and the Soviet Union exercise their rights (notably for the Western Powers this right of access) forms the subject of the various agreements among the four powers. But it is important to stress that the rights themselves, being originally derived from the unconditional surrender of Germany, do not depend for their validity upon the continued acquiescence of any one of the four. Accordingly, the rights of the Western powers in Berlin cannot be lawfully cancelled or reduced by the Soviet Union.

Events leading up to the current crisis

The divisions which after the War opened up between the wartime allies have prevented the effective negotiation of a German peace treaty. However, having consolidated its physical hold on the zone of occupation in Eastern Germany which fell to it on the surrender of Germany, and having installed Communist officials in key positions, the Soviet Government set up in 1949 a Communist regime there, the so-called German Democratic Republic.

Since then it has worked to place its special sector of occupation in Berlin formally under the control of that regime. These developments were accompanied by measures to restrict freedom of movement from East to West Germany. These measures were and are in breach of various four-power agreements, and most strikingly of the Paris Agreement of 1949, which ended the Blockade of 1948-49. It is understandable that in these circumstances the existence of a free West Berlin, enjoying the protection of the Western powers, and with living standards so superior to those of East Berlin, has been an increasing embarrassment to the Russians. They showed early signs of wishing to put an end to this state of affairs, in the imposition of the Berlin blockade in 1948. This attempt was defeated by Allied resolution and the Air Lift and for some years there was little trouble.

But towards the end of 1958 Mr. Khrushchev faced the Western powers with an ultimatum calling for the conclusion of a separate peace treaty with East Germany (which would formally legitimate the Communist regime there and perpetuate the division of Germany) and for the establishment of West Berlin as a so-called "free city".

There followed a Foreign Ministers' Conference held in Geneva in the European summer of 1959. At this Conference, the Western Powers made constructive proposals designed to ensure free elections for the whole of Germany and at the same time to safeguard both Western and Soviet security. Mr. Khrushchev refused to agree, and though he temporarily withdrew his ultimatum there were indications that he would again raise the subject when he judged the time was ripe.

The present crisis was set in train by a Soviet memorandum delivered to United States officials in Vienna at the time of President Kennedy's meeting there with Mr. Khrushchev on 3rd and 4th June, 1961. The text of this memorandum is set out in the paper I have tabled; I shall describe its contents in a moment.

The Attitude of the Two Sides -

The Soviet View

Essentially, the Soviet Union wishes to perpetuate the division of Germany because it knows that a freely elected all German Government would certainly not choose the Communist social, economic and political institutions which the Soviet Union has imposed on the people of East Germany.

The aim of its policy is to strengthen and stabilise the Communist regime in East Germany, to obtain international recognition of it, to dim the beacon light which West Berlin shines into the darkness of East Germany, and to close off the escape route which it offers to the oppressed population of the Eastern zones.

Each year since the war some 200,000 refugees from Communist rule have fled by way of West Berlin. The flight of these refugees has naturally disturbed the rulers of Eastern Germany, because of the consequences both for the economy of the Eastern Zone and also for the prestige of the Communist regime which the Soviet Union supports there. According to official figures, some 2.7 million people have fled from the Eastern zone of Germany since 1949. Some estimates place the total number who have fled since 1946 at nearer four million. Out of a total population of 17 million, either of these is a formidable figure. It shows, more dramatically than anything else could, the misery and oppression which rule in the Eastern zone, in striking contrast to the freedom and prosperity of West Berlin and of Western Germany. It is small wonder that the Communists regard West Berlin as a "cancer" in Mr. Khrushchev's term, and that they wish to seal off the means of escape which it offers.

The "Free City" Proposal

The theme of the Soviet memorandum of June this year and of subsequent speeches by Mr. Khrushchev is that there is an urgent need for a Peace Treaty to be signed with "both German states" (that is the Federal Republic of Germany and the Communist regime in East Germany) by all the powers at war with Germany; that, if the Western powers refuse to sign, the Communist powers will conclude by the end of this year a separate peace treaty with East Germany; and that this treaty will terminate the present basis of Western rights in East Germany and in Berlin and will define the status of West Berlin as a "free city". The Western powers would then be obliged to work out with the East German regime new arrangements for their right of access to Berlin. Mr. Khrushchev has stated that any attempt to maintain Western rights by force would be met by force. But he has also suggested that, after the signature of the peace treaty Western rights of access to Berlin would not necessarily suffer interference. The Warsaw Pact powers have issued a declaration stating that a demilitarised "free city" of West Berlin would itself enjoy free communications. But nothing was promised in this declaration about access for Western troops and clearly, if the Soviet view were accepted this would be a matter for the East German Government to determine.

Negotiations

The Russians have not suggested negotiations except on their own terms. Any conciliatory signs from them have been balanced by statements of their willingness to resort to force if necessary to defend the so-called sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic.

The Western View

The Western attitude towards the Berlin problem has always been that it is, essentially, part of the wider problem of a German settlement - and indeed of a European postwar settlement. They have long considered, as the Soviet Union claims to believe, that a peace settlement in Germany which would make it possible to end the occupation regime in Berlin is overdue. In a series of unsuccessful negotiations with the Soviet Union extending over many years, they have endeavoured to reach agreement on arrangements which, while meeting legitimate Soviet fears about its own security, (fears which, in the light of modern history can be understood) would ensure a stable and peaceful Germany in future.

Together with the Soviet Union the Western powers are committed, by signature of the United Nations Charter, as well as by agreements specifically relating to Germany, to respect the principle of self-determination.

The Western attitude has also been based on the conviction that a divided Germany would prove a source of constant tension in Europe and that the only really permanent solution lies in the reunification of the country by means of free all-German elections followed by the conclusion of a peace treaty with a single German government. Such a Treaty could be combined with various measures constituting a European security system to guard against any revival of German militarism. For the same reason, the Western powers have been opposed to the recognition of a separate puppet state in the Eastern zone of Germany, which would imply acceptance of the permanent division of Germany. They have withheld formal recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as the Eastern frontier of a future Germany on the ground that the determination of Germany's frontiers is properly a matter for an all-German peace treaty.

The Western powers have, however, made it clear in the past that they are prepared to enter into negotiations and they have on various occasions in the past made constructive proposals. At the Foreign Ministers' Conference at Geneva in 1959 they proposed an advance in three phases towards the conclusion of a peace settlement with an All-German Government: first, free elections throughout Berlin to establish a united city there; second, a mixed German committee (from West and Germany) to draft an electoral law and submit it to plebiscite; third, elections for an all-German assembly and the formation of an all-German Government to conclude a peace treaty. They proposed that, concurrently with stages two and three, there should be certain reductions in military strength in central Europe. These proposals were not accepted by the Soviet Union.

The Western Powers will no doubt be prepared to enter into further negotiations. In such negotiations, they would undoubtedly continue to defend and secure the freedom of the inhabitants of West Berlin, the rights of the Western forces to be there, and the rights of access of these forces.

The Importance of Berlin

In the years since the unconditional surrender of Germany a democratic state has been established in Western Germany with a Government deriving from the freely exercised vote of the population. Under the able leadership of Chancellor Adenauer the Federal Republic of Germany, though not a member of the United Nations, has developed into a loyal member of the free world, to the strength of which its economic vitality contributes.

Similarly, the zone of Western occupation in Berlin, West Berlin, has prospered as the result of its inhabitants' efforts and under the protection of the rights that the Western powers enjoy there.

Two and a quarter million people now live in West Berlin. They have steadfastly resisted Communist pressure and the Western Powers have a responsibility for their future, to see that they are not abandoned to Communist oppression. They cannot be allowed to share the fate of the other German millions in the Eastern zone, the nature of which is so eloquently attested by the refugee figures I quoted just now.

The existence of free Berlin is of importance not only to Germans, but to all the peoples of Eastern Europe - and indeed, to people everywhere in the world. To hand the Berliners over to Communism would not only be wrong in itself and a denial of every principle of justice; it would also be a fatal blow to the hopes and confidence of people everywhere in the determination of the Western powers to defend their freedom. What happens in Berlin will affect the balance of power and reputation between the Communists and the West in areas geographically much closer to us than Berlin itself.

Future Prospects

What may we expect to see in the next few weeks and months?

It is likely that there will be a series of measures and counter-measures over Berlin by the Communists and the allied powers. The sealing off of West Berlin by the East German authorities on 13th August, and their subsequent action to draw the ring round Berlin tighter is an example of the action open to the Communists; as is their apparent threat to air communications with Berlin in their latest note to the Western Powers. This note, it may be observed, has been speedily and firmly rebuffed.

Against this background of tension there may well be a new series of negotiations. I will not venture any prediction about their exact timing, location or outcome.

It is possible that at some stage there will be a recourse to the United Nations. Article 107 of the Charter envisages that action in relation to former enemies may be taken "by the Governments having responsibility for such action." It will be recalled however that the problem of Berlin was placed before the United Nations at the time of the Soviet Blockade of Berlin in 1948. A Security Council resolution was vetoed by the Soviet Union, and an appeal by the President of the General Assembly and Secretary-General produced no perceptible result. The lifting of the blockade was the result primarily of the steadfastness of the Western Powers and of their patient negotiations with the Soviet Union. But the United Nations interest may have helped to bring to bear on the U.S.S.R. the force of world opinion, and it was the Soviet United Nations

representative through whom the U.S.S.R. announced its willingness to lift restrictions as soon as a date had been set for a meeting of Foreign Ministers. The possibility of the United Nations playing a useful role in the present crisis can therefore not be excluded.

Conclusion

The Berlin situation is both difficult and dangerous and much patience, firmness and good sense will be needed to avoid its manifest dangers.

These dangers will be recognised by both sides. In particular, I believe that the Communists would do well to realise that, though the Western nations will never be the aggressors, they will if necessary defend their rights.

As to Australia, we shall of course continue to support the Western position in Berlin and the right of Berliners to freedom which we have maintained in the past. I might recall our contribution in 1948 to the Western airlift, in which R.A.A.F. aircrew helped to man the aircraft which beat the blockade.

We are in close touch with other Governments and with our own missions - including those in Bonn and in Berlin itself - about the developing situation; and I shall inform the House from time to time of events as they occur.

Indeed, since this statement was first drafted, a new move has been made by the Soviet Union. It has in substance abandoned the negotiations for a cessation of nuclear weapons tests, first by the dramatic statement that the Soviet would test another bomb; and then, within a matter of hours, the actual carrying out of that and further tests.

In order that this entirely cynical and dangerous action may be fully understood, I should remind the House that on August 28th, 1959, the Soviet Government made the following announcement -

"The Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union have decided not to resume nuclear explosions in the Soviet Union if the Western Powers do not resume the testing of atomic and hydrogen weapons. Only in the event of the resumption by them of the testing of nuclear weapons will the Soviet Union be freed from this self-imposed undertaking."

The Soviet Union has professed to believe, as the Western world certainly does, and as the Commonwealth Prime Ministers publicly declared earlier this year, that the cessation of further nuclear testing would be a step in the direction of disarmament, would serve to reduce tension, and would offer to the people of the world some hope of a reduction in international tension.

Honorable Members will be well aware that the Soviet Union has by every instrument of propaganda, including statements made by Mr. Khrushchev to me in New York at the end of last year, professed a desire for complete disarmament to be arrived at by organised stages.

The first stage clearly would be to hold up the development of new and even more terrible weapons of destruction. The Soviet Union has now, by its action, exhibited its contempt for such an idea. We will no doubt be told that the decision to explode these further bombs is due to the tension resulting from the Berlin crisis. But, as I have pointed out earlier in this statement, this is a crisis manufactured by the Soviet itself.

The immediate effect of this last action by the Soviet Union might well have been to produce an immediate resumption of testing by the Western Powers and an abandonment of hope that so sensible a measure could ever be achieved.

It is therefore of significance that on Sunday last, President Kennedy and Mr. Macmillan made the following statement-

"The President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom propose to Chairman Khrushchev that their three Governments agree, effective immediately, not to conduct nuclear tests which take place in the atmosphere and produce radio-active fallout. Their aim in this proposal is to protect mankind from the increasing hazards from atmospheric pollution and to contribute to the reduction of international tensions.

They urge Chairman Khrushchev to cable his immediate acceptance of this offer and his cessation of further atmospheric tests.

They further urge that their representatives at Geneva meet not later than September 9th to record this agreement and report it to the United Nations. They sincerely hope that the Soviet Union will accept this offer, which remains open for the period indicated.

They point out that, with regard to atmospheric testing, the United States and the United Kingdom are prepared to rely upon existing means of detection, which they believe to be adequate, and are not suggesting additional controls. But they reaffirm their serious desire to conclude a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, applicable to other forms of testing as well, and regret that the Soviet Government has blocked such an agreement."

The reply which will presumably be made to this statement will be a complete test of the good faith and pacific intentions of the Communists.

On Tuesday, 5th September, on the day that the third Soviet nuclear explosion was announced, President Kennedy, after careful thought and a thorough review of all the factors involved, issued a statement ordering "the resumption of nuclear tests in the laboratory and underground, with no fall-out". It must be emphasised that this announcement did not qualify in any way the Western offer to make an agreement. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, which clearly show that the Soviet has embarked on a series of tests which, it must be presumed, will materially increase Soviet nuclear weapons capability, the steps taken by President Kennedy are, in his own words, those "which prudent men find essential".

I will reserve further comments on this subject till next week when a further statement to the House may be appropriate.
