The Origins and Effects of the Berlin Blockade

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General Information

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Description

This anti-Soviet film produced by NATO Information Services describes how Russia tried to strangle the city of Berlin. An airlift by the Western powers kept vital supplies going into the besieged city.

Keywords

Berlin Airlift, Blockade, Cold War, Soviet Union, Russia, Communism, Police, Paramilitary Units, Joseph Stalin, Federal Republic Of Germany, German Democratic Republic, Allies, Great Britain, France, Mayor Ernst Reuter, Iron Curtain, Food Shortages, Kommandatura

Citation

MLA
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NARRATOR: In the eastern sector of Berlin, Communist power was fully established. Party bosses, party youth, party rallies, permeated with all the hysteria previously associated with the Nazis. By organizing special police and paramilitary units, the Soviets were illegally rearming East Germany. In the world council of the United Nations, the war-weary were endeavoring to establish a lasting peace. But these were the days of Stalinist expansion. And so by repeated refusals to cooperate except on their own terms, the Soviet delegates sabotaged any progress towards real stability. On the 23rd of June 1948, West Berlin introduced monetary reform, without which economic recovery would have been impossible. New notes for old, the currency was revalued. For the Russians their disagreement gave them the excuse for action. West Berlin they could not touch, but they could and did interfere with the lifelines on which West Berlin depended. The roads, the railways, the canals… these were West Berlin’s vital arteries. So stop the trains, close the roads, bar the canals and cut the power. West Berlin was a hundred miles deep in the Soviet zone of Germany. This was to be the way to force the western allies to quit Berlin.

Thus two million people were isolated to be faced with the prospect of hunger, cold, unemployment and misery. No way in, no way out, the only element still open, the air above. It started as a trickle, as a temporary measure. Plane after plane, destination: the airfields of West Berlin; the vital necessities, food, raw materials, even coal, brought in by air, until the United States, Great Britain and France were embarked upon the biggest air transport operation history has ever seen. Round the clock, plane after plane, even flying boats to set down on West Berlin’s lakes. In the beleaguered city, power shortage enforced skeleton transport services; food shortage necessitated careful distribution and queues, but rather short measure than surrender. As each night fell the roar of aero engines continued. Dependant for the most on power from the eastern sector, West Berlin was plunged each night into a blackout. And while West Berliners felt their way through the gloom, still the airlift continued through the hours of darkness. When West Berliner’s rose each dawn, it was again to the roar of planes.

But because of those planes there was bread in the shops, and this was to be the patent for many a hard
month ahead. It was to be expected that the Soviets would not take the airlift without some reaction. Across the eastern boundary the communists staged demonstrations against what they called this Western interference with Berlin affairs. These in turn led to riots that forced the non-communist councilors to abandon the Berlin town hall, which lay in the eastern sector. But in the western sectors unity against the blockade was overwhelming, symbolized by the leadership of Ernst Reuter. Any joint administration of Berlin as a whole had already ceased to exist, a fact emphasized by the abandonment by the Russians of the allied Kommandatura. City government for greater Berlin was impossible, since the Western councilors had been driven from the east, so Reuter and the non-communists moved into new quarters in the west. And at their meetings, empty chairs stood witness to the fact that the East Berliners were denied the right to choose their representatives freely. For West Berlin it had been a tough winter.

On the airfields, fog, mist, and freezing cold, yet in spite of the conditions the airlift had carried on--in spite of conditions and the losses. By means of the airlift, West Berlin had been kept alive, but only at a cost, all the sufferings of war in the midst of peace. But there could be no turning back now. If the Russians thought that the city could not be supplied indefinitely by air, they were going to be proved very wrong. For the airlift: all possible reinforcements, more planes, improved runways, greater facilities. And so what had begun as makeshift became routine. Food and supplies month in and month out, soon it became clear that the west had not only won a victory against logistics, but also a model victory, which drew the admiration of the world. Thanks to the crews of the airlift, victory through determination to defend the right.