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Notes on the Conversation of Comrade N.S. Khrushchev with Comrade W. Ulbricht on 1 August 1961

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Summary:

Transcription of a meeting in Moscow between Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and East German leader Walter Ulbricht on August 1, 1961. They discuss plans to close the border between East and West Berlin. The document shows Khrushchev’s and Ulbricht’s deliberations about the reasons for sealing the border in Berlin, the timing for sealing the border and some of the difficulties they expected to arise therefrom.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

- English Translation

Notes on the Conversation of Comrade N.S. Khrushchev with Comrade **W. Ulbricht** on 1 August 1961

N. S. Khrushchev: I have read your speech [for the upcoming meeting of the Warsaw Pact leaders in Moscow on Aug. 3-5] and have no objections. I like your speech; it puts forth the right questions.

Maybe a small comment, less a comment than an opinion about one particular formulation. One can say it one way or another way. You put forth good arguments in your speech, better than our foreign ministry delivers. I will use your material for my speech [at the Warsaw Pact meeting], I will borrow from parts of it. Your speech has good facts. I asked our foreign ministry to provide me such facts, but so far they haven't done this. Thank you for doing this.

My comment concerns page 14. There you raise the question of what to do, saying, We assume that the Soviet regime will propose negotiations to the Western Powers. But we already made such a proposal two years ago, after 1958. Therefore you can't say will propose. Maybe we still will propose something, but in reality we have already done this, with the publication of our draft peace treaty.

Otherwise, everything is okay in the speech.

W. Ulbricht: I would like to direct your attention to the part about economic issues. I actually wanted to formulate this part more sharply, meaning, our dependence on West Germany, and I wanted to clarify the fact that without help from the socialist countries, nothing will work. This of course concerns not only the economic situation. It would be good if the people's democracies [i.e., the East European allies] would make political statements on this issue, but it is also important that they participate economically on this issue. [i.e., in case the West launches a boycott against the GDR in response to closing the border, Ulbricht wants economic aid from his socialist allies.]

N. S. Khrushchev: I support you. Of course we need to discuss all of the issues more concretely and create a corresponding commission. But I have done a bit on this already. When you raised this issue, I called Comrade [Antonin] Novotny [the Czechoslovak CP leader]. When you put forward your view to him during your stay in Czechoslovakia, Comrade Novotny didn't respond fully correctly. Of course each has Republic [East European socialist state] its own needs and I am not criticizing him, but he wasn't at the time ready to sacrifice himself [to help the GDR].

I said to him: Whether Comrade Ulbricht is right or not, we will hear him out; in any case, he can't get out of the problem without help. So we can't be prepared to allow Comrade Ulbricht to be rebuffed; instead we must help him. Comrade Novotny told me that they are prepared for this issue and will come [to Moscow for the WTO meeting] with a proposal to help you.

The same goes for Poland. Our Comrade Wladyslaw [Gomulka, the Polish CP leader] is a good comrade when it comes to taking [i.e., he takes much more from us than he gives to us]. He said to me: the Germans live better than we do. I agreed with him, but said: they must be helped. We will of course complain about him [Ulbricht] not to his face, but behind his back, as happens among good friends, but we will give him help.

I must ask you maybe I am just not informed. I have heard you have problems with vegetables, that you don't have enough hay and that Poland must help you.

W. Ulbricht: Yes.

N. S. Khrushchev: That isn't good. This raises the question of whether this isn't due to the overly hasty collectivization. Internally, that's exactly how the Poles explain the situation. They are of course great at speaking about this, since they themselves aren't doing anything in this area, but about you they said that you are wrong. I understand that in the first years of collectivization, this

can result in a clear reduction in production. But now it's too late to talk about this, since you have already implemented it [collectivization].

Germans having no vegetables! This is very bad. And regarding milk if one takes your model plants, the ones with Comrade Strube or Pezzoni,[1] you could even fill up everything with milk. I mean you must get control of things. It's not entirely clear to me what the problem is. I often can't believe the explanations people give me. There is much subjective [opinion] in it all.

On another issue. Many engineers have fled the GDR. You should consider shouldn't we send you perhaps some engineers from the Soviet Union? They won't run away. But you should know yourself whether this would create political difficulties from a national perspective. Decide this among yourselves. But something must be done.

I have asked our ambassador to explain to you my thoughts that we should use the current tensions with the West and place an iron ring around Berlin. This will be easy to explain: we are threatened with war[2] and we don't want spies sent into our midst. The Germans will understand this explanation. Then you can act in the interests of the Warsaw Pact and not just in your own interests. I think our troops should lay down the ring, but your troops should control it. First, this must occur before the conclusion of a peace treaty. It would be a means of pressure and will show that we take the problem seriously. If we are forced into war, then there will be war. Second, it will help you, since it will reduce the refugee exodus.

We must also come to a joint agreement on demonstrative measures of strengthening our military forces. I have received a report from our General Staff, and we will do everything necessary. Our tanks will dig in behind your soldiers on the border with the FRG. We will do this secretly so that the West will notice it. This isn't bad. Maybe we will add a few divisions in the GDR. I told Kennedy's advisor [Khrushchev met with John J. McCloy, Kennedy's advisor on disarmament, on July 26-27 in the Crimea]: Against each one of your divisions we have two; and when you mobilize yours, we will do the same.

Our comrades in the military thought that perhaps something should be done by the Germans too. Perhaps it would be good to undertake an increase in your divisions. But I said that we must ask Comrade Ulbricht how the Germans would respond to this. Under the circumstances, this could lead to negative reactions, and these measures would have no decisive significance as a demonstration [of East German military power].

These are the thoughts I wanted to lay out for you.

W. Ulbricht: I will begin with an explanation of our economic situation. For two months there have been no potatoes to buy in the GDR. This is very bad. The reason is that we had a very bad harvest last year and this year the weather was humid, with the result that the potatoes spoiled on the clamps. It has absolutely nothing to do with collectivization.

Otherwise, the use of butter is increasing in the GDR, and we don't have enough butter. The planned deliveries of milk were not fulfilled in half of the districts in the GDR. We had to order that butter be given out with potato ration cards since we still have potato ration cards.

All of this produced a hostile mood among the people. This is seen for example in the events in Hennigsdorf [which are described further below]. With this we can see that the use of butter hasn't decreased, but instead has remained at the previous level. We only just introduced rationing.

In addition, we have forbidden the making of cream out of milk, which is also not liked by many people.

In this time of the year, for vegetables we usually have only sauerkraut and sour cucumbers on the market. But in this year, we never had potatoes.

You are searching for an apology from us when you say that we could pull back on collectivization. Under our circumstances, this thesis of pulling back doesn't work. During and after the process of collectivization, we experienced an increase in agricultural production.

N. S. Khrushchev: I said this, because I have read too many West German reports. That is [West German chancellor Konrad] Adenauer's voice.

W. Ulbricht: Some of what they say is true, but in general the issue is more complicated.

How does it look in the GDR? Some of the new collectivized farms are progressing only slowly toward joint work, although they are fulfilling the plan in the context of individual farming. Some big farmers say to us: We will join the collective farm, but we don't want to work there. These have privately about eight cows. So in the context of the village, the plan is fulfilled.

N. S. Khrushchev: These are the German collective farms!

W. Ulbricht: What is the issue? The party organizations didn't give enough support to the Type 1 collective farms.[3] The reason is that the party workers don't know enough about agriculture to persuade the mid-level farmers. So what can they advise the farmers? Now we are doing it differently. We are delegating workers from strong collective farms to go to the weak ones. That helps.

But there are also political aspects of the issue. Every time that international negotiations are approaching, the farmers ask: What will come from these? Maybe a middle line between Ulbricht and Adenauer? In this connection, some of the farmers left the collective farm. When we asked them what was going on, they answered: We are continuing to work, but not in the collective farm. We will wait until the fall. That is a hedge on the part of the farmers.

N. S. Khrushchev: You have sly farmers. I thought only we had them.

W. Ulbricht: In addition, among the farmers there are some Nazi elements, the former Farmer Leaders (Bauernführer). Thus, for example at a meeting in Plauen district, where our representatives were present, a large-scale farmer said he supported getting back the Sudetenland [the part of Czechoslovakia that was taken over by Nazi Germany in 1938-39 and then lost by Germany at the end of World War II]. Our comrades told him that that would mean war. To this he responded: Then I will fight together with [Hans-Christoph] Seebohm for this he is a revanchist provisional minister from West Germany [he was Adenauer's Minister for Transportation and also the spokesman for Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft]. That's how people speak there.

But even this farmer joined the collective farm. He of course must stand trial as a war-monger and be resettled somewhere else. I mean every discussion has its limits. I told the Minister of Justice to take care of this. But we have no Siberia. There such people would be sent right to the labor camp.

On the issue of food supplies. In winter we had very little fodder, since in the last year we had a bad harvest. Some of the livestock died. But this wasn't the fault of the farmers. We expect a similar situation this year. Since we have wet and cold weather, the corn is only 50 centimeters tall, and the potatoes have spoiled. So as fodder we have neither corn nor potatoes. If the socialist countries don't help us with fodder, we won't be able to maintain the level of production of milk.

This means, there will be a sharpening of the political struggle in the GDR, which expresses itself in losses regarding the cooperatives (which we will have completed) and also the scarcity of fodder.

N. S. Khrushchev: I think the enemy is clearly at work here.

W. Ulbricht: This is the church.

N. S. Khrushchev: Let's take the issue of the spoiled potatoes in their clamps. But the Germans are masters in the storage of potatoes. So this is definitely not a question of the weather, but of bad work or sabotage.

W. Ulbricht: Of course there are saboteurs. But one must consider that our potatoes are given artificial fertilizer, which makes them less resistant against spoiling.

N. S. Khrushchev: From my Moscow experience, I would like to introduce corn. When I came from Ukraine to Moscow in 1950, the weather here was very cold and rainy. At the time I brought my bodyguards with me from Ukraine, and the comrades told me that the son of a co-worker had even asked his mother whether there ever is summer in Moscow. Even in that year, my corn grew five meters high. It all depends on how you take care of it.

W. Ulbricht: But it doesn't grow in the GDR.

N. S. Khrushchev: I can't agree with you on this. I am an expert on corn, and you, on the contrary, I do not accept as such an expert.

I have yet another question. I read original reports of Western secret services in which they believe the conditions are ripe for an uprising in the GDR. Through their channels, they tell people not to push all the way for an uprising, since that won't bring anything good. They say: We can't help you, and the Russians will flatten everything with tanks. So they advise waiting until the conditions are right.

Is this really true? I don't really know; I am just relying on western reports.

W. Ulbricht: We have information the Bonn government is preparing the conditions for an uprising that is supposed to take place in fall 1961 step by step through recruitment and organizing opposition. We see the methods of the enemy's work: The churches are organizing the withdrawal of the farmers from the cooperatives, although without great success. There are also acts of sabotage. Is this all real? An uprising is not realistic. But it is possible that there will be some actions which could cause us great damage internationally.

Thus, for example in a factory in Henningsdorf near Potsdam, that previously belonged to AEG [Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft, General Electric Company], hostile engineers organized a signed petition. They made the demand of not signing a peace treaty, since this would deepen the division of Germany. They didn't directly say that they support Adenauer, but they proposed carrying out free elections and the creation of a government that would lead Germany. The struggle is carried out this way in a series of plants. When we carried out house searches of these people, it was proven that one of them is an American agent and four are former fascists. So the affair actually wasn't done by the [West German] SPD's Eastern Office, but by American agents.

In this district, the number of sabotage acts increased in agricultural production cooperatives, [and] there was malicious slaughtering [of livestock]. The district leadership of the party didn't work in this plant, so hostile elements, particularly re-settlers from West Germany, could slip in there. Among the re-settlers, there are many agents [spies]. If they had been successful in organizing a demonstration in Henningsdorf, the farmers would have supported them. There are many other districts where the enemy carries out such actions. We are working on this now; nothing bad will happen.

N. S. Khrushchev: Did these people re-settle in the GDR a long time ago?

W. Ulbricht: Two or three years ago.

N. S. Khrushchev: Why?

W. Ulbricht: They say that they didn't like West Germany. Some of them are primitive people who are being used by the enemy.

N. S. Khrushchev: Maybe it would be better to push them back to West Germany instead of having them sit in prison?

W. Ulbricht: I have also addressed this issue. The villagers wanted to chase the farmers I spoke of in Plauen to West Germany. But we can't do this, since our task is to persuade.

I would like to deal with several general issues. We have problems with the intelligentsia for political and economic reasons. The political reasons are that these people believe there is a third way. They think that a peace treaty would mean that the division of Germany would remain, and they ask whether there isn't another way.

The economic reasons are that our internal difficulties have increased, since the figures for the Seven-Year-Plan have been declared invalid. Our State Planning Commission is now working on reducing these numbers. This has a disruptive effect on broad circles of the population. Representative of the intelligentsia say that with such a reduction of the plan, we can't achieve our goals. Since we have pulled back from the declared main economic task of surpassing West Germany in per-capital consumption and worker's productivity, the people are working without any economic inspiration. As long as things stay this way, we will have difficulties, not only due to scarcities of merchandise.

In addition, the buying power of the population in the GDR currently surpasses the availability of goods in the stores by 2 billion marks. The population has demands that cannot be satisfied. With an open border, we cannot solve the problem of the buying power surplus vis--vis the availability of goods, since we must freeze wages and sometimes raise prices. We have already started freezing wages, but we can't explain it to the people. We aren't saying why we have reduced the plan figures, but every engineer can see it. We have reduced investments by two billion. The intelligentsia feels this and expresses displeasure.

In addition to West Germany's hostile acts, there are also a series of issues that can't be resolved with the open border. We are experiencing great losses due to the Grenzgnger [border-crossers] (people who live in one part of Berlin and work in the other) and people who have fled. Therefore we can't fulfill some of our tasks.

You must consider that in the last three years, in the interests of the Seven-Year-Plan, we have taken what was possible out of our economy. For this, some of the local industry, which previously worked for the internal market, was reoriented to exports. When I examined the work of our foreign trade in the last year, I realized that representatives were sent from there to conclude contracts with artisans, and everything went into exports. Through this, the provision of services for our population was reduced. Long lines before stores developed, which led to dissatisfaction. I forbade this, since this would bring the entire population against us.

N. S. Khrushchev: Everything was fine when I participated in your [5th] party congress two (sic) years ago [in July 1958]. So what has happened? You even wanted to surpass the FRG by 1961/62.

N. S. Ulbricht: We didn't put the raw materials in our plans, that means, the plans weren't balanced. We had to import steel and other goods and to export consumer goods in exchange. I have already reprimanded the State Planning Commission for this.

N. S. Khrushchev: But what happened? The GDR can't pay for raw materials? But no one would give these away for nothing.

W. Ulbricht: Yes, no one can do this. I will give you an example: We bought shoes in West Germany for 100 million [valuta marks] and now we have a deficit in our accounts. They warned us that if we can't pay by August 15, they will stop the supplies.

In preparing the plan, we counted on help from the people's democracies. We sold modern metallurgical equipment to the Czechs, and they were supposed to send us 8000 tons of steel in 1960 according to the contract. But they didn't do this. The Poles and Bulgarians are the same way.

The Bulgarians now owe us 60 million; that means that we are giving them a credit. We gave the Poles a credit for 450 million so they would supply us with hard coal, for which we even paid more than the world market price. And in return they got from us equipment, but we didn't receive steel from them. In order to fulfill our obligations to these countries, we are forced to buy for hard currency in West Germany what we lack in material and they are now our debtors.

Things are sometimes done similarly with the Soviet Union, but you give us credit.

N. S. Khrushchev: Do you also conclude such disadvantageous contracts with us?

W. Ulbricht: I ask you not to use these facts, since they make it clear that sometimes we can't get the necessary equipment in the socialist camp. But I can give you the following example: We built a ship for you and had to pay 20,000 [valuta marks] for technology in West Germany. Your foreign trade office made it a condition that the ship's engine had to come from West Germany, although they should have known that we didn't necessarily have to buy it in the West, but that it could be produced just as well in the socialist camp.

I don't mean this example as a criticism, since at least you are helping us.

There is no cooperation among the socialist countries, and the question won't be resolved of who can make new machines based on Western designs. For example, the Romanians bought from the Americans a machine for drying plastic. (Kunststofftrocknung) If we had four such machines, then we could double the production of the corresponding plastic. But COMECON (Council on Mutual Economic Aid, the socialist economic community) doesn't deal with this issue and doesn't duplicate the designs of such new machines. Therefore, we are now fighting with the Romanians so that they will have the designs copied for us.

Currently everyone is working for himself alone, with the result that we are falling into great dependence on the West. COMECON must get control of this and work as you do with the coordinating committee you created for economic research.

N. S. Khrushchev: So if we sign the peace treaty, the first step of the West will be an embargo. Then what will we do?

W. Ulbricht: That is why I am raising this issue.

N. S. Khrushchev: This comes a bit late. You got involved with relations with the West Germans, and now you are in such a bad situation. We also have trade with the West Germans, but if they declare an embargo, then to hell with them we will get some plants running two years later. I have a secret report on how they are planning this. They can go ahead. Krupp [the West German steel manufacturer] will have more disadvantages from an embargo than we will, since then we will stop paying.

W. Ulbricht: Krupp is already now looking into the possibility of [continuing] trade [with us] via neutral countries [in case of a West German embargo].

N. S. Khrushchev: Krupp wants to trade with us. They have even secretly asked us to complain

about Krupp more loudly, since otherwise the Americans will put pressure on them.

W. Ulbricht: In order to change the mood in the GDR, we have to explain the economic situation to the population and show the population an economic future that it doesn't now see.

N. S. Khrushchev: I have my own view on these issues, and you still haven't answered me. Your production is just a small percentage of the volume of our production. Maybe your entire productive output corresponds just to the growth in our production. If this wasn't used until now, then it must be because of sloppiness in our economy. For this we are guilty and the Germans as well. We are building new factories, and yours aren't fully utilized.

I know about the laws of production and I know that when engineers have become used to particular dealings, then they don't want to change them and also don't want to change the assortment of goods.

W. Ulbricht: We have already achieved this. This question no longer exists.

N. S. Khrushchev: But this is the main thing. For example, we order ships from you. In the treaty, it is agreed what you have to do and we have to do. You are obligated to buy the ship engine in England or the FRG. But you don't do this.

W. Ulbricht: So I guess that means that I am anti-Soviet.

N. S. Khrushchev: Stop it! We are actually building cruisers and atomic submarines that are faster and better than the American ones. We know how to do it. Clearly your people said they could do it. After all, we have paid for it and don't want to pay for nothing. The fact that things are this way, I blame more on the GDR, since whom else should I blame for it?

W. Ulbricht: According the Seven-Year-Plan, we forecast a yearly production increase of nine percent. According to the new plan for 1962, the growth will only be five percent. But we will miss the four percent.

N. S. Khrushchev: I don't understand this. We have been talking about this issue for three years. Maybe the translator is translating poorly?

W. Ulbricht: We support changing our economy to be completely dependent on raw material supplies from the socialist camp. But for the next year, we will be short 153,000 tons of steel. Even in negotiations with the Soviet Union, this amount was not addressed. So we have to buy it from West Germany. For special steel plates, we are one hundred percent dependent on them.

N. S. Khrushchev: We also have to buy several types of steel.

W. Ulbricht: But your comrades said that you don't have this type of steel.

N. S. Khrushchev: That is correct. So we make other machines. You don't produce the machines from this steel for the GDR. So don't make them anymore.

W. Ulbricht: You, for example, supply us with rust-free steel only for orders from the Soviet Union.

N. S. Khrushchev: That is correct, since we don't have enough of this steel.

W. Ulbricht: But Poland and Czechoslovakia have ordered from us chemical equipment made from the same steel, and we have to buy it in the FRG.

N. S. Khrushchev: I don't understand this. I would never sign such a treaty which isn't commercially advantageous to me.

I will give you an example. When we made the Seven-Year-Plan and said that we were ready to accept credits, very many offered us credit from the West. At the time, I said that we must examine our capacities to pay back the credits and that we didn't want to bite off more than we could chew. They offered us supply credits for five years. We answered okay, but not for five, but for seven years. If you don't want it, then forget it.

What has happened here? We order ships from you, and you buy the engines in England or the FRG. If that is disadvantageous for you, then don't accept such orders. Look for others that don't force you to become dependent on the West.

At the beginning, things were going well for you, trade with West Germany developed and that was useful for you. But what do they say [?]: as long as it's not lightening, the farmer doesn't cross himself. Adenauer gave you a lesson last year, and only then did you begin to scratch yourself in a particular place. [erst da habt Ihr angefangen, euch an einer bestimmten Stelle zu kratzen].

Can we really not find a way out of this situation? America doesn't sell us anything, and we are fine with that. That's how it was also with England and the FRG when they didn't engage in any trade with us. How is that we can't now build socialism without Adenauer and [French President Charles] de Gaulle? We should damn well get rid of them. [Die sollten wir zum Teufel jagen.]

We bought fishing vessels from Adenauer and two chemical plants from Krupp. When the Italians decided to trade with us, they proposed that we should buy more from them than they from us. But we didn't agree. It was the same thing with the British. They asked us what they should buy from us. We answered: Figure that out yourselves. If you don't find anything to buy from us, then we also won't buy from you. That got them thinking and they thought: we buy oil from America, but the [Americans] don't buy anything from us. So we should instead buy oil from the Russians, and in exchange sell them our goods.

I say to the capitalists: You each have your own private country. If you need oil, then buy ours, and we will obtain your goods. They refer to their laws. And we answer that we also have laws and they can't speak to us differently.

We signed a good trade treaty with the Italians. Today I read a conversation between our ambassador and the oil magnate Matteo. He is a supporter of trade with us and says that now they can buy more Soviet oil.

You are giving in way too much to Adenauer and [British Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan. Why can't we supply you with raw materials? That is a defect in our relations.

Regarding the Czech and Poles, that is your fault. Regardless of friendship, business is business. Only the Albanians are capable of saying: give to us or we won't be your friends. They should go fleece someone else

I have spoken all about this in our CC (Central Committee), but no one has taken it seriously.

Let's talk about this at the level of [First] Secretaries [at the Warsaw Pact meeting]. The Poles will of course jump. If they don't give you anything, then you also don't need to help them, you can't give them credits.

We will help you with steel. Regarding special steel, we ourselves have to buy this. But let's buy it together so that we don't have to pay later with gold for you. Otherwise, you are like the Bulgarians, who first buy everything without us and then get into a very tight spot and find themselves facing bankruptcy. We had to pay for them, but things can't work like this.

W. Ulbricht: Okay.

N. S. Khrushchev: Let's talk with Gosplan about increasing your growth by nine percent. Maybe the Poles will give you something. It will be harder for the Czechs, since many of their goods are exported.

W. Ulbricht: The Czechs are in a better position in some ways with steel than the USSR is.

N. S. Khrushchev: In colonial goods, we need to see what they pay you with gold. We could pay for it in goods now. We have agreed with [Ghanaian leader Kwame] Nkrumah that we will pay for half of their goods with gold and the other half with goods.

W. Ulbricht: We will discuss this with Gosplan.

N. S. Khrushchev: With regard to industrial goods, don't take on any obligation if you can't deliver. If you absolutely must buy something from the West, then ask for compensation from us and don't get into a tight spot.

W. Ulbricht: We have made serious mistakes in foreign trade. We tried to change this, but it was difficult since Heinrich Rau [who was Minister for Foreign Trade and Inner-German Trade until he died in March 1961] had his individualism. Now we will change this. I have said; we have no gifts to distribute. But it will take some time until order is established.

N. S. Khrushchev: You will need about two years. You have come to this rather late. You need to think about the issues that arose at your last party congress. These are issues we are also faced with. We must surpass West Germany. If you close the borders, the difficulties won't disappear.

W. Ulbricht: On the contrary, a blockade will be imposed.

N. S. Khrushchev: I don't mean the conclusion of a peace treaty, but the measures which will now be taken around Berlin [i.e., sealing the border]. Our ambassador has told me that you lack laborers. We can give you some.

W. Ulbricht: In the Politburo, we have resolved to ask for laborers from Bulgaria and Poland.

N. S. Khrushchev: We could also give you some laborers--young people, young party members. We have surplus labor. Don't listen to the Voice of America [radio station] that says we are lacking in laborers.

W. Ulbricht: I just couldn't bring myself to ask you for this.

N. S. Khrushchev: Let's think about this, how we could explain it best to the population.

W. Ulbricht: As socialist help for the GDR!

N. S. Khrushchev: Maybe it would be better if we called it a youth exchange, as Fidel [Castro] has proposed. In this exchange, you give us one, and we give you one hundred. That's how it's done with Fidel. All things considered, he was upset that we sent too few to Cuba, but we told him that at this stage we didn't need to send more. If the Cubans want to come to us, then they should come.

This is also how we can resolve the problem with engineers. Previously the Germans sent us engineers, and we learned from them. Now we send you our engineers, but not to teach you, but to help you.

Why are you quiet? Would you rather not talk about this?

W. Ulbricht: No, I want to think it all through first.

Now on closing the border. When is the best time? What will we do about this?

When the Church Congress took place in West Berlin from July 19-23

N. S. Khrushchev: Do you know that the Americans criticized Adenauer about that, since they were afraid of the situation coming to a head? This activity [the Church Congress] was Adenauer's work [i.e., sponsoring a federal West German event in West Berlin, which was not legally a part of the FRG].

W. Ulbricht: Adenauer suffered a defeat, since we got the opportunity to separate our churches from the West German churches. We took countermeasures and implemented control posts over trips to Berlin, which still stand 50 kilometers from the city border. In addition, we also implemented control over the ring [around Berlin].

The Politburo decided that the Berlin Senate will make a resolution this week about registering all border crossers. We will register them all and then process them. Practically, this won't bring us much, but it will prepare people for the closing of the border and will prepare the further measures.

N. S. Khrushchev: How many people are we talking about?

W. Ulbricht: Officially it is 75,000 in Berlin, but really it is more.

In this week, Friedrich Ebert [the SED party leader of Berlin] will appeal to the people of the GDR with the request that they put off trips to Berlin until there is a normalization of the situation. At the same time, bus traffic to Berlin will be stopped.

But the people will ask why they can't travel to their own capital. We will have to explain this.

N. S. Khrushchev: This can't be allowed; they have to have the possibility of traveling to their capital.

W. Ulbricht: Technically we could prepare this in two weeks.

N. S. Khrushchev: Implement it when you want, we can be ready at any time.

W. Ulbricht: Aren't you afraid of any effects on the West German elections which could help Adenauer and [West Berlin Mayor Willy] Brandt?

N. S. Khrushchev: I think Adenauer will win. We aren't playing political games here. They are both scoundrels. Brandt is worse than Adenauer. Here we leave it totally to you.

W. Ulbricht: Anything can be expected from Brandt, since he has nothing to lose.

N. S. Khrushchev: I think Adenauer will behave differently after the elections. I know from secret documents that the Western Powers will make their proposals only after the elections in the FRG. If they wanted to present us with harsh conditions, then it would have been more advantageous for them to do this before the elections, in order to help the chancellor [Adenauer]. But then they would have created the path for talks with us.

They want to bring forward their proposals only after the elections so they can formulate them more mildly.[4] [Hans] Kroll [the West German ambassador to Moscow] suggested this to me. He said the elections are only idle talk. He is a smart man. He meanders a bit, since people say he's a representative of a soft line. So sometimes he has to show he's tough.

W. Ulbricht: We will discuss these measures in the Politburo.

N. S. Khrushchev: When is the most advantageous time for you [to close the border]?

W. Ulbricht: When I return from Moscow, we will carry out economic consultations, since West Germany will stop delivering key goods as an answer to the measures at the border.

N. S. Khrushchev: That is possible.

W. Ulbricht: Therefore we must explain to the state bureaucracy how we envisage our future economic policy. We will explain that since we have not yet won the competition with West Germany, we have new economic tasks. Making our economy safe from Western interference is one of these tasks.

N. S. Khrushchev: The measures should not be explained to your people in this way. Such an explanation would be advantageous to Adenauer, since it means that you can't compete with West Germany. The border closure must be explained politically, and the economic consequences are then to be derived from this.

W. Ulbricht: You didn't understand me correctly, of course the measures are to be explained politically.

N. S. Khrushchev: We must publish a joint communique in which the GDR is asked to close the border in the interest of the socialist countries. Then you will be doing it at our request. That is not an internal, not an economic, but a large common political matter.

W. Ulbricht: We agree with explaining the issue from the perspective of high politics. But we must prepare economic steps. Before carrying through these measures [of closing the border], I must explain how our economic policy will look so that everyone will know. On the political side, we have created the peace plan which has been a great success.

N. S. Khrushchev: I have another opinion on this. Before instituting the new border regime, you shouldn't explain anything, since this would only increase the refugee exodus could lead to lots of traffic [with people trying to get out while they still can]. We need to do it as we did with the currency exchange.^[5] We will give you one, two weeks so that you can prepare economically. Then convene the parliament and announce the following communique: As of tomorrow guards will be posted and it will be forbidden to go through the border. Anyone who wants to pass through can only do so with permission from the designated GDR authorities. An order will be carried out and no one will be allowed into Berlin [meaning from the surrounding East German territory into Berlin] or through the border of Berlin with the West [meaning the East-West Berlin border].

If the matter was presented in such a way now, then the bourgeois citizens in this regard Russians and Germans are the same would try to leave. On the streets leading to Berlin, long lines of traffic could then develop, which would be a certain demonstration.

W. Ulbricht: This point is correct.

N. S. Khrushchev: Comrade [Mikhail] Pervukhin [the Soviet Ambassador to East Berlin] told me that we must take control of the outer border of Berlin [the border of the surrounding East German countryside with Berlin].

W. Ulbricht: This is the usual view of the foreign ministry which proceeds from the Four-Power status of the city.

N. S. Khrushchev: Comrade Pervukhin said: If the people really do take off for West Berlin, then they won't be able to get out of there. But this is unthinkable, since then there would develop in West Berlin a huge [refugee] camp that they [the West Berliners] would show the tourists.

W. Ulbricht: Yes, since the border goes within Berlin.

N. S. Khrushchev: I would just establish control in Berlin, not outside around it.

W. Ulbricht: At the beginning, we need control on the outer line, so that certain people don't already now start gathering in Berlin. The outer line around Berlin exists due to the Four-Power status, but we are of the view that the border goes within Berlin. Above all, it must happen quickly.

N. S. Khrushchev: If the border is closed, the Americans and West Germans will be satisfied. [U.S.] Ambassador [Llewellyn] Thompson told me that the exodus causes problems for the West Germans.[6]

So, when you establish the border posts, all will be satisfied. And in addition, they will then feel your power.

W. Ulbricht: Yes, then we will achieve a stabilization [of the situation].

N. S. Khrushchev: I have a technical question. How will the border control be realized on streets in which one side is in the GDR and the other is in West Berlin?

W. Ulbricht: We have a specific plan. In houses with exits into West Berlin, they will be walled up. In other places, barbed wire barriers will be erected. The barbed wire has already been delivered. It can all happen very quickly. It will be harder with transportation routes. We will reconstruct the train platforms of the city trains (S-bahn) and underground trains (U-bahn) that go to West Berlin.

N. S. Khrushchev: Who will then get off the trains there?

W. Ulbricht: The part of the population that has permission to travel. For example, there are 14,000 people, among them many of the intelligentsia, who live in West Berlin and work in [East Berlin].

N. S. Khrushchev: Another question. If you allow your people to live in West Berlin, then can people who live in East Berlin also work over there in West Berlin?

W. Ulbricht: No, that will not be allowed, that is a bit different. We also have a few thousand children, primarily from petty-bourgeois families, who live in East Berlin and go to school in West Berlin.

N. S. Khrushchev: That must be stopped.

W. Ulbricht: Yes, we won't let them go over there any more.

Until now, our trains to Potsdam [in East Germany, on the southwestern border of West Berlin] have traveled through West Berlin. Now they must go around on GDR territory. But there is the danger that the West Berlin authorities and the Occupying Powers will requisition the train stations in West Berlin that belong to us. That, however, will be hard for this, since the trains which leave from there must pass through our territory.

N. S. Khrushchev: Then they won't do this, since you could then block their transit routes.

W. Ulbricht: And there is the problem of the [Western] military trains which we must be ready for. There will be conflicts of this kind.

N. S. Khrushchev: Small conflicts won't hurt anything. But it must be done smartly, so that no one can blame us for anything.

W. Ulbricht: We have already begun the fight against trade in people [Menschenhandel, as the East German leaders referred to West Berlin and West German advertising campaigns for jobs, which particularly lured skilled workers away from the GDR]. The enemy feels that we are preparing to close the border. Yesterday for example an English correspondent asked me: Will you close the border today? I said that it depends on the Western powers.

N. S. Khrushchev: I see that we correctly understand each other on this issue.

W. Ulbricht: How will our consultations in Moscow in practice occur? I think we should begin with a conversation among the first secretaries.

N. S. Khrushchev: That wouldn't be bad, but since it's the first secretaries and the chairmen [of the governments] who have traveled here, that wouldn't work.

W. Ulbricht: Then we must begin with a plenary discussion.

N. S. Khrushchev: Yes, it would be hard to start any other way, since there are politburo members in the delegations. [Foreign Minister Adam] Rapacki [of Poland], for example, is a Politburo member. We had moments of doubt about him. But nothing will be presented that he could transfer from impure motives. [i.e., that he could tell the West]

W. Ulbricht: We don't have anything against him. But information seeps out of his office [i.e., the foreign ministry].

N. S. Khrushchev: Comrade Gomulka also told me that and asked me to go to him directly [i.e., Gomulka and not Rapacki] on an important issues. Our relationship to Rapacki is the same as it is to [Polish Premier Jozef] Cyrankiewicz: They are friends who come from the former socialists [i.e., the SPD, social democratic party, instead of the communist party].

So we will have the first session, and then we'll see what comes next.

W. Ulbricht: After that there must be a special session.

N. S. Khrushchev: Let's do it this way: we will task the foreign ministers with putting together the communique, we will also find work for the economists and once we have gotten rid of them in this way, we will then have a joint consultation at our level.

W. Ulbricht: The main issue for the consultation in the small group will be what to do when the FRG declares a blockade after the conclusion of a peace treaty.

N. S. Khrushchev: This issue can be dealt with at plenum; it's not secret.

W. Ulbricht: But the details must be discussed in a smaller group.

The conversation lasted two hours and 15 minutes.

V. Kopteltsev (signature)

Footnotes by Hope M. Harrison

[1] It is not clear whether Khrushchev had names of these particular leaders of model plants or whether he made them up. It is also the case that the supply of milk in East Germany was nowhere near as satisfactory as Khrushchev seems to believe.

[2] This is no doubt a reference to the military build-up announced in President Kennedy's July 25, 1961 public address.

[3] Type I collective farms were those where the farmers were only forced to bring their farmland into the collective farm, but not their cattle and other goods that they could continue to treat as their personal property. The author is grateful to Dr. Jens Schne, deputy director of the Berlin Landesbeauftragte fr Stasi-Unterlagen, for his help on this issue and others in this document.

[4] On the relatively soft US approach to the pressure on Berlin and willingness to resume talks with the Soviets soon after August 13, see Frederick Kempe, *Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth* (New York: Putnam, 2011).

[5] Khrushchev is referring to the October 13, 1957 sudden currency exchange announced in East Germany with no prior warning as way to get rid of excess East German marks held by people in West Berlin. The border in Berlin was closed for several days at this time as well. I am grateful to Jens Schne for identifying this for me.

[6] On the issue of a possible US green light for Soviet plans to close the border, see Kempe, *Berlin 1961*.