

June 22, 1953
Minute from Selwyn Lloyd to Winston Churchill,
Reflecting British Perspectives on the Berlin
Uprising

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Summary:

Lloyd emphasizes Germany's large role in the unification of Europe, and the importance of maintaining the sympathies of the West German population. He provides suggestions for how to proceed in Germany, and requests Churchill's views on the matter.

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English

Contents:

Transcript - English

PRIME MINISTER

Your minute M.215/53 of June 19 to Sir William Strang: Berlin.

1. Germany is the key to the peace of Europe. A divided Europe has meant a divided Germany. To unite Germany while Europe is divided, [even] if practical, is fraught with danger for all. Therefore everyone--Dr. Adenauer, the Russians, the Americans, the French and ourselves--feel in our hearts that a divided Germany is safer for the time being. But none of us dare say so openly because of the effect upon German public opinion. Therefore we all publicly support a united Germany, each on his own terms.

2. In the meantime, whether Germany is united or not, we have to keep the sympathy of the Germans with the West and our purpose has been that the Germans in the Soviet Zone of Germany and in East Berlin should not become loyal subjects of the Russian Communists. Since the Berlin blockade we have done all we can to sustain their morale and resistance to communism at the same time avoiding any provocation to violence.

3. The recent strikes and demonstration in East Berlin and throughout the Soviet Zone have shown up the fact that the Russians have almost completely failed with the Germans and that their puppet regime in the Soviet Zone is now completely discredited. This is a great triumph in the cold war, perhaps the greatest since the defection of [Yugoslav Leader Josip Broz] Tito.

4. It is true that the Russians, by their own standards, appear to have behaved so far with relative restraint. Certainly they do not appear to have been provoked by these events into contemplating any attack upon our militarily precarious situation in West Berlin. This no doubt was what [British Commandant for Berlin] General [C.F.] Coleman had in mind in his telegram No. 128.

5. On the other hand, the Russians shot almost out of hand Goettling [Göttling], a West Berlin citizen and therefore under our protection. Many people in West Berlin were killed or wounded on the sector boundary by shots fired from East Berlin. Three mechanized Soviet divisions have been moved into Berlin. Contrary to existing agreements, communications between East and West Berlin have been severed. This all gave us the right, and indeed the duty, to make a firm protest in accordance with those facts. There are of course also reports of numbers of East Germans and East Berliners being shot and ruthlessly handled. We also technically share responsibility for the East Berliners.

6. The Germans in West Berlin have on the whole behaved sensibly and with restraint. We think that the strong statement of the Commandants, together with their restraining influence, has helped towards this. German opinion, in the East and West as well as in Berlin, is now carefully watching to see whether we continue to support them against the Russians or not. This is of vital importance to Dr. Adenauer's election prospects. You will have seen his personal message to you (copy attached).

7. What action should now be taken? I suggest

(1) [British High Commissioner for Germany] Sir I[vonne] Kirkpatrick should return to his post. Orders have been given to this effect.

(2) A reply should go to Dr. Adenauer reaffirming your declaration that Germany will not be let down. The words used by you on May 11 were

"The policy of H.M.G. is to adhere most faithfully in the spirit as well as in the letter to our agreements with Western Germany."

"Strong as is our desire to see a friendly settlement with Soviet Russia, or even an improved modus vivendi, we are resolved not in any way to fail in the obligations to which we have committed ourselves about Western Germany."

"Western Germany will in no way be sacrificed or cease to be master of its own fortunes within the agreements we and other NATO countries have made with them."

You could remind him that these obligations fully cover West Berlin and that H.M.G. have frequently stated that they desire to see a reunited Berlin as the capital of a free reunited Germany. (In this connection you may like to glance at the speech (copy attached) made by the Foreign Secretary in Berlin on May 28, 1952.) You would say that we still think the way to achieve this is on the basis of the Allied note of September 1952, which conforms with the Bundestag resolution of June 10 (see separate note attached). Finally, I hope you would express some sympathy with the spirit and courage of the East German population, while endorsing the Chancellor's and the Commandants' counsels of restraint.

8. A reply on these lines, if made public, should help Dr. Adenauer in his elections. It would help him even more if you could make a statement on the same lines in the House of Commons on Wednesday, June 24, when there are already questions down about recent events in Berlin. Apart from this, this seems a good moment to rub in the Allied offer to the Russians of September 1952.

9. If we can have your views on the above, we shall be better able to decide on the nature of the reply to the latest Soviet communication to the Allied Commandants in Berlin (copy attached with copy of Allied note). This, put very briefly, rejects our protest, alleges Western provocation but ends on the constructive note that the Russians are willing to restore communications between the sectors. The tone of the note does not differ from other Soviet communications made to us in Germany.

Selwyn Lloyd
June 22, 1953