

**September 15, 1961**

**Letter from Ulbricht to Khrushchev on Closing the  
Border Around West Berlin**

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**Summary:**

Ulbricht writes to Khrushchev regarding the closing of the border between east and west Berlin.

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Now that the first part of the task of preparing the peace treaty has been carried out, I would like to inform the CPSU CC Presidium about the situation.

The implementation of the resolution on the closing of the border around West Berlin went according to plan. The tactic of gradually carrying out the measures made it more difficult for the adversary to orient himself with regard to the extent of our measures and made it easier for us to find the weak places in the border. I must say that the adversary undertook fewer counter-measures than was expected. The dispatch of 1500 American bandits would bother the West Berliners more than we do. The drawing-up of the Soviet troops into a position of readiness as well as the employment of units of the National People's Army in Berlin had a very sobering effect on the adversary. It was of decisive significance that the Warsaw Pact states acted unanimously under Soviet leadership and that the Soviet press reported comprehensively after August 13 and took a position supporting the GDR measures.

We achieved the following things by closing the border around West Berlin:

- 1.) The protection of the GDR against the organization of a civil war and military provocations from West Berlin.
- 2.) The cessation of the economic and cultural undermining of the capital of the GDR by the West Berlin swamp.
- 3.) A change in the political situation will occur. The Bonn government has understood that the policy of revanch and the plan to roll back the GDR by the organization of a civil war and a small war has been destroyed for all time. This will later have great effects on the tactics of the Western powers regarding Poland and Czechoslovakia.
- 4.) The authority of the GDR state, which was weakened by its tolerance towards the subversive measures from West Berlin, was strengthened and a revolution in the thinking of the population of the capital and the GDR has occurred.

The experiences of the last years have proven that it is not possible for a socialist country such as the GDR to carry out peaceful competition with an imperialist country such as West Germany with open borders. Such opportunities first appear when the socialist world system has surpassed the capitalist countries in per-capita production.

The adversary tried to answer our defense measures with a cry about the division of Germany. The attempt to call forth difficulties for us through chauvinistic propaganda and the use of the slogan of the "right to self-determination" failed, because large groups of the population had believed for a long time that it could not continue further as it was. The revolution in the mood of the GDR population was expressed in the happiness that the adversary was dealt a real blow. The authority of the GDR state grew significantly in the people's consciousness. Not only broad groups of the industrial workers, but also the collective farm

workers, are working better than before. The main discussions in the weak sections of the population, especially in parts of the intelligentsia, are basically about perspectives. Many people say that they will no longer be able to visit their uncle and their aunt regularly, but they really think that now the Western orientation is shattered and that there is no longer any other way than to orient themselves on the workers-and-peasants state of the GDR and on the socialist camp. Each citizen of the Republic who hoped for the reunification of Germany through an inexplicable compromise between the four powers or in general through any kind of "concessions by both sides" was forced to think the issue through to its conclusion, i.e., the resolution of the national issue of the German people presupposes the conquest of German imperialism and the victory of socialism in the GDR. The people learned in the days after August 13 to completely think through many questions to the end. I would like to mention that the organized adversaries, who let themselves be led in their struggle against the GDR by RIAS [Radio in the American Sector] and West Berlin agencies, on the basis of the hatred of the West Berlin radio stations in July and the first half of August, were released from prison and some were made safe. I must say that the intelligentsia in general understood the situation relatively quickly. They respected the measures of the state, and there were fewer difficulties with them than before. There were bigger conflicts only with a part of the young intelligentsia which felt the experiences of the capitalist time.

In the GDR capital, some of the citizens who had worked in West Berlin factories took work in our factories. There are young people who were infected strongly by the Western imperialist propaganda and asphalt culture. Some of the younger workers refused to work and roamed around the streets. We transported some of them from the streets into work camps to teach them to work. There were difficulties, because some of the doctors of Charity hospital and other hospitals live in West Berlin and were influenced there not to come to work in the capital of the GDR. Also several large orchestras and theater ensembles are having difficulties which we are trying to overcome by enlisting artistic forces from the Republic (50% of the musicians of the orchestra of German State Opera were West Berliners; the majority of artists at the Comic Opera live in West Berlin).

The present elections for the district parliaments, district councils, and district assemblies help us to carry out great educational work in the entire population and to further consolidate the situation.

A measure of the drastic change in the working class is the resolution on production intentions for raising the production in the same period of time and with the same pay, as well as making the economy free from interference. The agricultural production cooperatives have begun a plan for raising the production for the market in a similar way. We not only want to raise production with this campaign, but also at least in part to correct the violations of the economic laws which occurred due to influences from West Berlin.

The raising of consciousness of struggle is reflected in the commitment of more than 50,000 young men to voluntary duty in the National People's Army. Of course, the older workers also helped with this, since they made it clear to the young men that every young man must complete his military service with defense of the fatherland. There are many resolutions from the factories which request the President of the Volkskammer to move for the Volkskammer to resolve on the institution of the draft. We have stopped this now and postponed these appeals until after the peace treaty.

The visit of the cosmonaut Comrade Major Titov was a great help for us. His visit gave us the opportunity to connect the questions of the securing of peace with friendship with the Soviet Union and with the issues of the future as they are set forth in the CPSU program. Comrade Titov behaved extraordinarily. Even in the most complicated situation he reacted quickly and properly politically, like a true cosmonaut. So, thank you very much for this great help.

Due to our measures of August 13, the whole election exercise was muddled up in West Berlin and West Germany. When Mr. Brandt was summoned to Berlin on August 13, he made an overwhelming impression and demanded countermeasures by the Bonn government and the Western powers, even if they meant extreme risk. The adventurer Brandt overtook even Mr. Adenauer in regard to chauvinism and anti-communism. This does not however change the reality that both Adenauer and Brandt came to West Berlin to see for themselves the fragments of their policy of revanch and the policy of strength.

In West Berlin itself the border areas have become desolate. Many stores and cinemas are closed, many members of the bourgeoisie are moving their homes to West Germany. There are now many villas for sale in West Berlin. The new aspect of the situation is that West Berlin has finished playing its role as a show window of the capitalist West and also will continue to function only partially as a center of subversion. Further, it has been made clear that by the regulation of the use of the transit routes of the GDR to West Berlin, this part of the city will not escape from the difficulties. West Berlin can develop only on the basis of normal relations with the GDR. Until now West Berlin received about one and half million marks in subsidy from the USA and the Bonn government per year. In addition, there are the many buildings which were made with money from the USA and Bonn. The West Berlin Senate demands in addition from Bonn a further one billion mark subsidy each year. From this it is clear how much West Berlin has lived at the cost GDR. After the closing of the border, suddenly there was still present in the GDR capital even in the evenings enough meat of the best quality, while before, especially on weekends, it was already sold out by midday. We also do not have any more problems with bread or butter in the capital. Even the women are satisfied that they can now go to the hair dresser's, since until now the big hair dressing salons were occupied by West Berlin women.

In West Germany, the defense measures of August 13 also led to a sobering up among a part of the bourgeoisie. War Minister Strauss was somewhat repressed and Economics Minister Erhard was pushed more into the foreground. Unfortunately the time until the elections in West Germany on September 17 was too short so that August 13 had only a little influence in West Germany. The German Peace Union cannot master the new main questions in so short a time, although it takes great pains and its resolution on a neutral Germany has gained ground gradually.

The international effect of August 13 was generally a very positive one. The citizens of the people's democracies realize more and more now that the struggle against German militarism and for a peace treaty is the business of every people's democracy. The danger of German militarism has become more clearly visible in the capitalist countries of Western Europe. In the majority of neutral countries the governments have come to the realization that there is a German Democratic Republic, and it is no longer prepared to support the occupation rights in West Germany and West Berlin claimed by the USA. Regarding the USA, it obviously will play the

strong man by bare-faced demands and thinks it will gain a better negotiating position from this. Otherwise, it cannot be explained that the USA claimed an unrestricted right to occupation in West Germany and West Berlin in its last note. The American-oriented West Berlin daily newspaper "Der Tagesspiegel" even refers to the Haager Convention of 1898 in which the conduct of occupation troops in a country captured in war was regulated. This position of leading politicians in the USA and West Germany has induced us to carry out a systematic campaign for the right to self-determination of the West German population with the demand of the right of West Germany to leave the Paris Treaties and the demand for the removal of American occupation troops from West Germany. Since the resolution of the national question of the German people is only possible through the overcoming of German imperialism, we put forward the liberation of West Germany from the shackles of the Paris Treaties of NATO and the departure of foreign troops from West Germany as prospects for the militarily neutral Germany. The strengthening of the workers-and-peasants state of the GDR and the victory of socialism is the basic condition to overcoming the imperialist past and present in all of Germany and to establishing a militarily neutral and flourishing Germany.

We assess the situation such that the GDR will be strengthened further. In this we must see that also when the borders are closed the competition with West Germany will continue. Thus, we must overcome in the next years the losses which we have suffered because of West Berlin aggression; we must carry out economic cooperation with the USSR consistently, and reach the figures of the Seven-Year Plan again in 1963. This requires a corresponding plan for 1962 which will enable the preparation for this goal.

What are our next measures? We are preparing ourselves for the conclusion of the peace treaty. By the time of the talks in the second half of October, we would like to inform you of our view "On the question of the air connections to West Berlin." The question of the air connections over the air space of the GDR is already playing the main role in discussions in the circle of Western powers. We have prohibited the false term "air corridors" to be used.

In the attached, I send you a report of a discussion with a group of House of Commons parliamentarians of the British Conservative Party, which took place on the occasion of the visit to the Leipzig Fair.

The West Berlin commandants are trying through various protests to awaken in the public the impression that a four-power status still exists in Berlin. We believe that we should no longer publish such reports of complaints of the West Berlin commandants to the chief of the Soviet garrison in Berlin. It would be best if such complaints were not accepted in general any more. When the Western powers have requests, they can report these to the Soviet government.

In the Volkskammer session of September 20, we will adopt the law for the defense of the GDR. In addition, we will carry out now the agreed-upon measures on the safe-guarding and strengthening of the GDR border with West Germany.

The key thing is economic, to make the GDR economy safe from subversion by December 1. It will facilitate the international talks if the Bonn government knows that we are well prepared for any possible blockade measures, that such measures will concern us much less than they will concern West Berlin.

We think it is important that the anniversary of the foundation of the GDR, October 7, be celebrated on a greater scale than has been common until now. We ask your opinion as to whether it is possible for the USSR to send a delegation of leading comrades of the party and government. We had the intention of inviting you, dear Comrade Nikita Sergeevich for October 7, but we do not presume to express the request directly, since no doubt you are busy with the preparation for the Party Congress. We request your view on the composition of the Soviet delegation so that we can propose to the people's democracies that they all send delegations of leading comrades.

I have written little about West Germany in this letter. I think, though, that we must essentially change and improve much in our work in West Germany. I will write about this later.

We are very grateful to you that you sent us Comrade Marshal [I.S.] Konev [Commander in Chief of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany]. This is a great help. Our cooperation is very good.

Thank you very much for the information about your interesting meeting with Mr. [Amintore] Fanfani [the Italian Prime Minister]. Your statements were very important for my further orientation.

I wish you good health and remain,  
with communist greetings,  
Yours,  
W. Ulbricht