

'Willy Brandt: West Berlin is, and will remain, the only normal city behind the Iron Curtain', from Le Monde (15 August 1961)


Caption: On 15 August 1961, the French daily newspaper Le Monde describes the reactions of Willy Brandt, the Mayor of West Berlin, to the closure of the East German border in Berlin during the night of 12–13 August 1961.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 15.08.1961, n° 5 155. Paris: Le Monde. "M.Willy Brandt: Berlin-Ouest est et restera la seule ville normale derrière le rideau de fer", p. 2.

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Willy Brandt: West Berlin is, and will remain, the only normal city behind the Iron Curtain

Berlin, 14 August (*Agence France-Presse*) — In a statement to the House of Representatives on Sunday evening, Mr Willy Brandt, the Governing Mayor of West Berlin, called on the Western Powers to urge the authorities in the Soviet Zone to lift the barriers imposed with a view to isolating East Berlin from the Western sectors of the city and from the rest of East Germany.

‘We must do more than simply protest,’ added Mr Brandt, to the applause of the Members of Parliament.

Mr Brandt stressed that the statements made by the East Berlin authorities declaring that all ‘peaceful citizens of West Berlin’ will have access to the Soviet sector would open the way to arbitrary decisions.

To further cheers from the House, Mr Willy Brandt exclaimed: ‘The presence of the Berlin Allied Commanders at this session proves that we have friends who know that we are all in the same boat. The Bundestag may meet during the next few days in a display of solidarity with our compatriots in the Soviet Zone and in protest against the illegal measures taken by the Soviet Zone authorities.’

The Governing Mayor then invited the Members of Parliament to display more openly their solidarity with their fellow citizens in East Berlin and their compatriots in the Soviet Zone. ‘Any participation in demonstrations organised by the Government of the Soviet Zone’, he said, ‘must be refused.’ Mr Brandt asked the population of West Berlin to remain calm, despite its indignation, and to follow police orders. ‘Ill-conceived actions’, he said, ‘would only cause harm to our city and to our compatriots.’

Similarly rejecting Communist accusations that West Berlin was the centre of subversive activities against East Germany, Mr Willy Brandt declared: ‘West Berlin is, today more than yesterday, the only normal city behind the Iron Curtain, and it will remain so. Those who want to destroy peace are on the other side of the Brandenburg Gate. The responsibility for everything that has taken place, and for everything that might take place, lies with Moscow.’