

'One minute past midnight' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (12 May 1949)

Caption: On 12 May 1949, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung comments on the lifting of the Berlin Blockade by the Soviet Union and considers the future of the quadripartite division of the city.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. FRIEDMANN, Werner; GOLDSCHAGG, Edmund; SCHÖNINGH, Franz Joseph; SCHWINGENSTEIN, August ; Herausgeber DAHLMANN, Alfred; KREYSSIG, Gerhard. 12.05.1949, n° 55; 5. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Eine Minute nach Mitternacht", auteur:Kreyssig, Gerhard , p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

One minute past midnight

by Gerhard Kreyssig

The Iron Curtain has gone up and the drawbridges of Berlin, the blockaded fortress of freedom, have been let down. The sensational news for the whole world and for Germany, that normal transport routes to Berlin and to the East have been restored to their normal use, almost obscures the very important fact that the political and economic trial of strength between two worlds with differing ideologies, played out on the chessboard of international politics, has ended for the moment in a draw. The Germans in the West are relieved of many concerns and of the burden of having to pay out millions for a senseless enterprise in which they were just passive participants. The people of Berlin are experiencing the momentous triumph of their deprivation and their courage. For the millions of inhabitants on the other side of the Iron Curtain, today is finally the day ... when spring has come and brought hope! We in the Western Zones are very glad that we can resume some degree of normal contact with relatives and friends in the East — and the millions in the Eastern Zone, who have been living under the increased strain of uncertainty and fear for ten months since the Berlin Blockade began, heave a sigh of relief in the (perhaps premature) feeling that this period is behind them for good. Millions of packets and parcels from West to East, millions of letters between East and West will bear witness to the fact that the border of the Soviet Zone was an artificial division of something that naturally belonged together. And, if a verdict from the people is needed, thousands who attempt — legally — to escape to the West will now pronounce it, whereas previously hundreds had — illegally — risked their lives every night. For, on the Eastern side, freedom was on its deathbed.

The great event — during the night from Wednesday to Thursday, at one minute past midnight, when the Blockade was at an end — may be likened to waking up from a nightmare. However, in the joy and the release of nervous tension, we should not be tempted to forget that the lifting of the Berlin Blockade is, for the moment, no more than the correction of a political operation. For Berlin, for West Germany and for East Germany — and for the former Second World War allies — it is then simply the restoration of an essentially unsatisfactory state of affairs. Today of all days, we shall have to be particularly conscious of the fact that it is still a very long way from the Berlin Blockade (which now belongs to the past) via the restoration of the ‘normal’ existence of the isolated island of Berlin, to the freedom and unity of Germany.

Since the Blockade was imposed, the currency reforms have spread across the sectors of Germany. This has meant the suspension of economic relations and interactions which once existed. What is more, even if Berlin is no longer under blockade, its currency problem will not be solved because there are now once again 17 scheduled trains from the West into the city, the motorway is open, and the barges can once more ply the canals. It is much more the case that the situation created at one minute past midnight on 12 May now simply once again provides an opportunity to look for *sensible* solutions and to find them together.

From a political standpoint, there is some indication that, in lifting the Blockade, the Russians are far more determined in their pursuit of economic goals than of political ones. Their blockade had a greater effect on them than it did on Berlin and was seriously detrimental from an economic point of view, not only for the Eastern Sector but also for the Eastern European states behind the Iron Curtain. It was not necessary to reconvene a meeting of Foreign Ministers on the German Question in order to reverse the economic repercussions of the Berlin Blockade. The fact that the Russians demanded one, however, shows that the imminent approach of the creation of a West German state and a federal government has brought a new set of political problems. What is on the agenda is not the (temporarily West German) Federal Republic, but *Germany itself*.

This means that all the questions that have remained unspoken for ten months, because the Blockade made any discussion superfluous, are now brought back to the forefront. We are again faced with the burning issues as to whether and when West Germany, with its democratic orientation and Marshall Plan, can merge into one with the collectivised, Soviet economy of the Eastern Sector — with the principles of the so-called People’s Democracy, which has much to do with rule by the terror of the Red people’s tribunes and nothing to do with democracy. For the sake of German unity, we shall have to be prepared to make many great *economic* sacrifices, if the Soviet Sector is to be brought up to the standard of living and the productivity

levels of West Germany in the foreseeable future. We shall not be able to consider making even the smallest concession if it would mean that German unity has to be bought at the price of relinquishing democratic principles, compromising human dignity or placing restrictions on freedom. This is an *indivisible* and integral component of human rights.

Given this situation, the Western powers must be aware that the unity, peace and freedom of Germany are synonymous with the demand that the People's Democracy in the Eastern Sector is also rendered a mere phase in the past, just as the Blockade now belongs to history.