

Statement by Dean Rusk concerning travel restrictions in Berlin (13 August 1961)

Caption: On 13 August 1961, Dean Rusk, US Secretary of State, criticises the measures adopted by the East German authorities to restrict freedom of movement to the West for the inhabitants of East Berlin and for the citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Source: United States-Department of State. Documents on Germany 1944-1985. Washington: Department of State, [s.d.]. 1421 p. (Department of State Publication 9446). p. 776.

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Statement by Secretary of State Rusk concerning Travel Restrictions in Berlin (13 August 1961)

The authorities in East Berlin and East Germany have taken severe measures to deny to their own people access to West Berlin. These measures have doubtless been prompted by the increased flow of refugees in recent weeks. The refugees are not responding to persuasion or propaganda from the West but to the failures of communism in East Germany. These failures have created great pressures upon communist leaders who, in turn, are trying to solve their own problems by the dangerous course of threats against the freedom and safety of West Berlin. The resulting tension has itself stimulated flights from the East.

Having denied the collective right of self-determination to the peoples of East Germany, communist authorities are now denying the right of individuals to elect a world of free choice rather than a world of coercion. The pretense that communism desires only peaceful competition is exposed; the refugees, more than half of whom are less than 25 years of age, have “voted with their feet” on whether communism is the wave of the future.

Available information indicates that measures taken thus far are aimed at residents of East Berlin and East Germany and not at the allied position in West Berlin or access thereto. However, limitation on travel within Berlin is a violation of the four-power status of Berlin and a flagrant violation of the right of free circulation throughout the city. Restrictions on travel between East Germany and Berlin are in direct contravention of the Four-Power agreement reached at Paris on June 20, 1949. These violations of existing agreements will be the subject of vigorous protest through appropriate channels.