

## Address given by Willy Brandt to the Bundestag on the building of the Berlin Wall (Bonn, 18 August 1961)

**Caption:** On 18 November 1961, Willy Brandt, Governing Mayor of Berlin, addresses the Bundestag and denounces the building of the Berlin Wall and the violation by the Soviet Union of the city's four-power status.

**Source:** Verhandlungen des deutschen Bundestages. 3. Wahlperiode. 167. Sitzung vom 18. August 1961. Stenographische Berichte. Hrsg. Deutscher Bundestag und Bundesrat. 1961, Nr. 49. Bonn. "Rede von Willy Brandt", p. 9773-9777.

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## Address given by Willy Brandt to the Bundestag on the building of the Berlin Wall (Bonn, 18 August 1961)

**Brandt**, Governing Mayor of Berlin (*greeted with applause by the SPD*): Mr Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, it is fairly rare for a component part of the *Bundesrat* to address this House. The fact that I appear before you today on behalf of the State of Berlin is a reflection of the extraordinary position in which we now find ourselves.

It is not just Berlin that concerns us here, it is the cold menace which has settled over the other part of Germany and the Eastern sector of my city, as it once did over Hungary: you have all seen the pictures of the barbed wire, concrete posts and concrete walls, the tanks, the tank traps and the troops in full battle gear. What has happened is a howling injustice, nothing less.

Just think of the countless human tragedies that have unfolded over the last few days. A city which, although administratively divided, still had thousands of connections linking its two parts every day, has had concrete stakes driven right through its heart to form a border, a kind of Great Wall of China.

Something which should be a single whole has been further divided, is being brutally destroyed. The right of freedom of movement has been trampled underfoot. Yet it is a most fundamental human right to be able to flee from one country to another. How much more fundamental is the right to be able to flee within a single country and a single city.

Berlin thus believes that the international community must, above all, take steps to denounce this flagrant violation of human rights. Protection of human rights is one of the most sacred duties of the United Nations. We cannot wait for Armageddon before appealing to the community of nations.

*(Applause from the SPD and members of the FDP.)*

We have already reached a stage where it is essential for international bodies to take action, especially since those immediately affected no longer believe that they have any chance of effectively overturning this illegal act of aggression without jeopardising the peace.

The people in the Eastern Zone, muzzled by Ulbricht and held in check by Soviet tanks, and in East Berlin, which Ulbricht has now occupied and annexed, are full of hatred and despair. They feel totally abandoned.

*(Cries of 'Hear! Hear!' from the SPD.)*

They are obliged to stifle their outrage. But none of us will want to abandon them to their despair.

For this reason, too, it is good that the German *Bundestag* has met, and it is gratifying to have seen a few signs of unity, of solidarity in the past few days. We must not now — this is how Berlin sees it — do business with Ulbricht's people or in any way act as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

*(Loud applause from the whole House.)*

The City of Berlin now faces a new reality. It has been closed off as a point of daily human contact between West and East. But this closure also shuts the safety valve which offered relief from the pressure of life lived under the Ulbricht regime.

Ladies and gentlemen, more than nine million tickets for cultural events were sold last year to East Berliners and people living in the areas of the Eastern Zone which border on Berlin. Sixty thousand residents of my city, with homes in East Berlin, commuted to work in West Berlin. I have learned in the last few days of cases where people have crawled under the barbed wire at night to say goodbye to their work colleagues and gone back behind the wire with tears in their eyes, because their wives, children and parents are over there. Berlin is no longer a place where people were once able to come to breathe in the air of freedom and

recharge their batteries before returning to the grey, routine of life in the Zone.

The Berlin Senate — and I must make this clear to the House — has taken or initiated the action which the situation demanded, in so far as it was able. It has maintained order in the streets and kept the economy going.

Now, above all, is the time to invest in Berlin, and I beg you to do so.

*(Loud applause from the whole House.)*

Berlin cannot live as a free and liberal city unless it and its friends believe in Berlin's viability and vitality. More than ever before, it needs to be developed into a big modern centre of economic and cultural activity.

My fellow citizens have faith in the guarantees which the Allies have given regarding the freedom of the people of West Berlin, the presence of Allied troops in West Berlin and free access from and to West Berlin. I am not just convinced, I know — and I made it plain to my fellow citizens at a large rally a few days ago — that crossing the line which has been drawn would be more than dangerous. These guarantees are now guarantees of peace. They are fundamental to our existence in Berlin. But the same goes for West Germany and, indeed, for the West as a whole.

For over 12 years now, Berliners have shown that they prefer to endure deprivation rather than submit to the yoke of a new dictatorship.

*(Applause from the whole House.)*

There, and elsewhere, too, despite bitter disappointments, it is now more important than ever that we should stand firm with our friends, resolute and united.

*(Renewed applause from the whole House.)*

I read a news report yesterday which said that Sunday's events represented 'action by the Communists within their own sphere of power, not against the freedom of the West'. I think that this interpretation is wrong.

*(Cries of 'Hear! Hear!' from the SPD.)*

Firstly, the interests of free and liberal Berlin are directly affected, as I shall explain. Secondly, there are huge repercussions for the life of our divided nation. But, above all, nothing more must be said which indirectly excuses this illegal occupation of the Eastern sector.

*(Applause from the SPD and members of the other political groups.)*

It is not just that countless individual stories are currently being played out. Something is currently afoot in our nation, in both halves of our country. Some are asking the others if they are being abandoned. Others are asking how great a value we, who are free, attach to justice and solidarity.

We have brought unspeakable misery upon our nation and the human race once before by disregarding the law and morality, by thinking that the fate of others was of no great concern to us as long as we were all right.

*(Applause from the SPD.)*

As Governing Mayor of Berlin, I have received countless messages in the last few days which prove that it is wrong to think that people in the Federal Republic do not understand what has been happening since Sunday in Berlin and in the Eastern Zone. Our nation has not become a nation of selfish fat cats. Our nation

has retained a sense of shared responsibility. It is important for our compatriots over there in the Zone to appreciate that.

*(Applause from the SPD and members of the other political groups.)*

What happened in East Berlin was that an army marched into a territory where it has no business to be.

*(Loud applause from the whole House.)*

The so-called People's Army and its militias have annexed East Berlin. The treads of its tanks have smashed Berlin's four-power status into pieces.

*(Murmurs of assent from the SPD.)*

The orders which brought all this about were issued by the so-called 'Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic'. The orders which brought the overhead and underground railways to a halt were signed by the so-called 'Transport Minister of the German Democratic Republic'. The orders forbidding residents of East Berlin to enter West Berlin were signed by the 'Interior Minister of the German Democratic Republic'. Authorisation to enter the city's Eastern sector for 'peace-loving West Berliners' is granted by the Interior Minister of the so-called 'German Democratic Republic'. The same goes for the orders applicable to residents of West Germany. The Interior Minister of the so-called GDR has allowed foreign nationals, together with members of the diplomatic corps and the Western occupation forces, to use designated crossing points into the Eastern Sector — 13 initially, currently 12, but who knows how many in future? The Mayor of East Berlin has had no choice but to tell his people the wretched news that they can no longer work in West Berlin and should look for new jobs.

The Eastern Zone Government has extended its virtual sovereignty to the whole of East Berlin. It has annexed East Berlin, and it has exercised this sovereignty over everyone — I repeat, everyone — who might wish to enter East Berlin.

*(Mr Wehner: 'Hear! Hear!')*

This is the simple truth and it would be self-deception to dress it up as anything else or ignore it.

Acceptance of realities created by armed force is one emphatic way of recognising a national organisation. Anyone reading *Neues Deutschland*, the Socialist Unity Party newspaper, in the last few days will have noted its tone of triumph, satisfaction, pride and scorn for the West. In the latest orders issued by the authorities in the Eastern Zone, the Eastern sector border is actually referred to officially as — and I quote — the 'border of the German Democratic Republic'.

*(Cries of 'Hear, hear!' from the right.)*

What was previously designated there as the national frontier — the barriers at the eastern end of the Eastern sector — has now been moved forward to the Potsdamer Platz and Brandenburg Gate.

And then — if I have understood correctly — the Soviet Ambassador pops up and says that Mr Khrushchev is anxious not to add to the tensions in Berlin.

*(Cries of 'Hear! Hear!' from the SPD.)*

We have heard noises like that before from others.

*(Murmurs of assent from the SPD.)*

People take a little, and say that's enough for now.

Of course, relations with the Government of the Soviet Union are bound to be affected by the disgraceful breach of the law perpetrated on 13 August — the people of Berlin have said as much in the last few days outside the House of Representatives and elsewhere, and I say it again here.

*(Applause from the SPD and from the Centre and Right.)*

Of course we cannot and will not pretend that what has happened is an isolated event. Of course we cannot, in view of this flagrant violation of human rights, hold talks on a cultural agreement as if nothing had happened.

*(Applause from the SPD and CDU/CSU.)*

It goes without saying that those in positions of responsibility in Germany — the Federal Government and, more modestly, we of the Berlin Senate — do not plan to do anything which will make the international situation worse. There can be no city and no people which wants to secure peace more than Berlin and the German people, and I am sure that that will not change. But the Government of the Soviet Union must not think that it can slap us in the face and expect us to be pleased about it.

*(Loud applause from the SPD. — Applause from Members from the Centre and Right.)*

The quarter of a million and more people who assembled of their own free will outside Berlin City Hall two days ago to voice their bitter outrage at the disgraceful acts of the last few days to the whole world, these people were making it clear, together with myself and my colleague Franz Amrehn, that they would not tolerate any attitude which showed a lack of the most basic self-respect — anywhere in the Federal Republic or elsewhere. Even a worm curls up when you step on it.

For the forces of the Western Allies, last Sunday means that they have been pushed out of the four-power agreements which apply to Berlin as a whole. The declaration by the Warsaw Pact nations and the announcements made subsequently by the Eastern Zone Government also mean in effect that the shared responsibility of the Western powers for Germany as a whole is being challenged, even before the separate peace treaty of which there is so much talk.

Our Western defence forces lodged serious protests yesterday in Moscow. They were totally unanimous with us in making clear to the Soviet Union that they hold it responsible. They denounced this invasion as illegal and demanded that the measures taken in connection with it be reversed. These demands are consistent with the will of the Berlin Senate and the people of Berlin. The Western powers also pointed out in their protest notes that 'This unilateral infringement of the quadripartite status of Berlin can only increase existing tension and dangers.' The situation has indeed become more tense, and it the fault of the Soviet Government alone,

*(Mr Wehner: 'Hear! Hear!')*

which persists in supporting the brutal and incompetent Ulbricht regime.

*(Applause.)*

The Government of the Soviet Union must be made to realise in no uncertain terms how dangerous it is to continue violating the four-power agreements. But the four-power agreements so cavalierly torn up by the Soviet Union must not, until such time as they are restored, prevent the West from doing what has to be done in the interests of a free and liberal Berlin as part of a free Germany. The ties between the Federal Republic and West Berlin must not be loosened, they must be tightened.

*(Applause from the SPD, FDP and members of the CDU/CSU.)*

Moreover, the Federal Republic, which represents the State of Berlin in international law, must not conclude any international agreements which do not safeguard the interests of Berlin.

The Berlin Senate would welcome visible signs of the Allied presence and Allied rights and would like to see all possible political initiatives being taken. The Senate also expects the entire world community to respond to this new injustice, and it is, of course, prepared to play its part.

The Berlin Senate has told the House of Representatives, the people of Berlin and the Federal Government that persuasive non-military measures should be taken. This is not a reproach to the Western Allies. It is just that we are not impressed by talk of 'countermeasures', which would trigger hoots of laughter from the Potsdamer Platz to Vladivostok.

*(Applause from the SPD and FDP.)*

We are not impressed by words which are not followed by deeds.

*(Renewed loud applause from the SPD and FDP.)*

We are more interested in our people being given as clear an idea as possible of the facts and the changed reality that we shall have to live with if this illegal act cannot be reversed. All parties concerned need to realise that last Sunday's actions were only the curtain-raiser. They marked Act One of the drama, and Act Two will shortly follow.

The Soviet Premier has achieved half of his ambitions for what he refers to as a 'Free City of West Berlin'. He has grabbed what he wanted. Partial successes like that have always made dictatorships greedy for more.

*(Applause from the SPD, FDP and members of the CDU/CSU.)*

This is the real danger here.

As Governing Mayor of Berlin, I can only warn against any response which would reward the breaching of a treaty, reward the use of force. It would be an invitation to Ulbricht to continue with his policy of the *fait accompli*. Tension is not heightened because people tell the truth; tension is heightened when unilateral acts of injustice are perpetrated.

*(Applause.)*

We have often heard it said prior to these events that one must not negotiate under duress. The ultimatum had to be lifted before talks could be held. We believe that the West must ensure that it does not give in to *de facto* coercion in any negotiations which lie ahead.

*(Applause from the SPD and members of the CDU/CSU and FDP.)*

We understand that reference was made at the Paris Conference to a Western initiative on talks. It would have to be totally clear that talks may take place only on a clear basis of law, unless there is a willingness to accept the *fait accompli* and negotiate a poorer status for West Berlin — something which none of us wants to believe.

What happened on Sunday is — I repeat — not a direct threat to West Berlin. But it is a deep incision into the life of our nation, and it is an attack on the West. I think that our credibility, the credibility of the West's policy, is at stake here.

The second act of coercion, the separate peace treaty, which I can only describe as a *diktat* of partition, is openly threatened. A *diktat* of this kind is more ominous than allegations about spies and agents. It is not about stamping documents but about the expectation that the Federal Republic will betray its compatriots in

the Eastern Zone.

Berliners are certainly not alone in saying that the Federal Republic cannot agree to a *diktat* of partition.

*(Applause from the whole House.)*

It will never be able to accept it, not only because it cannot violate its own Constitution which requires us to act for all Germans. The Basic Law requires the Federal Republic — as we have again heard it said here today — to concern itself with the people in the Soviet-occupied zone. The Federal Republic cannot and must not accept a *diktat* of partition, or it will be violating the Constitution.

We are as one with the Allies who have also made reunification a formal policy objective. They too could not accept a treaty which runs counter to our common policy.

Our compatriots will not be sacrificed. We are one people — Berliners have shown that again in their own special way in the face of the threats of recent days — and a proud people. Justice and morality allow us no other option. But this response is born, too, of our belief in democracy, because without this wholehearted and unshakeable belief we would ourselves, out of weakness or opportunism, become the forerunners of a new nationalism. And no one who values peace, in East or West, can want that.

As Governing Mayor of Berlin, I know, as my fellow citizens know, that the months ahead will be difficult. I hope that we shall be able to weather the storm.

*(Sustained loud applause from the SPD. — Applause from the CDU/CSU and the Right.)*