

Reactions to the construction of the Berlin Wall (August 1961)

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Reactions to the construction of the Berlin Wall (August 1961)

[Commentary] Eight years later ...

[Newsreel] The East German Government cements the division of Germany. A wall is being erected around East Berlin. At the eleventh hour, this family manages to escape to West Berlin before their house on the sector border is evacuated. So far, there is no prospect of an end to the terrorist measures of the East German regime.

[Heinrich Barth] Adenauer wanted to travel to Berlin on the Monday following the building of the Berlin Wall. However, the Americans — it is safe to say this now — did not allow him to do so. They said that it would lead to violent insurgencies in Berlin for which they, the Americans, could not be held responsible. This is why Adenauer did not fly to Berlin on the Monday, and he was reproached for this.

[Newsreel] Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of West Berliners prepare to give US President Johnson a rousing reception. Johnson shakes hands with thousands on his way to the Rudolph Wilde Platz, where 350 000 demonstrators receive him and General Clay, organiser of the Berlin Airlift during the Blockade, with rapturous applause. Kennedy's representative speaks words of encouragement to all Germans. In his address, he states that the barriers of brick and barbed wire were erected by men who have no real conception of human freedom.

[Werner Krüger] The building of the wall affected the Federal German Chancellor deeply for several reasons. He was particularly disappointed with regard to his expectations of the role that Kennedy would play in the matter. He believed that only US President Kennedy could effectively achieve anything in Berlin. Kennedy let him down by cancelling the visit that he had been requested to make and sending his representatives Johnson and Clay in his place. The two men made a stopover in Bonn on the flight from the USA to Berlin. The discussion became very heated and the Chancellor came close to demanding that he accompany them to Berlin, a demand that was blankly refused by the US Vice-President.

[Commentary] Adenauer was able fly to Berlin only a few days later. In his address at the airport, he explained that the wall that had been built right through the middle of Berlin should stand as a reminder for all Germans that they were to continue putting all their efforts into achieving reunification. The building of the Berlin Wall dashed all hopes of imminent reunification.