

HORIZONT MARKS BERLIN WALL ANNIVERSARY

AU291916 East Berlin HORIZONT in German issue no. 29/81 p 32

[Report by Stefan Doernberg and Franz Koehler: "August 61"--first of six installments]

[Text] There are dates at which changes in the international balance of power become visible and effective suddenly. Thus it was on 13 August 1961. On that Sunday, an acute danger of war was eliminated in the center of our continent, at a place where the dividing line between socialism and imperialism constitutes a particularly jittery borderline, and, last but not least, even the danger of a third world war was warded off.

This date was preceded by years of cold war during which problems upon problems had accumulated. It became more and more clear in the late fifties that the chances of realizing the revanchist plans for an "affiliation" of the GDR with the FRG had disappeared once and for all.

Thus its advocates became victims of a last-minute panic, and the more adventurous and risky their methods became, the more dangerous became their entire policy. Peace in Europe was threatened to an extent unprecedented since 1945--and viewed from today's standpoint, also since that year [1961]. Bonner Rundschau on 9 Jul 1961 wrote brutally and openly that one must be in a position "to use all the means of war, of the war of nerves and of a shooting war. This comprises not only conventional armed forces and armament but also subversion, the fanning of internal resistance, illegal work, dissolution of order, sabotage, disturbing traffic and the economy, disobedience and insurrection." The economic pilferage of the GDR, the purposeful enticement of skilled workers, physicians and engineers, and the virtually unhindered infiltration of paid agents, disseminators of rumors and speculators were to keep the creeping counterrevolution going, to fan the situation of the boiling point.

On 1 August, Franz Josef Straus stated in New York in his capacity as FRG defense minister that the world must be prepared for a "sort of civil war" on German soil. The open border between the GDR capital and West Berlin was to be abused for unleashing this "civil war", for simulating a "police action" and for involving the NATO powers in the provocation if necessary. It was planned in the end to celebrate the conquest of the GDR with "garlands and flying colors and the victorious entry of the Bundeswehr through the Brandenburg Gate with bands playing, as INDUSTRIEKURIER, the newspaper of the big FRG monopolies, later admitted.

Many times before, German militarists had wrongly assessed the real situation and the real balance of power. Precisely because of this, there was the acute danger that they would unleash, by their adventurous policy, by military provocations against the GDR, a worldwide conflagration, this time a nuclear one. This is why the USSR Government on 7 August 1961 issued a serious warning to the effect that "the emergence of the danger of a military imperialist attack against the socialist states is not out of the question."

In agreement with its Warsaw Pact allies, on 13 August the GDR initiated the required measures for protecting its borders and safeguarding its sovereignty. The measures put an end to an intolerable situation which had been used to carry out disguised acts of aggression against the GDR via West Berlin by means of economic war and intensified diversionist activities. The aggressive plans of adventurous imperialist forces were foiled at the Brandenburg Gate, which every so often was made by German militarists to serve as the scene of their policy of aggression, before these plans could cause any major damage. This time the imperialist forces were prevented from implementing their plans by the combat groups of the Berlin workers class, by the workers and peasants who served their time in the armed organs of the socialist Germany. Thus 13 August turned into an important landmark on the road from the cold war to detente, even though this was to take roughly another decade.

The Widow Schlieff was indignant. Konrad Adenauer's housekeeper found it inappropriate for the telephone to ring at such a late hour. The 85-year-old had returned late in the evening from an election tour in Schleswig-Holstein and now urgently needed rest, so she stated. But the man whose voice she heard on the receiver would not be refused. Hans Globke, state secretary in the Federal Chancellor's Office and Adenauer's closest confidant--who under Hitler significantly participated in preparing the criminal "final solution of the Jewish problem," as an active coauthor of the notorious Nuremberg racial laws--had every possible reason now, at 0430 in the dawn of this summery Sunday morning, to dial from his apartment on Bonn's Dietzstrasse 10 No 2867 of the Honneff Post Office, in whose district Adenauer's residence was located.

He had to report urgent news to his chief. While still innocently sleeping himself, he had been awakened by a staffer of the Federal Press Office with the news that the GDR had sealed-off the border with West Berlin. While Globke, somewhat bewildered, was still asking himself whether the GDR was allowed to do such a thing, Minister Ernst Lemmer--skilled in diversionist work against the GDR in the Adenauer cabinet--telephoned from West Berlin and destroyed Globke's hope that there could have been a false report, a mistake or exaggeration. Lemmer was able to give details: It had been reported by police posts to a staffer of the police inspectorate of West Berlin's Kreuzberg District--a trustworthy CDU member as Lemmer did not forget to mention--that the combat groups had taken up positions on East Berlin's territory along the border and that they were erecting barbed wire obstacles.

"Brandenburg Gate Closed"

If people in Bonn had attentively heeded the reports of the GDR news agency, they would have been able to obtain a clear picture much earlier--and from a reliable source at that. As early as 0111, ADN had transmitted a "Declaration of the Governments of the Warsaw Pact States."

Therein it is said: "The governments of the Warsaw Pact states propose to the GDR People's Chamber and Government, as well as to all GDR working people, that a system be introduced at the West Berlin border so as to reliably thwart the subversive activity against the countries of the socialist camp and to ensure a reliable guard and effective control around the entire West Berlin territory, including its borders with democratic Berlin.

"Naturally these measures will not affect the valid provisions concerning the traffic and control over the connecting roads between West Berlin and the FRG!"

But under Adenauer's chancellorship, people in Bonn had gone so far in the policy of not recognizing reality, of ignoring the GDR, that even the existence of the news agency of that state was ignored and no receivers for ADN's telex reports were installed at the decisive government offices. Thus people at the Bonn Federal Press Office only woke up when at 0337 the U.S. press agency AP announced in an express report that "the Brandenburg Gate was closed." Nevertheless, it took the West German DPA press agency until 0353 to report the scanty news that the "people's police were stringing barbed wire."

Confusion in Bonn

Since none of the West German secret services and none of the espionage organizations with their many branches had reported anything about the imminent GDR action, prominent people in Bonn and West Berlin slept through the first few hours of this event which they would later assess as a far-reaching turning point in postwar history.

The news reached Bundestag President Eugen Gerstenmaier at his hunting lodge in Hunsrueck's Vierherrenwald. Foreign Minister Brentano was surprised by the news at his retreat in Waldmichelbach in the Odenwald. The foreign ministry spokesman was one of the few people who spent this beautiful August night at home. In a mixture of thoughtlessness and naivete, he did every possible honor to his name: When journalists woke him up with their phone calls in the early morning, Legation Counsellor [legationsrat] Von Hase, now director of the FRG German Television Two Network, stated that he knew nothing, protested against such jokes on his account, and went back to sleep. A rash awakening only came for him when he saw the alarming reports of the night callers confirmed in the 0800 news over the radio.

The news reached Willy Brandt at that time ruling mayor of West Berlin, who as SPD chairman was on an election tour of the West German lands--on the train. He interrupted his trip in Hannover and rushed to the airport to reach West Berlin as quickly as possible.

At that time there was already a general uproar in Bonn. Ministers phoned one another, consulted their state secretaries, tried to reach the chancellor and tried to shake off journalists, because the result of these alarming phone calls had a shocking impact on them. They all agreed on one and the same thing: that something incomprehensible had happened; but they were all uncertain as to how they should react to all this. State Secretary Thedieck of Lemmer's ministry only announced to Bonn DPA correspondent Baur, with a ring of deep conviction in his voice, that it was up to the Western powers "to eliminate the developed situation."