



The Communist World

SOVIET CHALLENGE TO WESTERN ACCESS RIGHTS IN BERLIN

Soviet interference with US and British convoys on the Berlin autobahn appears to be aimed at drawing the Western powers into negotiations on both access procedures and the broader question of the status of Western forces in West Berlin.

Soviet authorities now are seeking to impose new procedures for checking Allied convoys. The USSR's initial tactic in this regard appears to be an attempt to establish a link between the Western practice of giving advance notification for convoys over a certain size (over seven vehicles in the US case) and procedures governing the dismounting of convoy personnel for a head count. The Soviet checkpoint commander stated flatly to a British official that all convoys of five

vehicles or more must agree to dismounting. In a conversation with a US officer on 15 October, the Soviet commander claimed that the US had agreed last year to give advance notification for convoys of more than five vehicles and said this same procedure should apply to dismounting. He added that even if a truck contained only one to five passengers, they would have to dismount.

While the USSR almost certainly expects the US to reject these demands, it probably hopes that continued publicity relative to the ambiguity and differences which exist between the US and British convoy procedures will tend to underscore the need for negotiations to remove "misunderstandings."

The USSR may have calculated that a display of pressure on

the sensitive Berlin access question was necessary to induce the US and Britain to disregard French and West German opposition to negotiations on Berlin at this time.

Moscow probably foresees a protracted period of negotiations and plans to follow a step-by-step approach, using discussion of access procedures as an avenue for leading into the central problem of the status of Western forces in West Berlin. As part of this strategy, the Russians may envisage further harassment of Western communications as a means of underscoring the issues they intend to press as well as generating pressure on the West to agree to negotiations.

The Soviet Union may, in fact, be preparing the way for formally introducing demands for Western payment for the use of communications facilities on East German territory.

In talks with US and British leaders this summer, both Khrushchev and Gromyko referred to the need for a new tariff on Western military and civilian

rail transport, autobahn tolls on Western military personnel and cargo transport, and payment for the use of communication cables crossing East Germany. The USSR almost certainly would attempt to use negotiations on these matters to press its demand for Western respect for East German "sovereign rights."

Moscow presumably intends to maintain close control over these harassments in order to avoid irreparable damage to the detente atmosphere. The Soviet leaders, however, appear to be operating on the assumption that the US and Britain also have an interest in preserving this atmosphere and that this situation affords the USSR greater latitude for maneuvers to draw the West into a new round of Berlin talks.

Soviet press reports of the incidents have sought to minimize the seriousness of the confrontation. Playing down the challenge to the US and British convoys, Izvestia claimed that President Kennedy had observed that the incident resulted from a misunderstanding rather than a deliberate provocation.