

"ICH BIN EIN BERLINER"

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President John F. Kennedy's iconic statement delivered in his speech to the citizens of West Berlin during his eight hour visit on June 26, 1963 became a symbol of the friendship that was forged between the Berliners and the Americans during the blockage and of the support for American troops in Berlin's US Sector. In a memorandum dated July 4, 1963, Robert H. Lochner of the USIS Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) reports to Mr. A.R. Day of the US Mission in Berlin that the visit by the President of the United States "ranks equally with the American inauguration of the Air Lift 15 years earlier," and asserts that these were the two most important events that had happened in Berlin since the end of World War II.

Berliners received the President with affection and gratitude, and according to RIAS analysts these expressions of honor, faith and confidence inspired his "Ich bin ein Berliner" assertion. A telegram to the Secretary of State dated June 27, 1963 describes the Berlin reception as unprecedented: a record crowd of approximately 1.5 million lining the entire 35 mile presidential route (Figure 1). This telegram also discusses the long-term commitment to US-Berlin relations set forth by State Department foreign policy two months prior to the presidential visit, and clearly stated by President Kennedy to the people of Berlin.

These demonstrations of affection and gratitude to the US President and his message of freedom were not contained by the 12 ft. high barb-wired wall. A recently declassified document confirms that East Berliners were likewise uplifted by the visit of the American President to Berlin and they wanted President Kennedy to know. In a telegram dated June 25, (FIGURE-Figure 1)

Figure 1. An estimated one and a half million Berliners line the 50 Kilometer route taken by the President through the city. Here crowds wave greetings on the way to the airport. USIS:IU:Photos (306-KF-3-7-6/26/1963 USIA)

These demonstrations of affection and gratitude to the US President and his message of freedom were not contained by the 12 ft. high barb-wired wall. A recently declassified document confirms that East Berliners were likewise uplifted by the visit of the American President to Berlin and they wanted President Kennedy to know. In a telegram dated June 25, 1963, Mr. Calhoun of the US Mission in Berlin informs the Secretary of State of the intention of East German construction workers to smuggle a bouquet to be presented to President Kennedy on occasion of his address to the Labor Unions Congress, taking place in West Berlin in conjunction with the President's visit. (Figure 2) Georg Leber, Chairman of the Construction Workers Union and one of the labor convention leaders, submitted the request to the US Mission hoping that the President would accept the bouquet. The request was hence submitted to the Secret Service and the smuggled bouquet got its "good to go" with no security. (Figure 2) In contrast to the overwhelmingly warm reception afforded to President Kennedy on June 26, Soviet Premier Khrushchev's visit to East Berlin two days later did not seem to draw much response and enthusiasm

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from the East Berliners. It was reported that only a small crowd gathered along the route that Khrushchev and East Germany's leader Ulbricht followed on June 28 (Figure 23).



Figure 2. Waves by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev and East German Leader Walter Ulbricht fail to draw much response from small crowd along the parade route in East Berlin. No one moves forward as small girls present flowers to the Soviet visitor. (306-KF-3-30-6/28/1963 USIA)

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