

The Facts Behind the Berlin Crisis



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I.

THE TUG-OF-WAR over Berlin really began on July 3, 1945.

On that day the American Second Armored Division rumbled eastward, through pouring rain, along Hitler's six-lane highway, the "Autobahn."

The veterans of Sicily and the Bulge were about to take over the newly formed American sector of Berlin. Maj. Gen. Floyd L. Parks, in temporary command, was in a hurry. The next day would be the Fourth of July, and there was to be a parade for the occasion.

At Helmstedt, the border of the Soviet zone, the advance guards on motorcycles found a barrier stretched across the highway. A Soviet officer, polite but firm, brought the whole division, with its tanks and trucks and troop carriers stretching westward for miles, to a halt.

His orders, he said, were to count every vehicle and every man before letting the Americans in—to make sure that the actual number would tally with the number previously agreed upon.

General Parks fumed and fussed, but he was helpless. The division was stalled for seven hours while the count went on. It reached the battered capital just in time to raise the American Flag outside the Adolf Hitler Barracks, side by side with the Soviet flag, on the morning of the Fourth.

The seven-hour delay was just a foretaste of the next three years.

THE Americans and their western allies were in Berlin by virtue of prior agreements, made with Soviet participation and consent. The first, made in September, 1944, by the European Advisory Commission in London, split Germany into four occupation zones and made Berlin a four-power island in the middle of the Soviet zone.

This agreement was approved by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and Generalissimo Stalin at Yalta. It was confirmed in general terms in an exchange of messages between President Truman and Stalin on June 14 and 16, 1945. The Truman message said that American forces, which had advanced deep into the Soviet zone, would be pulled back to the zone boundaries—but on condition that the military commanders reached a satisfactory agreement giving road, rail and air access to American forces in Berlin. Stalin agreed.

Accordingly the American, British and Soviet military commands agreed on June 29 that the single railroad and highway from Magdeburg to Berlin should be used as the only land route for getting to Berlin from the west.

Gen. Lucius D. Clay, who represented the United States, wanted a corridor under American control along this route, but Soviet Marshal Zhukov refused. He said the Soviet authorities did not care what would be hauled along the route, or how many

trucks or trains would be used—and on this basis the westerners assented.

As for air traffic, Zhukov proposed, and the others agreed, that the main air lane for the Western Allies would also go from Magdeburg to Berlin, with one route of access from Frankfurt to Magdeburg, and the other from Hanover, in the British zone.

After the American troops had entered Berlin a third agreement made the Western Allies responsible for feeding and supplying the people in their sector of the city.

THESSE agreements were not so precise as they should have been; they were left to be clarified and strengthened by day-to-day and month-to-month usage, and a good deal was left to the presumed good faith of Russia as an ally in arms. But from the start the Russians showed clearly that they felt they had special rights all over Berlin.

In spite of the Western Allied occupation, and the division of Berlin into sectors, the Russians tried to keep in office a Soviet-sponsored municipal government for the entire city. When voters in the western sectors repudiated this Communist city government, the Russians tried to control the police in all four sectors, and claimed the right to veto every appointment to municipal office.

In the same way, they used their veto incessantly in the Kommandatura, the four-power body in charge of the city, so that effective four-power control became difficult and at times impossible.

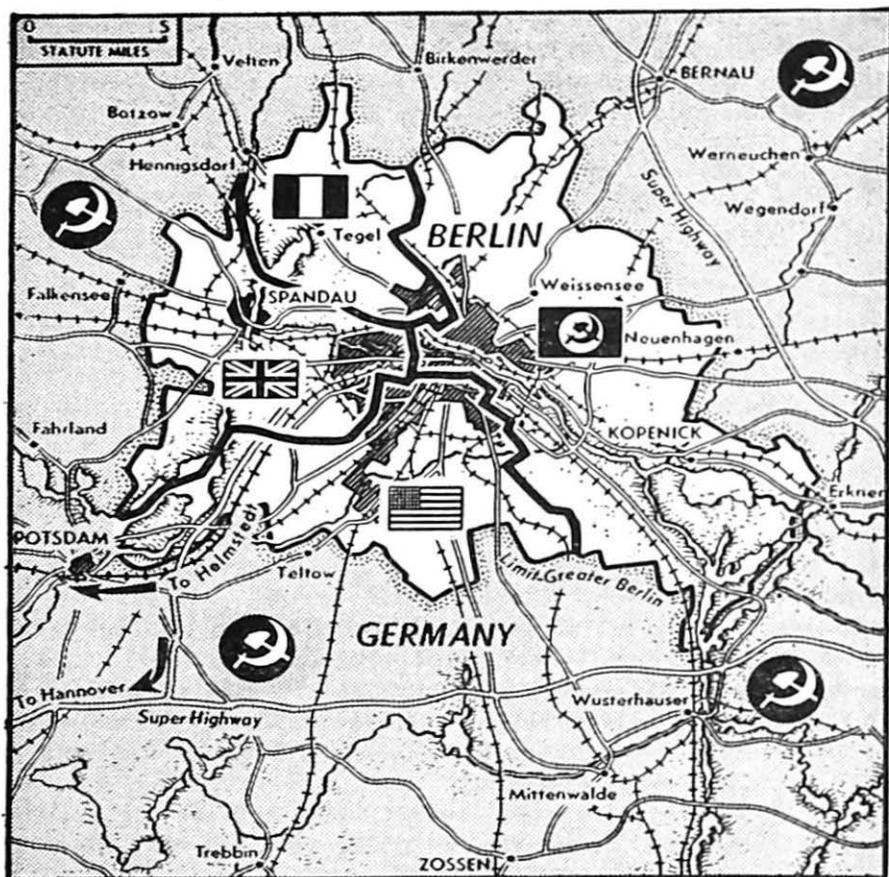
The Western Allies, in turn, made their own authority clear in their own sectors of the city. They pushed Soviet troops and officials out of municipal government offices in the western sectors. They brought in western ideas as well as food and fuel. By newspaper and radio they spread their democratic doctrines, not only throughout Berlin but into the surrounding Soviet territory.

Berlin, in short, soon became an arena of interallied rivalry; and all interallied relationships in Berlin were distorted by the wider East-West struggle over the prostrate body of Germany.

When the Second Armored Division took up its garrison duties, barges loaded with Soviet loot were passing in plain view along the Wannsee and other lakes in Berlin's chain of waterways. The Russians were dismantling factories and methodically stripping their zone of everything movable they wanted, although their share of reparations from Germany had not yet been decided.

They refused to send food from their zone into the western sectors of Berlin or into western Germany. They pulled a curtain of secrecy around their zone outside Berlin. They did all this, and more, in spite of the fact that President Truman, Prime Minister Attlee and Generalissimo Stalin had agreed at Potsdam, in July of 1945, to treat all of Germany as an economic unit.

AFTER ALMOST a year of vain protests from the West, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes proposed in June, 1946, that, if all four



Berlin is an island in a Soviet sea (shaded area the Russian zone of Germany)

powers were not willing to merge the economic life of their zones, those that were willing should do so. In December the British and Americans agreed to combine the economic administration of their zones, including the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, and about 45 million German people.

The British and Americans simply went ahead without the Russians in restoring normal life to the western zones. During 1947 they set up German state governments, with weak but gradually developing powers; they created a German economic authority for all the states in the combined zones; and during February and March of this year, and again in April and May, the Americans, British and French agreed in London to carry the process two steps further.

After one more futile attempt to get Soviet agreement they decided, first, to introduce a new currency soon in western Germany in place of the worthless German marks and the cigarettes that

had been used for money since the end of the war. They decided, secondly (and they announced this decision at once), to let the Germans in the western zones start writing a constitution for a political federation of all of western Germany.

THE RUSSIANS had always complained bitterly about the economic merger of the western zones. With the first news of the political merger, they promptly fired warning shots across the westerners' bows. In February and March they sent two formal protests against what they called the "dismemberment" of Germany. On March 20 their commander in Berlin, Marshal Vassili Sokolovsky, stalked out of the four-power allied control council meeting, saying that by setting up a western German government the Western Allies had forfeited whatever legal right they had to share in the control of Berlin.

The Russians reacted with more than words. They demanded the right to inspect every piece of Western Allied freight and every person entering or leaving Berlin. The Americans offered to show the Russians a passenger list and a freight manifest of each train, but no more.

During the spring American, British and French rail and barge traffic was interrupted; the automobile highway from the west was ordered closed "for repairs" to a bridge across the Elbe, and a creeping paralysis set in over the supply of the western sectors of Berlin.

On June 18 the Western Allies announced their currency reform for western Germany, although not for Berlin. The Russians promptly stopped all passenger train traffic between the western and eastern zones, halted all road traffic and demanded a special Soviet license for all water transport.

On June 22, after an angry four-power meeting, the Russians introduced a new currency into their zone and ordered it used in all parts of Berlin. The Western Allies countered by putting their new western zone money, with a special overstamp "B" for Berlin, into their sectors of the city. The bewildered Berliners paid for some transactions in the so-called "rublemarks" and some in western marks.

In London, on the same day, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin said the westerners would be perfectly willing to have the Soviet mark used as the only currency in Berlin, but only if its printing and distribution were controlled by all four powers. The Russians showed no interest.

The next day, June 23, the blow fell. On the plea of "technical difficulties" the Russians suspended all railroad passenger and freight traffic into Berlin, and all barge traffic as well. The 2,500,000 people in the western sectors of Berlin could be supplied only by air.

General Clay did not argue. Instead, he rushed an urgent appeal to the Army chiefs in Washington to send him more cargo planes.

II.

THE IDEA of feeding a huge city by air was just an H. G. Wells fantasy until June 27 of this year.

On that blazing hot Sunday a group of high officials met in Army Secretary Kenneth Royall's office in the Pentagon Building. Royall, of course, was there; so were other officials from the defense services; and so was Undersecretary of State Robert A. Lovett, who had known plenty about aircraft as Assistant Secretary of War for Air during the war.

The problem before them was clear-cut. The choice, as Lovett put it to them, was to abandon Berlin to the Russians, or to hang on. In itself Berlin was just a defenseless island in a Soviet sea. But to abandon it would condemn tens of thousands of anti-Communist Berliners to the labor camps of Siberia; would lead millions of other Germans to think we were pulling out of Europe; would weaken the resistance to communism in western Europe and would, in short, knock the props from under American foreign policy everywhere.

Could we hang on to Berlin? The military men weren't sure. They weren't sure how many planes it would take to keep the city fed and supplied, or how many big C-54's were available.

But they agreed without hesitation that the effort had to be made. They agreed that the blockade of Berlin had to be answered and countered by every cargo-carrying plane that could be mobilized.

The next morning the Pentagon conferees, with Secretaries Marshall, Forrestal and Royall, went to the White House to get presidential approval for their decision. They got it, and went to work. From the Pentagon orders went out to Hawaii, Alaska and Panama to rush C-54's to Germany. From the State Department a message flashed to Ambassador Lewis W. Douglas in London to ask the British what they could do.

BY THE NEXT DAY, a fleet of 39 C-54's was on its way to Germany, each plane able to carry 10 tons and to make at least three round trips a day from the Rhine airfields to Berlin. One squadron, on its way westward across the Pacific, was diverted in mid-air west of Hawaii and told to reverse course—for Germany!

In Frankfurt air crews arrived still wearing tropical uniforms, and shivered in the chilly north European weather. In the British zone of Berlin pleasure boats were ordered off the Havel Lake, so that big seaplanes from Hamburg could land their cargoes.

Near Tempelhof airfield gangs of Germans were put to work loading rubble onto 10-ton trucks, dumping a total of 40,000 truckloads on the airfield, crushing it to a depth of 18 inches with bulldozers, and coating it with asphalt from bombed-out streets to make a new 5500-foot runway.

Day and night the big C-54's and smaller C-47's landed at Tempelhof with their cargoes of flour, milk, bags of coal. Day after day

the total tonnage flown in grew more impressive—first only 300 tons a day, then, a month later, 3000 tons a day. The airlift came to be a miracle and a marvel. The airmen themselves were astonished at what they could do.

German civilians clambered up the wooden wall alongside Tempelhof to watch the great planes being unloaded. At the far end of the field crowds of Germans strained their eyes to watch from the platform of the Russian-controlled elevated railway.

THIS was the first response by the Western Allies—to keep the blockaded city fed from the air. Few air officers imagined, however, that it could be more than a stopgap for a few weeks. So the second response, in those early days of July, was to use high level diplomacy, by all three allied governments working together, to get the blockade lifted. On July 6 the three Western powers delivered similar notes to the Soviet embassies in their respective capitals.

The American note, kept secret until the State Department published it the other day, told the Russians that the blockade had caused an "extremely serious international situation" and was "a clear violation of existing agreements."

It insisted that the United States was occupying its part of Berlin with free access "as a matter of established right deriving from the defeat and surrender of Germany and confirmed by formal agreements among the principal allies."

The note warned the Russians that the United States would "not be induced by threats, pressures or other actions to abandon these rights." For this reason, and for the sake of the people of Berlin, the United States demanded that the blockade be lifted.

Finally, the note said the United States was always willing to settle the Berlin quarrel by negotiation, or by arbitration, impartial inquiry or any other method provided in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. But, the note said, the United States would not negotiate under duress, and not until the blockade had been lifted.

THE Soviet answer, dated July 14, was brutally frank. It claimed that "Berlin lies in the center of the Soviet zone and is a part of that zone"—a claim never before put forward officially.

Whatever rights the westerners may have had in Berlin, the Soviet note argued, the westerners have forfeited those rights by carrying out a separate currency reform in their zones, by circulating their new currency in Berlin, and by "the policy of the dismemberment of Germany"—namely, the policy adopted in London in March of setting up a German governmental authority in western Germany.

The Soviet army had conquered Berlin and also Vienna, the note said, and the Western armies were "given the opportunity to enter" those cities on condition that agreements elsewhere in Germany and Austria were observed. Since those agreements had been "violated,"

the Western Allies had only themselves to blame for the troubles inflicted on the people of Berlin.

The note complained bitterly of the western currency reform, saying that "the entire mass of currency notes which were canceled in the western zone threatened to pour into Berlin and the Soviet zone." It said Russia would not object to four-power negotiations, but only if they also covered broader questions of Germany. And it flatly refused to lift the blockade or to accept "any preliminary conditions whatsoever."

The Russians no longer pleaded "technical difficulties." In the western capitals the blast from the Kremlin made it clear that Russia wanted one or both of two things—to get the Western Allies out of Berlin altogether, and to reverse or delay the decision to set up a western German regime. Either one of these would be a smashing success for Soviet diplomacy and Soviet policy.

PERHAPS for this reason, American military men in Germany talked openly at this time of pushing an armed convoy up the Autobahn into Berlin, on the theory that the Russians would back down when confronted by a show of force. Former Maj. Gen. William J. Donovan of the wartime Office of Strategic Services talked in this strain at a press conference in Berlin, held under General Clay's auspices, and the tremors of excitement spread to Washington.

Neither Secretary Marshall nor the defense chiefs, nor the British and French governments, would have approved any impulsive action. General Clay hurried home for "consultations." The "telecom" flashed teletype messages onto big screens in embassies and government offices in Paris, London and Washington, in the intricate work of keeping three governments in step.

The three allies still had diplomatic cards to play, and the airlift was giving time to play them. They decided to take the Berlin issue to Stalin himself.

On July 30, the Western envoys in Moscow asked for an appointment with Foreign Minister Molotov; being told he was on vacation, they saw Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin. They handed him a memorandum stressing the "gravity" of the situation, reasserting their right to be in Berlin, and asking for an interview with Stalin.

The next evening they saw Molotov, who repeated that his government saw no point in discussing Berlin except within the framework of discussions about Germany as a whole.

Still, Molotov said he "hoped" Stalin would agree to talk. Two days later, on the evening of August 2, the three drove through the gate of the Kremlin for their meeting with Stalin.

III.

STALIN was affable when he had his first meeting with the American, British and French envoys on the night of August 2.

He was chatty and good-humored and, from the Soviet viewpoint, he had every reason to be. By springing the trap of the Berlin blockade six weeks earlier, he had given the West what looked like a clear choice—either to quit Berlin or to sidetrack the plans for setting up a separate government in western Germany.

The West's position, however, was stronger than seemed possible when Marshal Sokolovsky, in Berlin, had cut off all land traffic in June on the pretext of "technical difficulties."

The great airlift was showing unsuspected capacity. American and British cargo carriers were flying almost 4000 tons a day into Berlin, and the totals were mounting steadily. The 2,500,000 people of the western sectors were being fed, although thousands were out of work because factories were shutting down for lack of fuel.

The new runway at Tempelhof was almost finished. Airmen and ground crews alike were getting invaluable training. The air commanders in Germany now felt sure they could keep Berlin fed through the bad flying weather of the fall and winter.

Even more encouraging to the West was the spirit of the Germans in the blockaded western sectors. Day after day they held crowded mass meetings a few blocks from the Soviet part of the city, cheering every mention of the airlift and pledging resistance with a courage they had not shown since the occupation began. The blockade of Berlin was making new enemies for communism in Berlin and throughout western Germany.

AMBASSADOR WALTER BEDELL SMITH was conscious of these assets when he went to the Kremlin on August 2. As senior member of the three envoys, he read a brief but pungent statement to Stalin on behalf of all three governments.

He repeated the "unquestionable and absolute" right of the Western Allies to be in Berlin. He said that "they do not intend to be coerced by any means whatsoever into abandoning this right."

He reminded Stalin of the "extreme seriousness" with which the blockade was viewed by the three governments.

If the trouble really was "technical," Smith said, it could be settled easily after the lifting of the blockade, but if Russia was trying to push the Western Allies from Berlin, the attempt would fail.

Stalin answered emphatically that it was not his purpose to push the Westerners from Berlin, although, he added, they no longer had a legal right to be there. They no longer had the right, he argued, because of the decision to set up a western German government at Frankfurt and to circulate the new Western currency in Berlin.

THE Soviet position was this: that you could not set up a new government at Frankfurt covering three of the four parts of Germany and still share in the four-power control of all Germany from Berlin.

The Westerners assured Stalin that the proposed government at Frankfurt had never been intended as a central German government; and that to start setting it up now would in no way hamper a later agreement with the Russians covering the government of all of Germany.

The three envoys and Stalin agreed that it would be "desirable" to have a future four-power meeting to discuss the problems of Germany as a whole. The Westerners said, however, that they were not in a position to discuss what subjects should be taken up at such a meeting.

Toward the end of the two-hour interview, which Stalin made as friendly as he could, he asked whether the Westerners wanted to settle the Berlin matter then and there. If so, he said, he could agree to two things. The first was that the Soviet currency should replace all Western currency in Berlin, and simultaneously the blockade should be lifted.

The second—and perhaps the more significant—was that he would not insist upon postponement of the western German government as a condition of letting the trains reenter the city. He wanted the Western allies to know, however, of his "insistent desire" that the western German political decision be delayed.

The three envoys promised to refer Stalin's ideas back to their governments. They were moderately hopeful, and their reports of the talk with Stalin brought some hope to weary officials in Washington, London and Paris. Now the technical details had to be worked out with Molotov, who had been in the room during the meeting with his chief.

THE job assigned to the Western envoys was to write a formal agreement with Molotov which would lead to the lifting of the blockade. It turned out to be an exhausting and exasperating process. It required four long meetings with Molotov on August 6, 9, 12 and 16, one of them that lasted four hours; it also involved intricate day-and-night communication between Washington, London and Paris to keep the three governments in step on every point.

While Stalin had given genial assent to general principles, Molotov was stubborn and immovable when it came to details. More than that, Molotov seemed to the Westerners to go back on what his chief in the Kremlin had said.

For example, contrary to what Stalin had said on August 2, Molotov wanted to make the postponement of western German government a condition of lifting the blockade, and on August 9 tried to put his condition into a formal agreement.

As another example, Stalin talked of lifting "all transport restrictions"—namely, of lifting the blockade completely—as soon as the Soviet currency had been substituted for the Western currency in Berlin. But Molotov talked of lifting only those transport restrictions that had been imposed "after the announcement of currency reform in the western zones"—namely, after June 18.

This meant that the Russians might be willing to let the trains

reenter Berlin, but would still insist on inspecting every passenger and every piece of freight, licensing every bargeload of goods, and continuing all the other hampering restrictions imposed on Western Allied traffic between March 30 and June 18.

There was also a legal point at issue, a point which the Westerners regarded as basic. They contended they were in Berlin by "established right" under wartime agreements; the blockade was illegal because it violated that right. To Molotov, however, the Westerners' right to stay in Berlin would have to rest entirely on whatever new agreement might be reached with the Kremlin.

As to currency, the Westerners tried to make Molotov understand that there must be real four-power control over the issuance and use of Soviet marks circulating throughout Berlin. To Molotov, however, all the money issued for circulation in Berlin would have to be controlled by the Sovietized central bank outside the city in the Soviet zone of Germany.

IF MOLOTOV'S attitude meant anything more than just bargaining and stalling, it meant that the Russians were bent on controlling the life of Berlin whether the Western occupation troops stayed there or not.

If the Russians could maintain the blockade measures imposed before June 18, they could watch and control all Western Allied traffic to and from the city. If their central bank in their zone could have sole control of all Berlin currency, they could disrupt the economic life of the western sectors.

If Molotov could make it seem that the Westerners were in Berlin by grace of a new agreement with him, rather than by established and equal right, the whole legal position of the West would be undermined. The Russians could always reimpose their blockade whenever they thought or pretended that the new agreement was being violated.

Finally, if Molotov could force the Western Allies to delay their plans for western Germany, he would win an enormous political and propaganda triumph. It would be a cheap price to pay for a partial lifting of the blockade.

The Western governments, gloomily pondering the record of these wasted weeks in Moscow, began thinking of next steps. In the State Department, the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay, officials began restudying the Charter of the United Nations as a possible recourse in case all else failed. And they decided to ask for a second meeting with Stalin—to ask him some direct questions.

IV.

MOLOTOV'S position on a number of crucial points had seemed to contradict what Stalin had said on August 2, when he first saw the three western envoys in Moscow. On August 23, when Stalin received the Westerners for the second time, American Ambassador Bedell Smith tried to get clear and definite answers on two points.

The first was this: Was Stalin willing to lift the blockade completely? Or was he willing only to lift those restrictions that had been imposed after June 18, thus leaving the earlier blockade measures of April and May in full force?

Molotov, who, of course, was present, said the Soviet government would lift only the restrictions imposed after June 18. When the three envoys objected (according to the State Department version), "Stalin then suggested that it might be better to say 'the restrictions lately imposed,' and confirmed that if there were any imposed before that date they would also be lifted."

There had been restrictions, and serious ones, before June 18—among them the inspection of every passenger and every piece of baggage, the licensing of every bargeload of freight and the closing of the automobile highway for bridge "repairs." The Westerners thought Stalin's assurance was good, and they went on to the second point in dispute—the Berlin currency.

HOW DID STALIN propose to have the four powers control the money to be circulated in Berlin? He answered that the same kind of currency would circulate in Berlin as in the wider Soviet zone of Germany outside the city. The Soviet-zone bank that printed and issued the money, he said, would have to control its use in Berlin and in the Soviet zone alike; but—and this was important to the Westerners—a financial committee representing the four powers would work out arrangements for controlling the currency "and would supervise what the bank was doing."

This again was satisfactory to the Western envoys. They were willing to have Soviet-zone money used in Berlin, but they insisted on some four-power arrangement that would prevent the Russians from printing unlimited quantities, from flooding Berlin with uncontrolled paper money, from buying up enterprises in the Western sectors and disrupting the economic life of the city.

Stalin, in turn, now asked for assurance on the one point that bothered him more than any other: namely, the Western allies' plans made in London in the spring, for setting up a west German state.

The German politicians in the western zones were about to meet at Bonn on the Rhine on September 1 to start writing a west German constitution. Stalin was still bent on delaying these plans, although he had said he would not make delay a condition of lifting the Berlin blockade.

What he wanted now was a formal "indication" to the public that the plans would be postponed. The Westerners rejected this, and refused to budge. Next, Stalin suggested putting a couple of sentences into the public announcement of the Berlin settlement, saying something like this: "The question of the London decision was also discussed, including the formation of a western German government. The discussion took place in an atmosphere of mutual understanding."

Ambassador Smith was doubtful; he thought it would look like a condition imposed on the West. The three envoys gave no commitment to Stalin on this point beyond saying that they would consult their governments and let him know.

THE WESTERN ALLIES had not always seen eye to eye on the formation of a west German state. The French, for example, had never liked the idea; they had agreed to it in London with great reluctance and distaste, and they would not have shed tears if it had been postponed. Now Washington, London and Paris set out to see how far all three governments could go to satisfy Stalin.

The answer, as Smith got it from Washington, was just about what he had told Stalin at the first meeting on August 2. The Western governments were immovable. They would not refuse to discuss the German political problem with the Russians at some future time. But they would not tie their hands now, nor would they alter the London decisions as part of the present discussions over Berlin.

They would be willing to announce publicly that they still wanted a four-power agreement setting up a government for all of Germany, and would "make a sincere endeavor" to find out whether there was a "real prospect" of such agreement. In any case, the three governments repeated, the process of constitution-making in western Germany would not stand in the way of a later agreement with the Russians.

Meanwhile, on the basis of what had been said by Stalin, the three envoys and Molotov agreed at last on August 27 on the wording of instructions to be sent to the four commanders in Berlin.

THE INSTRUCTIONS were brief. They provided that the following steps be taken simultaneously "subject to agreement being reached among the four military governors for their practical implementation":

1. Restrictions were to be lifted from communications, transport and commerce between Berlin and the western zones and to and from the Soviet zone of Germany; and

2. The German currency of the Soviet zone was to be substituted for the Western currency in Berlin; the Soviet-zone bank that issued the money was to regulate its circulation within the

city, but a financial commission representing the four military governors was to be set up to prevent abuses.

Even this last agreement was not easy, in spite of the weeks of work that had gone into it. The Westerners reported home that they found Molotov and his aides "less pleasant" than before.

It had been planned to issue a public announcement when the instructions were finally sent to the military commanders; but Molotov now wanted to include a sentence which would, in effect, have delayed the forming of a west German state. There was a wrangle over this point, with the result that the four men could not agree on the wording of any public announcement at all.

NOT ONLY WAS Molotov more truculent, but the news from Berlin was ominous. On August 27, the very day when the instructions were agreed upon in Moscow, a mob of 4000 German Communists invaded the Berlin city hall in the Soviet sector and took possession of the chamber where the non-Communist City Council had been meeting.

The German police of the Soviet sector, always subject to Soviet orders, looked on but did not interfere. The next day a smaller crowd returned, and a Communist councilman let them in. The City Council was unable to function in its own building.

In Moscow the three envoys suggested to Molotov that he tell his military governor to keep a peaceful atmosphere for the coming talks in Berlin. Molotov snapped back that his military governor did not need such an order. The agreed "directive" to the four military governors finally left Moscow at midnight on August 30, with a deadline requiring a report by September 7.

The disputed points about the blockade seemed to have been settled in principle. Now it was up to the four military men to work out the details within a week. But the Western governments were uneasy.

Molotov's changed manner, and the continuing disorders in Berlin, had made them suspicious of a last-minute hitch. It was not long before their suspicions were dramatically confirmed.

V.

THE blockade had lasted 69 days when the four military governors met in Berlin on August 31.

The commanders were under orders from their governments to find "practical" ways of doing two things at the same time: (1) lifting the blockade, and (2) introducing Soviet zone currency into Berlin under four-power supervision.

The orders, approved by Stalin himself, were to get the job done in a week. But Marshal Sokolovsky, the Soviet commander, was in no hurry. He shrugged his shoulders when the Western generals reminded him of the one-week deadline.

He seemed to them to be interpreting the agreed orders as if the Moscow meetings with Stalin on August 2 and August 23 had never taken place.

He started by announcing that he would discuss lifting only a part of the blockade—namely, those restrictions imposed after June 18. Stalin had assured the Western envoys in Moscow that all restrictions would be removed.

The Soviet commander then argued that the proposed four-power commission to supervise the new currency would have no authority whatever over the operations of the Soviet-zone bank that printed and issued the money. Stalin had led the Western envoys to believe that the four-power commission would control the bank's operations, at least as far as Berlin was concerned.

Finally, Sokolovsky flabbergasted the Western generals by insisting on new Soviet restrictions on air traffic into Berlin. It sounded like a demand to stop the airlift before he would even discuss relaxing the land blockade.

TO THE Western commanders and their governments, this was the final proof of Soviet bad faith. The alarm bells rang loudly in every Western capital. The Soviet reversal could only mean that the Soviet leaders no longer wanted an agreement.

These suspicions were deepened on September 6, when Soviet sector police smashed into an American office in the Berlin City Hall and kidnaped 19 Western sector policemen—with the help of Soviet troops brandishing tommy-guns.

The Western commanders in Berlin asked for instructions from home after a week of wrangles with Sokolovsky. In Washington President Truman met with the National Security Council and decided to break off the negotiations, to tell the whole documented story to the world and to bring the case to the United Nations as a threat to the peace.

In London the cabinet voted to speed up recruiting, to delay demobilization, to improve civilian defense and to double the output of fighter planes. Already a powerful fleet of 90 American Superfortresses was assembled at wartime bases in England, ready for trouble.

The question now facing the Western governments was no longer whether to break off, but how. At first American officials thought the negotiations should be ended without further talk of any kind; the British and French persuaded them to make one last approach to Stalin before taking an irrevocable step.

The envoys in Moscow were told that Stalin was out of town and could not see them. They thereupon saw Molotov and handed him a stern memorandum asking whether the Soviet government would send a new set of instructions to Sokolovsky.

Molotov retorted that the military governors in Berlin should have been allowed to go on with their talks for two days, so that

they could send an agreed report of their discussions. The Westerners reminded him that the generals in Berlin had been disagreeing for a whole week and that a joint report had been proved impossible.

Four days later Molotov handed the Western envoys a long note, backing up every contention Sokolovsky had made, and reversing every crucial assurance Stalin had given. In this note the Soviet government officially demanded control of air as well as land traffic into Berlin, basing its stand on an alleged decision by the Allied control council in Berlin on November 30, 1945. (In fact, the Soviet commander had asked for such control back in 1945, but the other three commanders had rejected his demand.)

WHAT HAD happened to reverse the Soviet position? In the Western capitals two theories were discussed and pondered. One was that Stalin had been overruled by the 14-man Politburo, the supreme governing body of the Soviet Union. Once before, at the Yalta Conference of 1945, Stalin had made promises which his government promptly violated. Then, as now, there were rumors that his promises had been repudiated by the Politburo.

More believable was the second theory: That Stalin had lost interest in an agreement when he saw he could not delay the Westerners' plans in western Germany. In every document and every conversation, the Russians had pictured their blockade as a reply to the Westerners' London decisions to set up a west German state.

Molotov had tried, but failed, to make a trade—to lift the blockade on condition that the Westerners postpone their West German regime. Stalin had given the West a chance to delay its plans without losing face; he had expressed "insistent desire" for delay in western Germany, but without making it an outright condition. Still the Westerners had held their ground.

The record of events suggests that after the August 23 meeting with Stalin, and after the instructions on the subject of western Germany had come from the Western capitals, the Russians decided they had had enough. They concluded that they would get neither the abandonment of Berlin by the West nor the postponement of the west German constitutional convention scheduled for September 1.

In these circumstances, the Soviet Union could gain nothing from an agreement over Berlin. This, at least, was the most plausible explanation of (1) Stalin's gentle urgings on August 23 to delay the west German plans, (2) Molotov's "less pleasant" manner on August 27 when he heard the final answer from the Western governments, (3) the disorders in the Soviet sector of Berlin, and (4) Sokolovsky's reversals in the final Berlin talks.

WHETHER to send the Berlin case to the Security Council or the Assembly caused some inter-Allied disagreements in mid-September, but it was a minor matter easily resolved. The United

States persuaded the others that the Security Council would be better because it was the body set up to deal with threats to the peace, and because there could always be later recourse to the Assembly if the appeal to the Security Council failed.

Nobody expected the U. N. to settle the dispute directly, but at least the Western Allies felt the U. N. would bring them the support of opinion throughout the non-Soviet world. Perhaps, too, some third party could think of a way to bring the disputants together again.

On September 22 a brief note from the three governments was delivered to the Kremlin, putting the final question whether the blockade would be lifted. The Russians, as expected, rejected it, and in a long note dated September 25 sought to place all the blame on the Western Allies for the blockade and for the collapse of the negotiations.

The next day, September 26, the three governments announced their recourse to the Security Council. They also told the Soviet government of the move in a long note, prepared days in advance by officials of the three governments in London, giving the Western version of the negotiations. In Washington, the State Department published a 25,000-word report, containing the full texts of the most important Western and Soviet documents, for the world to judge.

Looking back over their records, officials in the Western capitals asked themselves whether they had left anything undone that might have averted the crisis or produced a settlement. They wondered again whether they should have pushed ahead in the spring with their political plans for western Germany; whether they might have foreseen the blockade months earlier and made their plans for it; whether they should have replied more sharply, or more softly, when the Russians first tried to inspect all passengers and freight entering Berlin at the end of March.

But what really made agreement impossible, they felt, was not anything the Western Allies had done or had not done. Discussion of other German issues was impossible as long as the Russians held the club of the blockade over the West. And agreement on Berlin was impossible, the Western governments were sure, as long as the Russians showed so little good will, good faith and honest dealing.

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