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The Berlin Wall

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The Berlin Wall was a mental and physical barrier, not only to the people of Berlin but to the entire German nation. The Soviets constructed the wall to stop the mass exodus of East Germans to the West German side of the city. The East Germans only wanted to have the same treatment that the West Germans were receiving but the Soviets were not ready to give in to the Americanized West. The East Germans would continue to suffer in a system that was politically and economically bringing the country to its knees. The wall was a sign of the Soviets power over the East Germans and they used this large concrete structure to strike fear into the rest of the World throughout the Cold War.

World War II ended in 1945 and Germany was split into zones by the Allied Forces. The British, Americans, Polish, French and Russians all claimed a zone and would take control of all political and economic activities in their zone. The British and Americans tried to help the struggling Germans get back on their feet and would merge their two zones into what became known as the Bi-Zone. They gave the German economy a boost and some political power. Soon the French would join in and they created the Tri-Zone. Eventually, they would name the Tri-Zone the Federal Republic of Germany. The East Germans were getting upset that the Russians were not helping them and asked for similar treatment. The Soviets would respond and give the East Germans limited powers in the new German Democratic Republic. The Soviets gave the East Germans very little as they made things very difficult for the people of their zone.¹

The Soviets traded half the City of Berlin, in 1948, for more territory in south east

¹Watson, Alan.; *The Germans: Who are they Now?* (edition q, inc., Chicago, 1993) pp. 71

Germany. Western Alliance then moved in making West Berlin part of the Federal Republic of Germany. As the economy continued to grow in West German, it became the envy of the East Germans and they wanted to have similar treatment. The struggle between the two sides would continue and problems would accelerate. The East Germans would suffer with the Soviet system and food and other supplies were limited. The presence of the West Germans and their productive economy was an attractive life and several people gave up their lives in East Germany and fled for the West.

On November 27, 1958, the Soviets decided they would no longer allow their skilled work force to defect to West Berlin and the rest of the Federal Republic of Germany. They offered the Berlin Ultimatum, which demanded that the Western Powers pull out of West Berlin and the city would be transformed into a “Free City” in six months. However, the Western powers knew that a “Free City” would fall to the East Germans and they refused the demands of the Soviets.² The West did not want to see all of the work that went into making West Berlin a success be destroyed because of the Soviets’ fears of an East German uprising. They would refuse the Soviets demands but they would try to come to a peaceful agreement to avoid a war with the Russians.

Three years would pass as several attempts to reach a peaceful agreement were made. However, none of these attempts would be successful and the East saw more of its people fleeing

²McAdams, A. James.; Germany Divided: From the Wall to Reunification. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993) pp. 18

to the West. Between January and August of 1961, there were about 160,000 people to sneak into West Berlin to find freedom and success. The Soviets couldn't take it any longer and on August 13, 1961 the East German government began to block off East Berlin from West Berlin. They put up barbed wire and antitank obstacles to deter the East Germans from sneaking into the West. They tore up some streets and the stones were used to construct barricades and tanks were placed in strategic positions. They cut off all transportation between East and West Berlin and the next day, under the watchful eyes of tanks from both sides, the Berlin Wall was built. The Berlin Wall was constructed of solid concrete segments that stood 4 meters high and had a concrete tube on top of it. The wall was 107 kilometers long and cut off one hundred ninety-two streets, of these ninety-seven lead into East Berlin and ninety-five into the rest of East Germany.

Outside Germany, people were believed that the wall ran through the center of the city but in actuality the wall surrounded West Berlin. This stopped East Germans from getting into West Berlin from anywhere in East Germany since the city lied nearly one hundred kilometers inside East Germany's border. The wall was well guarded and anyone attempting to go over the wall would be shot on sight. At the East German borders, guards were always on duty making sure that no one tried to defect to the West. Some people outside of Germany, those who were not well informed, believed that the wall divided the entire country. Physically it did not but in the minds of the German people it did Germany in half.

After the wall went up, East Germany introduced the New Economic System which showed some early success. They established criteria for factories to gage their efficiency and a

great deal of money put into automation to increase production. This new system was a success for a short time as East Germany became one of the most important economical regions in the Soviet Union. However, the East German economical downswing was too much for these short periods of success.³ As the years went on, the people in East Germany would have loved to have had what was available to the people in the West. They envied the Americanized West and wanted to be able to have the freedom and the ability to purchase items like “jeans, VCRs and V-6 cars.”⁴ However, East Germany was unwilling and unable to provide the standard of living that was available in the West. The closest the people of the East got to a Western life were the radio and television programs that were broadcasted from the west they could receive.⁵

The people of East Germany lived in a world of fear and depression. They were afraid to say or do anything that would be considered anticommunist for they would be arrested and taken away. Oppositions to East Germany’s government “were quickly and efficiently neutralized.”⁶ Those arrested for their beliefs were “punished brutally or subtly, in mental hospitals or through complicated campaigns designed to ruin reputations and destabilize fragile minds.”⁷ The Stasi, the secret service, were constantly watching for dissension in the people so they could eradicate it

³Watson; The Germans. pp. 71

⁴Fisher, Marc.; After the Wall: Germany, the Germans and the Burdens of History. (Simon&Schuster, New York, 1995) pp. 115

⁵Ibid. pp. 115

⁶Ibid. pp. 111

⁷Ibid. pp. 111

before it became a problem. This made people paranoid that they were constantly being watched, usually they were, as Stasi informants were everywhere.

In the early 1970's, the relations between the East and West improved and agreements were reached to improve trade and travel. Soon the people of East Germany were no longer suffering under the dictatorship of the Soviet Union. On November 9, 1989, the anniversary of Hitler taking power in Germany, became a day of rejoicing as the Berlin Wall was taken down. For the past few months, Hungary had opened its borders and East Germans followed a route through Hungary and Austria to West Germany. The East German regime was on the verge of collapse and the citizens saw their opportunity to finally get rid of the wall. The German nations would begin the long awaited first steps to reunification. After the wall came down going into East Germany was like stepping back in time. There were no technological advances in the Eastern half of the city as were present in the Federal Republic of Germany section of Berlin. The people were calling for reunification for a long time and finally they were about to receive it.

The wall created a physical and mental barrier for the German people. The East Germans were demoralized and never received the opportunity to come to terms with the atrocities of the Second World War. They did not get the chance to grieve or truly see what the Nazis had done during the Second World War. Before the wall came down it was easy to define Germany, capitalists on one side and communists on the other. However, when the wall fell it made the West Germans question their loyalty and patriotism. The East Germans were facing the “torn

psyches and shattered confidence”⁸ left by forty years of dictatorship. It was the Allied Forces that divided the country up after the war giving the Russians the opportunity to force their communist regime on the people of East Germany. The Allies are the reason the Cold War took place and they are to blame for the division of the German people.

The year after the wall came down, Germany made several steps toward a unified Germany. On July 2, both German states formed to an economic union and on September 12 the Two plus Four Settlement was signed in Moscow. Official reunification took place on October 3 and the reunified country held its first joint election on December 2. On October 3, the headline of the Berlin Newspaper read, “Adé DDR-Willkommen Deutschland! Nach 45 Jahren sind wir wieder ein Volk in einem geeinten Land.” This translates to, “Farewell GDR- Welcome Germany! After 45 years we are once again the People of one Nation.”⁹ Many people were extremely excited about the changes in the country and could hardly believe that Germany was whole once again. However, there were those that opposed the reunification from not only within Germany but around the World. People feared that Germany would rise to power and, like twice before, attempt to take on the World. However, Germany had been peaceful since the end of the Second World War and did not generate any kind of a threat to anyone. All the German people wanted was to be whole again. The horrors of the Second World War and the subsequent occupation by the Allied Forces broke Germans to the prospect of war. They had to

⁸Ibid. pp. 11

⁹Sevin, Dieter, Sevin, Ingrid, Bean, Katrin T.; *Wie Geht's?* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1995) pp.379

deal with a regime during World War II that lied to them constantly to keep them on side and then with the dissection of the nation when the war ended. They did not want to be engulfed in another war.

The Berlin Wall was a barrier created to stop the East Germans from fleeing into the freedom of the West. The wall acted as a sign of power and strength to the Soviets and a sign of oppression to the East Germans. The wall mentally tore the East Germans apart from their West German brothers and separated them from the rest of the world. When the wall came down, there were mixed reactions from the Germans on both side of the wall. Some people feared that the Soviet sympathizers in the East would try to take over and lead the country in a bad direction. Other people believe that the Americanized West was no longer German and that the Western ways would assimilate the East Germans into German-Americans. The wall has been down for ten years and Germany has made much progress but only time will tell if the new unified Germany can coexist on a National and International basis in the future.

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