

EXHIBITION



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ZONES OF OCCUPATION

The Iron Curtain

At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Big Three, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Harry Truman and Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, affirm that they will jointly govern the defeated German Reich. Germany is divided into zones of occupation and its capital, Berlin, is split into sectors. The victorious powers are each to administer their respective territories singlehandedly; they agree to decide on questions concerning Germany as a whole in an Allied Control Council in Berlin. As relations between the Soviets and the Western Allies rapidly deteriorate, however, so does cooperation within the Council. The boundary between the British and American zones on one side and the Soviet zone on the other becomes the line of demarcation between two opposed worldviews. Churchill has been expecting this from early on. He first described an "iron curtain" falling across the middle of Europe to divide the continent in a telegram to Truman only four days after the German surrender.



The situation particularly comes to a head in Berlin. The former capital of the German Reich is divided into four sectors, forcing the three victors and additionally France to work together especially closely in Berlin. But serious conflicts emerge in Berlin even within the first months of the four-power occupation. Beginning in spring 1946 the disputes escalate – both publicly in the form of propaganda battles and behind the scenes in numerous covert operations. Hopes for cooperation among the victorious powers are quickly dashed. Rather than peace reigning in Europe and the world, the Cold War now breaks out between East and West.



BLOCKADE

Rescue from on high

The confrontation between Western democracy and Soviet dictatorship is starkest in Berlin. In October 1946 Berlin holds city-wide free elections – the first since 1932 and the last until 1990. The voters express their clear support for the well-established tradition of social democracy and for the newly founded Christian Democratic Party. The Socialist Unity Party (SED), composed of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and those parts of the Social Democratic Party which have been forced to merge with it, receives only a fifth of the votes. However, the Soviets refuse to confirm the June 1947 election of Mayor Ernst Reuter. When West Germany introduces the German Mark (DM) as its new currency a year later, the commander of the Soviet garrison in Berlin opposes resolving the currency issue in Berlin.

When the three Western sectors then begin using the DM, Stalin reacts with a total blockade of all overland and water routes from the Western zones of Germany to the Western sectors of Berlin. Millions are affected as the

electricity supply and food deliveries from the surrounding region are also cut off. The East German transitional authority has checkpoints built around Berlin and at the boundaries between East and West within the city. The three Western sectors of the city are not entirely cut off from the surrounding area during the blockade; visits are allowed. However, anyone caught by the East German police smuggling supplies into West Berlin faces harsh penalties. US Military Governor Lucius D. Clay defies Soviet threats. Taking up the daring suggestion of a British officer, Clay arranges for the three Western sectors of Berlin to be supplied by air, effective immediately. The airlift begins. Airplanes loaded with supplies are soon landing every few minutes. In May 1949, the Soviets sheepishly give in, once again allowing access to roads to and from West Berlin.



CLASS WARFARE

Party policies against the people

The Socialist Unity Party, the ruling party of East Germany, decides in 1952 to implement socialism. In the years prior it has established its dictatorship in East Germany with Soviet backing. Germany has been divided into two states since 1949. As living conditions steadily improve in the West German Federal Republic, the ruling party in the East wages class warfare against its own population.

Farmers are pressed into agricultural collectives, private businesses are brought to their knees through ever-rising taxes and Christians are persecuted. When a ten percent increase in worker productivity is decreed in June 1953, construction workers take to the streets of East Berlin in protest. On 17 June the protest spreads throughout the GDR. Some one million people protest on the streets of more than 700 cities and towns, calling for free elections and an end to the dictatorship. Communist party rule is on the brink of collapse. Soviet tanks roll in and crush the protests; at least 55 people are killed.

The popular uprising comes as a shock to the ruling party. The party leadership initially reacts with concessions, which are meant to defuse the situation and improve the supply system. At the same time, however, State Security (better known as the Stasi) is being built up.

By 1958 the party feels reinvigorated. At the Fifth Party Congress it announces that it will continue implementing socialism in all sectors of society.

The party does not limit itself to ideological campaigns. Agriculture is forced to collectivize. Private business-people as well as trades people, bakers, butchers and many of the remaining private merchants are dispossessed or forced into production cooperatives. Christians are once again harassed in the GDR. Agricultural production falls sharply and the supply situation comes to a head. By the early 1960s, the party has led the GDR into another crisis.



WESTWARD

Exodus from the GDR

With the ruling party governing against the interest of its own population and living conditions decaying once more, the number of people who defect to the West rises sharply in the late 1950s. Their destination is West Germany, where freedom, democracy and the West German "economic miracle" await them. The decision to defect is especially common among the young and the well educated.

But reaching the West has been difficult for quite a while. The intra-German border has been sealed with barbed wire since 1952; checkpoints are strictly monitored. East German border police have also closed off the border surrounding Berlin. The border within the city, by contrast, though monitored, is not fully sealed thanks to the shared responsibility of all four Allied powers for Berlin. Several underground and city train lines cross the boundaries between East and West Berlin. Anyone who approaches the border clearly carrying luggage, however, risks being arrested.

Nonetheless, the Marienfelde Refugee Centre in West Berlin is soon filled beyond capacity. Some 12,000 refugees arrive in West Berlin per month in 1959, a number that rises by half in 1960. By the summer of 1961, up to 2,400 men, women and children per day are venturing a new start in the West with no more than a few suitcases.

Anyone who is recognized as a political refugee either receives a flat in West Berlin or is flown to West Germany. Because the Western Allies handle civilian air transport, the flight to West Germany is a safe one for defectors from the GDR. The demand by Soviet party head Nikita Khrushchev and GDR party General Secretary Walter Ulbricht to control air traffic to and from West Berlin is a transparent attempt to close this loophole.



CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL

13 AUGUST 1961

The time comes in the middle of the night between 12 and 13 August 1961: the lights go out around 1.05 am. The brightly illuminated Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of the unresolved question of Germany, suddenly plunges into the darkness of a balmy summer night. Visible only as silhouettes, armoured vehicles roll through the Classicist gate as uniformed soldiers form a cordon along the border between the central districts of Mitte and Tiergarten. In these moments armed GDR forces are deployed not only here but all around the three Western sectors of Berlin. Dragging barbed wire across streets, ruins and parks, they seal off the roughly 80 then existing official check-points.

Germans in East Berlin and the GDR are now permitted to cross the border to the Western sectors only with a special pass – for all intents and purposes, they are not allowed to cross it at all. By around 1.45 am all of West Berlin has been closed off and surrounded by armed guard posts.

From spring 1961 onward, the flood of refugees had posed an existential threat to the GDR. This is the argument GDR party leader Walter Ulbricht has used to convince Nikita Khrushchev that West Berlin should be fully sealed off. Party security head Erich Honecker perfectly disguises what is dubbed “Operation Rose”. Although the operation requires extensive preparation, involving thousands of soldiers, police officers and members of the “workers’ militias”, not a single detail of the imminent action reaches the public ahead of time. Scattered rumours draw the attention of the West German Intelligence Service. But political leaders in Bonn and West Berlin cannot imagine that the GDR would actually dare to violate the city’s four-power rule by closing off the border between the Eastern and Western sectors of Berlin.



REALPOLITIK

The Allies' reaction

The West is caught unaware by the building of the Wall. But West Berlin's three protecting powers see no reason for severe retaliation. Western leaders react coolly: US President John F. Kennedy goes sailing off Massachusetts, British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan goes hunting in Scotland and French President Charles de Gaulle relaxes in the Champagne region. All three view the closed border as no more than the embodiment of an existing political reality. As Kennedy succinctly puts it, “We’re going to do nothing now because there is no alternative except war.”

The Americans pay scrupulous attention to making sure their rights are not infringed upon. In a televised speech on the Berlin crisis on 25 July 1961, before the Wall is built, Kennedy signals to Khrushchev what the West would and would not accept. Indispensable for the US President are the presence of the Western Allies in West Berlin, unobstructed paths of access to and from West Berlin and the right of self-determination for the people of West Berlin. Kennedy’s speech

does not mention East Berlin. The Germans, however, are not prepared to accept the border closing. West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt writes to Washington: “Inactivity and pure defensiveness could elicit a crisis of confidence with regard to the Western powers.” In response to Brandt’s warning, Kennedy sends his vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson to Berlin, names Lucius D. Clay Special Presidential Envoy to Berlin and adds 1500 GIs to the US garrison in West Berlin. The UK and France also send military reinforcements. Tanks demonstrate the Allies’ protective presence. The Allies begin to regain the trust of West Berliners, especially when Kennedy visits the city in June 1963 and makes his famous proclamation “Ich bin ein Berliner.” But the radical alteration in the legal status of Berlin due to the building of the Wall is not officially laid down until the 1972 signing of the Four Power Agreement on Berlin.



DESPAIR

Suffering and yearning

The building of the Wall does not only split Berlin – it also divides families and friends. In the first days after 13 August there are still gaps in the barrier.

Thousands of East Berliners seize this opportunity. In the first twelve hours alone, three dozen young people reach freedom in the West by swimming across the Landwehrkanal, the Heidekampgraben and the Britzer Zweigkanal. In these early days, cemetery and factory walls along the border also offer relatively easy access to West Berlin. Escape becomes much more difficult beginning on 15 August 1961, when a concrete-and-brick barricade replaces the tangle of barbed wire in the city centre. Several dozen bricklayers conscripted into building the Wall manage to escape to freedom; numerous border guards also desert. Until 23 August 1961, West Berliners are able to drive into East Berlin if they show identification. But the GDR politburo

soon cuts off this privilege because many East Germans are escaping the GDR with smuggled West German IDs. For the next two and a half years the people of East and West Berlin live in almost total separation. Only letters and telegrams still make it across the border, always strictly monitored and often days late. Until the autumn of 1961 people crawl through sewer tunnels to the West, bravely trudging through faeces. As late as September 1961, well-coordinated groups make it across the border in broad daylight in some spots by squeezing through barbed wire that has been cut.

Harrowing scenes play out at the border: Young newlyweds in the West bid farewell to their parents in the East; fathers who've escaped see their wives and children for the last time for many years; fiancées and siblings must say their good-byes.



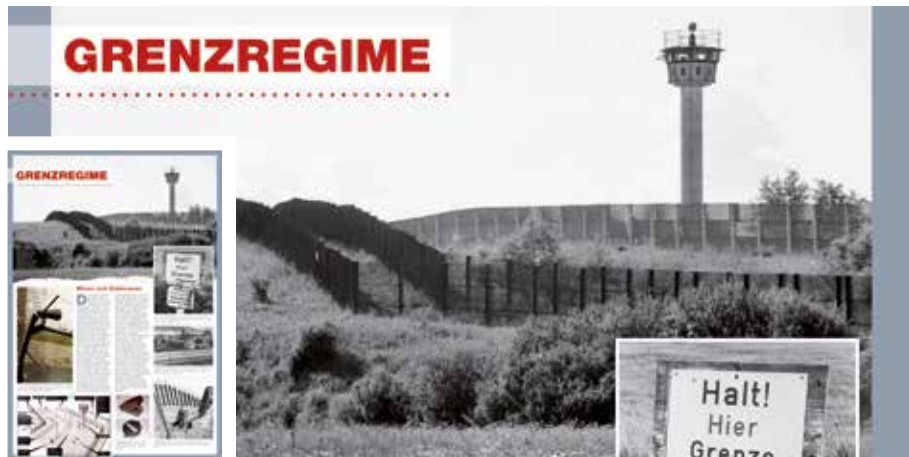
CLEARING SPACE

Free line of fire

To prevent escapes, the GDR establishes restricted zones on its side of the border. A 500-metre-wide strip is cleared along almost all of the border between West and East Germany beginning in 1952; residents are forced to resettle and their homes are torn down. The first mass relocation of 11,000 people takes place at that time, referred to within the party by the code name "Operation Vermin". Such an extensive border zone is not possible within Berlin. In some places, only a narrow street and two pavements lie between the houses of East and West Berlin – a total of little more than 15 metres. Until September East Berliners are able to escape by climbing down ropes from their windows or jumping into the nets of West Berlin fire fighters. Several people die in the attempt, and others are seriously injured.

In September 1961 the GDR border

police begin clearing the buildings along the Wall. Several thousand East Berliners lose their flats. Removal vans often pull up in front of the house door without warning. The first areas affected are Bernauer Straße in the Wedding district and Harzer Straße in the Treptow district, places where the outside walls of houses on the GDR side form the boundaries between East and West. From 1964 onward, border guards systematically create a "free line of fire": cleared buildings near the Wall are torn down. On Bernauer Straße only remains of buildings' ground floors with walled-over doors are left; on Harzer Straße entire rows of houses are soon completely levelled. Not only residences but also churches are demolished. The systematic clearance of the area near the Wall continues through the 1980s.



BORDER REGIME

Mine fields and Stalin's lawn

The GDR leadership systematically expands the fortifications surrounding West Berlin as well as on the border between West and East Germany. Wherever space allows, a five-kilometre-wide no-access zone is created, which can only be entered with a special identity card. Beginning in the autumn of 1961, border guard pioneers lay as many as 1.3 million Soviet-built antipersonnel mines along the border between East and West Germany. The mines are designed to maim victims' feet and legs without killing them instantaneously. Special targeted fragmentation mines are added beginning in 1970. Attached to the last fence on GDR territory, they are pointed eastwards. These automated weapons systems fire at anyone who triggers them. According to a secret report, "SM-70 injuries exhibited by border transgressors are either fatal or sufficiently grave to render said individuals incapable of traversing the security fence."

The presence of 60.000 of these deadly automated weapons systems makes up to 440 kilometres of the

border between East and West Germany practically impossible to cross; the GDR spends nearly 50 million marks on these weapons alone. Additional measures include trip wires, signal wires, lanterns and carpets of ten-centimeter-long steel spikes known as "Stalin's lawn". In the lingo of border guards these mats are called "surface obstacles". They are often installed on river banks and other sites "vulnerable to escape". Even in heavy shoes it is impossible to walk over "Stalin's lawn."

One year after 13 August 1961, thousands of kilometres of barbed wire and cinder block walls span the 155 kilometre border around West Berlin, making escape virtually impossible. Ten years later, almost all of the barbed wire has been replaced by massive concrete slab barricades and sharp metal fences. 60 percent of the border is further reinforced with trenches. There are more than 200 dog runs for specially trained guard dogs and nearly 250 watchtowers. On Soviet orders, however, minefields and self-firing weapons systems are not installed on the border to West Berlin.

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FIRING ORDER

The dead and the injured

Every person who tries to leave the GDR without official permission is risking death. The first of the estimated 1000 total casualties along the border between East and West Germany occur in 1949, three years before the border is sealed off with barbed wire and made practically impassable. With the building of the Berlin Wall, the last gap is closed. No "ordinary" citizen of the GDR is aware that the weapons of the border guards have no ammunition in the first days after the Wall is built: The GDR regime wants to avoid escalation as long as the Western powers' reaction to the Wall remains uncertain. Nine days after the Wall goes up, GDR leader Walter Ulbricht is confident that his wager has paid off and the West will not retaliate. He announces in the politburo: "We will fire on Germans who represent German imperialism. Anyone who provokes us will be fired upon!" The next morning, all border guards are issued live cartridges. A mere two days later, transport police

in Humboldthafen near the Reichstag open fire on 24-year-old tailor's apprentice Günter Litfin, killing him. From this point forward the order to fire is in effect; the order is not grounded in any single document, but rather exists in various versions. An order issued to border guards on 14 September 1961 proclaims: "Shots aimed at defectors seeking to avoid arrest by fleeing to West Germany are permitted after a warning shot has been issued." The GDR politburo's Operations Unit stipulates shortly thereafter: "Firearms are to be used against traitors and border transgressors." And Erich Honecker, Ulbricht's successor as party head, issues an unmistakable decree on 3 March 1974: "Firearms must continue to be used ruthlessly in the case of attempts to breach the border." The firing order stays in effect until early April 1989; the lifting of it, however, remains a closely guarded secret.

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LITTLE BERLIN

Mödlareuth in Thuringia

US soldiers stationed in Germany call this fifty-person village „Little Berlin“. Like a tiny version of the German capital, it becomes a symbol in miniature of the division of Germany. The border between East and West Germany runs right through this minuscule place.

The village of Mödlareuth am Tannbach has been a border town for centuries – one part of it lies in the region of Thuringia and the other part in Bavaria. But this border was long of little consequence for the village's inhabitants. They lived like any other German village community, with a school, a tavern and a men's choir. On Sundays the villagers attended church in the neighbouring Bavarian village of Töben.

When Thuringia is occupied by the Soviets after the Second World War and Bavaria by the Americans, life initially remains the same in the village, although one now needs to carry a pass. Even after the founding of the Federal

Republic of Germany and the GDR, Mödlareuth villagers are still allowed to cross the border. But in 1952 everything changes: the rulers of the GDR begin to fortify the border. The Eastern part of the village now lies in the "protective strip" – West Germans are not allowed to enter it at all, and even East Germans only with special permission. Villagers deemed politically unreliable are forcefully relocated. Step by step, the border in Mödlareuth is built up into an insurmountable barrier. In the mid-1960s the wooden fence is replaced by a 3.4 metre concrete wall similar to the one in Berlin. It serves not only as a barrier but also as a screen, as even waving to or greeting people on the other side of the border is forbidden. The people of Mödlareuth will have to wait 37 years before they are no longer separated by the Wall. When the Wall finally comes down, their joy is just as great in "Little Berlin" as in Berlin itself.



ESCAPES

Bravery in desperation

In violation of principles of human rights, the GDR regime does not permit its citizens to leave the country for the West. Applications for exit visas to relocate to the West are often denied, and the filing of such an application has negative career repercussions and leads to Stasi harassment. For many the only remaining option is to try to escape.

The motivations are multifarious: They include political repression, lack of economic prospects, and the desire to reunite with family. Just as varied are the methods of escape. Aspiring defectors drive heavy vehicles straight through border barricades, crawl through laboriously dug tunnels, take to the air in hot-air balloons or airplanes, and cross the Baltic Sea in rubber dinghies on surf boards or even by swimming. Many defect via neighbouring Eastern Bloc countries with falsified passports or are smuggled across the border in car boots. But the

largest group of those who escape to the West are what the Stasi call the "remainders" – those who receive permission to visit the West but never return from their visits.

Trying to escape is highly risky. Far more attempts fail than succeed. Those who are killed include Chris Gueffroy, shot dead in February 1989, and Winfried Freudenberg, whose improvised gas balloon crashes in March 1989. They are the last to die attempting to cross from Germany to Germany.





TRADE IN HUMAN BEINGS

Ransoming political prisoners

More than a quarter of a million men and women are imprisoned for political reasons in the GDR between the building and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Many serve lengthy sentences for attempts to flee to West Germany, for helping others flee or because of actual or alleged opposition to the government.

For one in every eight, a hope that was long spoken about only in whispers becomes a reality: West Germany buys their freedom. This "trade in human beings" begins in 1962 at the end of Adenauer's term as West German Chancellor, while Rainer Barzel is serving as Federal Minister for All-German Affairs. The Protestant churches in Germany play a vital role in establishing contacts. The first prisoner ransom is agreed on Christmas 1962 after arduous talks, which the lawyer Wolfgang Vogel leads on the East Berlin side. Twenty political prisoners and the same number of children are released. The price of their freedom is three rail carriages of fertiliser. But soon thereafter East Berlin drives the price up. While 40.000 DM per prisoner must be paid initially, the price per head rises to almost 100.000 DM by the 1980s. The rationale for the sum, which West Germany often must pay in the form of delivery of goods, is the cost of the education the prisoners have received in the GDR.

The selection of prisoners for ransom is problematic. While on the Eastern side Party General Secretary Honecker or Stasi head Erich Mielke decide personally in many cases, on the West

German side the decision falls to the Federal Ministry for Intra-German Relations. Ludwig Rehlinger, the responsible State Secretary, later writes: "We knew many names and stories through relatives and aid organizations. It was always clear that the GDR would only release very few prisoners. It thus primarily fell to us to decide on whose behalf we would make a particular effort. This was a very burdensome task."

By 1989 West Germany has purchased the freedom of 33.755 prisoners from Bautzen, Hoheneck and other notorious GDR prisons.

Exchanging agents on the Glienicke Bridge

The Glienicke Bridge is one of the best-known symbols of the Cold War. Across the steel structure spanning the Havel River between Berlin and Potsdam, agents are exchanged three times, a total of 38 people. They include Soviet nuclear spy Rudolf Abel; Gary Powers, the U2 pilot shot down over the USSR; and human rights activist Anatoly Sharansky. Adding to the legend of what the GDR calls the "Bridge of Unity", the bridge is closed to private traffic: From 1953 on, only the four Allies' military vehicles are permitted to cross it. Today a small museum in the Villa Schöningen on the Potsdam side commemorates this period.



"NORMALIZATION"

Regulated co-existence

The issue of the divided Germany appears to fade in significance in the 1970s. The outside world and ever more West Germans adjust to the country's division. There is talk of "normalization". A number of treaties regulating relations between East and West Germany contribute to this trend. These agreements culminate in the Basic Treaty, signed in December 1972, which proclaims that both sides "respect the independence of each of the two countries in matters domestic and foreign".

With this de facto recognition, however, West Germany forsakes neither the demand for reunification embedded in its Basic Law nor its call for citizenship for all Germans. Nevertheless, the Basic Treaty marks the end of West Germany's claim of the sole right to represent all Germans. The GDR promptly receives worldwide recognition. Both German states simultaneously gain United Nations membership in 1974.

Internally, West German governments now pursue a policy of step-by-step progress. This policy is intended to ameliorate the consequences of the division of Germany, improve the living conditions of East Germans and shore up the cohesion of the nation. In 1973 more than 3.5 million West Germans travel to East Berlin or elsewhere in the GDR, three times as many as in 1970. There are also early signs of improvement in the other direction: 40.000 East Germans below the age of retirement are allowed to visit the West in cases of "urgent family matters". The number of telephone conversations between East and West Germany, which was well below a million per year until 1970, skyrockets to more than 23 million by 1980. The GDR leadership, however, follows a policy of systematic ideological isolationism, not least due to the growing influence of Western television. West German correspondents, whose presence in East Berlin has been permitted since the mid-1970s, are strictly monitored.



LIVING WITH THE WALL

Living in the shadow of the border

In the East, border guards block off residents' view of the Wall as much as possible with screens and no-access zones. Things are different in West Berlin, where the Wall is integrated into daily life. Graffiti artists use it as a massive canvas, camping enthusiasts treat it as a weekend refuge and Kreuzberg bars run improvised beer gardens beside it – all as if there were no Wall. The perilous Wall running through the heart of this major city is soon of more interest to tourists than to those who live with it. The popular imagination of West Berlin focuses on the death strip only when news of another shooting comes. Because the actual barricades are set a few metres back into the Eastern zone, there are lawless zones in the middle of the city which West Berlin police are not permitted to enter. Numerous illegal buildings go up in these areas – they will remain standing until 1990, and some of them still exist today in a legalized form.

Growing up in the shadow of the Wall, West Berlin children play "border

police and defector" rather than cops and robbers. Their games mimic reality so closely that the "defector" is often "shot dead". Children process the inhumanity unconsciously, adults often not at all. But people only appear to have adjusted to the new reality. In truth many of them suffer from what psychiatrists and neurologists call "Wall sickness". This is a condition marked by psychosomatic disorders, often accompanied by depression and the feeling of being "walled in". After the building of the Wall, West Berlin is known for one of the highest suicide rates of any city in the world. The rate of suicide and attempted suicide is, however, even higher in East Berlin.



REVOLUTION

"We are the people!"

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms change the world. In the West they awaken hope for an end to the arms race, in the East for democratization. But the GDR regime has a low opinion of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika campaigns. A dispirited mood prevails in the economically depressed GDR. In May 1989 opposition forces prove that results of the recently held local elections have been tampered with. Government leaders respond with wilful ignorance and repression. The number of applications for exit visas climbs. In the summer thousands decide to take a one-way holiday. Some travel to Hungary, where the Iron Curtain has become permeable along the border with Austria, while others occupy the West German embassies in Prague and Warsaw. When they are allowed to travel onwards to the West as the East German Party leadership obliviously celebrates the 40th anniversary of the GDR, protests blossom into a mass movement. The words of visiting Head of State Mikhail Gorbachev, "Life punishes those who come too late,"

now become a beacon of hope. Hundreds of thousands take to the streets in Leipzig, Berlin and other cities. The slogan of this peaceful revolution is "we are the people." New political configurations form. Other political parties break away from the ruling SED, which in turn removes Honecker from power. But his successor Egon Krenz has little to offer in response to the momentum of the unfolding events. To temper the growing pressure on them, the new state and party leadership decide to issue new regulations permitting travel to the West.





THE FALL OF THE WALL

9 November 1989

At exactly 6.53 pm, at the international press centre in East Berlin, politburo member Günter Schabowski announces the decision of the GDR leadership "to implement a regulation today that allows every citizen of the German Democratic Republic to leave through border crossings of the GDR". In response to a journalist's question about when the new travel regulation will go into effect, Schabowski leafs through his papers and answers erroneously, "immediately, without delay".

With these words, party functionary Schabowski opens the floodgates. As soon as Western news agencies have broadcast the surprising announcement, countless East Berliners begin streaming towards the border checkpoints. By 9 pm, Trabants and Wartburgs are backed up along Bornholmer Straße. Having received no orders, the responsible border officer does not know how to reply to the chorus of calls for the checkpoint to be opened.

At the Bundestag in Bonn, MPs rise from their seats and strike up the German national anthem. The strains of "unity and justice and freedom" have barely faded away when the first East Berliners receive permission to cross the Bornholmer Straße border.

One by one, the other border checkpoints open, including the famed Checkpoint Charlie. Honecker's successor Egon Krenz will later say that the pressure was simply too great to withstand.

Normal life grinds to a halt in Berlin. Hundreds of thousands of people from both sides of the city celebrate at the checkpoints, on the Kurfürstendamm and in front of the Brandenburg Gate, the symbol of the division of Germany. After 28 years, the Wall has fallen.

Only a year later, the GDR will no longer exist: Germany is reunited in peace and freedom.



PROCESSING THE PAST

Criminal trials and remembrance

As a matter of principle, injustices that have been committed in the GDR must be punished according to GDR criminal law. One of the most important principles of the rule of law is the prohibition against what is known as retroactive jurisdiction. But how is the reunited Germany to punish those who killed people at the intra-German border? They were not acting in violation of GDR law; on the contrary, they were following clear orders.

In order to hold the perpetrators of these crimes responsible for their actions, the Federal Court of Justice draws on a principle set forth by legal scholar Gustav Radbruch. According to Radbruch, codified law is not applicable when it fundamentally clashes with principles of human rights – and the violent destruction of a human life is the ultimate human rights violation.

More than 2000 investigations of deadly shootings at the intra-German border are carried out. Some 300 people are convicted of crimes at the border, but only 30 perpetrators must actually serve prison sentences.

Other than these border shootings, only ten people in total are sentenced to prison for the injustices of the GDR. They include Egon Krenz, Heinz Keßler and Günter Schabowski, all of whom, as heads of the state and the party, bore a share of the responsibility for the shootings at the Wall. The trials of many key figures, such as party

head Erich Honecker and Stasi boss Erich Mielke, are discontinued because the accused are deemed unfit to stand trial according to the criteria of a state based on the rule of law. 2005 marks the conclusion of legal reckoning with the injustices of the GDR: At this point all crimes except for murder in the narrow sense fall under the statute of limitations.

"What we wanted was justice and what we got was the rule of law," the disillusioned GDR civil rights activist Bärbel Bohley remarks on the German legal system's grappling with GDR injustices. But despite legitimate criticism, criminal trials have made an important contribution to bringing to light the injustices of the GDR.

What now remains – along with the far from concluded process of scholarly research on the East German state and its injustices – is remembrance. Numerous sites are devoted to the task of keeping the memory of the inhumane East German regime and its victims alive, and thereby educating the public about political history. These include the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Straße, the Memorial to the Division of Germany at the Helmstedt-Marienborn checkpoint, the open-air border museum in Mödla-reuth and countless other large and small memorials and museums in Berlin and along the onetime border between East and West Germany.





REMEMBERING

A permanent end to dictatorship

Axel Springer laid the foundations for his publishing house directly on the border to the Soviet sector of Berlin. A visionary thinker, Springer was deeply convinced that the unnatural division of Germany would not stand the test of time. The publisher stayed put two years later when building crews erected the Wall right at the edge of the publishing house's property. Axel Springer and his publishing house's editors, who advocated for German unity for decades, were ultimately vindicated: After 28 long years the Wall collapsed in the throes of a peaceful revolution.

Nearly a generation has passed since that fateful day in 1989. The sufferings caused by the country's division, the story of how this division ended, the joy that the fall of the Wall bestowed in the memorable November of 1989: all these things are gradually fading from Germany's consciousness.

The Axel Springer Verlag is dedicated to working to preserve these memories. Also committed to this goal is the Foundation for the Study of the SED Dictatorship, which engages with the history and consequences of communist dictatorships, the division of Germany and Europe as well as unification. Founded by the German Bundestag in 1998, it has since provided more than 31 million euro in funding to some 2200 projects throughout Germany and thus played an important role in combating the idealization of the GDR. For the exhibition "The Wall", the Foundation worked in partnership with the newspapers BILD and Die Welt, which share its devotion to the goal of ensuring that dictatorship never returns.

The exhibition "The Wall: A border through Germany", was produced by the Foundation for the Study of the SED Dictatorship and the newspapers BILD and Die Welt.

Ralf Georg Reuth (BILD) and Sven Felix Kellerhoff (Die Welt) were responsible for research of images, text writing and editing; Ulrich Mähler (Foundation for the Study of the SED Dictatorship) led the project.

Barbara Boettcher-Hillen (BILD) was responsible for project conception and design, and Thomas Klemm (Agentur für Gestaltung und Realisierung, Leipzig) for implementing the design.

Unless otherwise noted, photographs used in the exhibition are from ullstein bild or from the BILD photographic archives.

Jim Dick produced the graphics and maps.

Monika Gehrmann and Tanja Belli from the BILD photographic editorial team helped provide the images.

Accompanying educational material is available free of charge from

www.stiftung-aufarbeitung.de/DieMauer

