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**People of the World, Look at this City!” – Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter’s Speech on  
the Berlin Blockade**

- People of the World, Look at this City!” – Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter's Speech on the Berlin Blockade (September 9, 1948), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:audio-5007>, October 23, 2024.

Born in 1889 Ernst Reuter was a German politician best known for being mayor of West Berlin from 1951-1953. He was a career politician serving during the entirety of the Weimar Republic before fleeing Germany after Hitler rose to power. At the end of WW2 Reuter returned to politics and became a city councilor for West Berlin. On June 24th, 1948 the western sector was put under a blockade by the Soviets and was cut off from West Germany and food and supplies that had come from the West. Despite being a socialist he had a close relationship with the Americans especially with General Lucius D. Clay and they worked together to help Berliners survive the blockade. Case in point when Clay expressed his reservations about the ability of West Berliners to put up with the blockade Reuter replied “General, I can assure you, and I do assure you, that the Berliners will take it.”<sup>1</sup> His political and moral leadership helped the people of Berlin withstand the Soviet blockade from 1948–49 and face the grave effects of the division and isolation faced by West Berlin.

Case in point, on September 9th, 1948 Reuter led a massive demonstration of 300,000 and delivered a speech on the steps of the Reichstag. The demonstration came about after communists from East Berlin at the behest of the Soviets raided and

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<sup>1</sup> Grose, Peter. “The Boss of Occupied Germany: General Lucius D. Clay.” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 4 (1998): 179–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049040>.

took over city hall which was in the Eastern sector. In response anti-communist leaders including Reuter in Berlin called for a demonstration against the seizure, 300,000+ Berliners -largely from the Western sector- responded and amassed in front of the Reichstag. In his speech, Reuter rejects any compromise with the Soviets and implores the people and the nation of the world to "look at this city. You cannot abandon this city and its people. You should not abandon it." In the aftermath of the speech, demonstrators marched into the soviet sector to protest the Soviet blockade where they were met by East German police and Soviet soldiers. In the ensuing confrontation, Berliners began throwing stones and chanting against the Soviets and their blockade. One German climbed the Brandenburg Gate and ripped down the Soviet flag, tossing it to the ground below. The flag was ripped and burned by the demonstrators below. In response to the growing tensions, shots rang out as Soviet troops and East German police tried to disperse the protestors resulting in the death of several Berliners. Reuter's Speech and the ensuing demonstration and deaths of Berliners at the hands of the East further galvanized support amongst Berliners towards the West and soured Berlin-Soviet relations. Moreover, the speech served as a launching point for Reuter who was gaining popularity since the blockade started. In late 1948 Reuter would carry that popularity into mayorship as he would become mayor of West Berlin and hold the position until he died in 1953.



City Councilor Ernst Reuter Appeals to the "People of the World" (September 9, 1948), published in: German History in Documents and Images, [https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1009](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1009), November 1, 2024. (For full transcript of speech see citation above)

### **Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order**

Richard Kasisehke. "Russian Soldiers and Sector Police Fire on Hostile Demonstrators: One Killed in Berlin Row." *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), Sep 10,

1948. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/russian-soldiers-sector-police-fire-on-hostile/docview/152051765/se-2>.

This Newspaper article was written the day after the Reuter speech and is centered around the attack by Russian soldiers and East German police on the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators who had demonstrated against the soviets and listened to Reuter's speech. This attack on the demonstrators left dozens wounded and resulted in one Berliner dying of a gunshot wound. The article explains the events that led to the Soviet military being called in and the aftermath of the assault on the demonstrators. The article doesn't mention Reuter until the end where it explains how Reuter was receiving cheers and applause when he stood up to deliver his speech. The article includes an excerpt from his speech where he disparages the Soviet Union and declares that Berliners will continue to fight against the "Communists until the power of darkness is broken and smashed.

"Anger Marchers." Newsweek, Sep 20, 1948, 36-36, 38,  
<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/anger-marchers/docview/1843941076/se-2>.

This Newsweek article written a week after Reuter gave his speech gives a description of the events that occurred on September 9th in Berlin -the day Reuter delivered his speech. The article compliments Reuter and his fellow speakers for being able to amass such a large crowd of demonstrators saying "even Hitler, they said, had seldom drawn such a crowd." The excerpt from Reuter's speech the article includes is a moment where Reuter criticizes the actions of Soviet Commandant Maj. Gen. Alexander Kotikoff for his failure to help Berlin police who were attacked by Soviet Sympathizers. The article suggests Reuter is criticizing Soviet command and authority as whole when

they quote a part in his speech where he says "What Russian promises are really worth is proved by the broken word of General Koitkoff!" The article continues on to describe the events that followed including the demonstrators being attacked by the Soviet army and a Berliner being killed.

"Berlin Protests Reds' Purge of City Officials." New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962), Sep 21, 1948. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/berlin-protests-reds-purge-city-officials/docview/1327477890/se-2>.

This relatively short article from the New York Herald Tribune references the demonstration Reuter delivered his speech at but its main focus is the political fallout in Berlin that occurred as a result of the demonstration on September 9th. The article covers a passed Berlin city assembly resolution that strongly protested the purges of non-communist officials in the eastern sector. In addition the article discusses the developing hostage situation as the Soviets military government decided to sentence those it arrested for their participation in the September 9th demonstrations to 25 years hard labor. The article explains these prisoners were considered hostages and would be released on the condition that Ernst Reuter was turned over to the Soviets. The Soviets wanted Reuter so he could stand trial for being as the Soviets saw it a "Fascist provocateur" since he was the leader and main speaker of the September 9th demonstrations.

Serge Schemann, Special to The New York Times. "EVOLUTION IN EUROPE; in Last Hours of 2 Germanys: Awaiting Unity and Revelry." New York Times, Oct 02, 1990, Late Edition (East Coast).

<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/evolution-europe-last-hours-2-germanys-awaitin-g/docview/427821215/se-2>.

This article describes the hours just before Germany was unified in 1990 and looks back at the history of both east and west Germany in broad strokes to see how unification eventually became a reality. The article describes the growing number of Germans amassing around the Reichstag and here the article describes major historical events that Reichstag played host to. From Kaiser Wilhelm abdication to the Soviets raising of their flag over the building in WW2 here the article mentions how "it was here, too, in 1948, during the blockade of West Berlin by Communist forces, that Mayor Ernst Reuter appealed to the world, "You peoples of the world, look upon this city." There is no other mention of Reuter and his speech at the Reichstag for the rest of the article, afterwards the article describes the events of the prior few years that made unification possible.

Mitchell, Pat and Isaacs, Jeremy, *Cold War*. Episode 4 "Berlin" Aired 1998, CNN, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-qu7Qs8410>

In episode 4 of this 24 episode documentary series of the Cold War produced by CNN the topic for this episode was Berlin, specifically the Berlin blockade and airlift. Starting in 1947 the documentary follows the growing divisions between the Soviets and the rest of the allies which created the conditions that led to the Soviets to enact the Berlin Blockade. The rest of the documentary deals with the Berlin airlift and life for the citizens of Berlin. The documentary dedicates significant time to Ernst Reuter providing background information like his upbringing and political experiences before the blockade in Berlin. Thirty minutes into the documentary the build up to and events of the

September 9th demonstrations are covered and a clip from Reuter's speech is played. The clip of Reuter's speech shown is the famous portion where he appeals to the world and asks them to "look upon this city! You cannot, you must not, forsake us." Testimony from Edzard Reuter (Ernst's son) is also included, Edzard provides additional context and background to the events of September 9th and he also gives insight into how Ernst felt emotionally about the situation facing Berlin.