

# The Berlin blockade, 1948-1949

By the end of this spread you should be able to:  
 1 explain the reasons for a the breakdown of co-operation in Germany between the Western Allies and the USSR b the Soviet blockade of Berlin  
 2 describe the Western response to the blockade

## Democracy

The USSR

- 1 gave political authority in its zone to the minority Communists.
- 2 tried to force the Socialist majority elected to run Berlin city council to merge with the Communists. Socialists refused with Western support.
- 3 blocked Western attempts to create democracy throughout Germany.

## Reconstruction

- 1 The war left Germany devastated. Food and fuel were scarce. Thousands were homeless.
- 2 The USA and Britain wanted to help Germany recover its prosperity as quickly as possible.
- 3 The USSR
  - a objected because it wanted a weak Germany
  - b refused to allow its zone to trade with the other three.

## From co-operation to conflict

### Allied agreements, 1945

- 1 Divide Germany into four zones of occupation (fig. 1). Run it through a Joint Allied Control Commission.
- 2 Divide Berlin into four zones. Run it jointly (although it was in the Soviet zone. Fig. 1).
- 3 Keep Germany as one country:
  - a remove the Nazis
  - b hold free elections
  - c sign a peace treaty with the new government.

### Points of conflict, 1945-1947

### Reparations

In 1946 the Western Allies stopped giving the USSR reparations from their zones (page 51).

### Berlin

- 1 Within the Soviet zone (fig.1). Soviet troops able to control all access.
- 2 Western Allies allowed access to their sectors by road, rail, canal, and air 'corridors'.
- 3 The USSR believed the Western Allies had no right to be in Berlin. It saw their presence as a threat because
  - a they had a base inside the Soviet zone
  - b the Capitalist way of life was on show there.
- 4 Western Allies wanted to be there
  - a to prevent the USSR controlling the capital
  - b to observe Soviet activity behind the Iron Curtain.

Fig. 1 Germany, 1945-49



- 1 Between 1945 and 1947, what factors contributed to the rise in tension in Germany between the Western Allies and the USSR?
- 2 Look at the actions taken by the Western Allies and the USSR between January and 24 June 1948. In each case
  - a Why would one side have objected?
  - b How would the other have justified its action?
- 3 Why did Berlin become the focus of the dispute between the USSR and the Western Allies in 1948?

## Towards a crisis, 1948

### Western Allies

#### Attitudes

- 1 Frustrated by the Soviet refusal to co-operate towards
  - a economic revival, including a much-needed new currency
  - b setting up of democracy.
- 2 Decide to develop these in their own zones.

#### Actions

**January** Merge US and British zones into one economic unit (the Bizone)

**April 1** include Western zones in OEEC and Marshall Plan (page 55)

**June 1** Announce plans (with France) to create a West German state

**June 18** Introduce new currency into Western zones

**June 23** Introduce new currency into Western sectors of Berlin

### USSR

#### Attitudes

Fears that

- 1 a strong, democratic, united Germany will be hostile
- 2 any new 'Western' currency will spread into the Soviet zone and undermine Soviet control of economic life.

#### Actions

**March** Representative walks out of the Allied Control Commission complaining that Western attitudes make it unworkable

**April** Troops begin to hold up and search road and rail traffic entering Berlin from the Western zones.

**June 23** Introduces its own new currency into Soviet zone including Berlin

**June 24** Accuses West of interference in its zone. Cuts off all road, rail, and canal traffic into Western sectors of Berlin.

## Blockade and airlift, 1948-1949

### Soviet aims

To force the Western Allies

- 1 to pull out of their sectors by starving West Berlin into surrender
- 2 to abandon their plans for the separate development of their German zones.

### Western options

- 1 Abandon Berlin. The Americans and British agreed they could not do this because it meant:
  - a handing two million West Berliners over to Communist rule
  - b losing their only base behind the Iron Curtain
  - c opening the way for Soviet domination of Western Germany.
- 2 Send troops to force the routes open again. This might mean war with the USSR.
- 3 try to supply West Berlin by air. The USSR could stop this only if it shot down the planes.

### The airlift

- 1 The Americans and British organized a round-the-clock airlift of essential supplies such as food, fuel, medicines.
- 2 In 11 months a total of 275,000 flights delivered an average of 4000 tonnes of supplies per day.
- 3 As a warning to the USSR, the USA stationed B-29 aircraft capable of carrying atomic bombs in Britain.
- 4 Despite shortages and hardship, West Berliners supported the Western Allies and rejected Soviet pressure to become part of one city under a Communist council.
- 5 On 12 May 1949 the USSR reopened the land routes to Berlin.