

# 7 THE BERLIN WALL



## Key Issue

Why was Berlin once again the focus of the Cold War?

### EAST BERLIN

After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the USSR faced less open opposition in Europe, although many eastern Europeans did not want to live behind the Iron Curtain. However, there was one place where they could leave, and that was through East Berlin.

East Berlin was a problem for the USSR. In 1953, building workers had gone on strike when the communist government increased the work they had to do by 10 per cent. As the strike spread, people demonstrated not only against their communist government but also against the USSR.

These demonstrations spread to East Germany and the police could not control them. After two

days, Soviet tanks moved onto the streets of Berlin and ended the disturbances. Crowds shouted, 'Ivan, go home'.

The revolt was over but the problem of East Berlin did not go away. It was the one place in eastern Europe where people in communist countries had easy contact with people in the West. East Berliners could see the living standards of West Berliners; they could see what was on sale in the shops – and they were envious.

### EAST BERLIN EXODUS

Ever since the Berlin Airlift, people had been leaving East Germany to live in the west. The total East German population was about 20 million; from 1949 onwards, over 2000 of them were leaving every day.

Communist soldiers patrolled the border between East and West Germany to stop people leaving. However, in Berlin, it was easy to get to the West. Every day, Berliners crossed the city to go to work or visit relatives. Many simply never returned.

Khrushchev wanted to solve this problem with a German peace treaty. In 1958, he demanded that all

foreign troops should be pulled out of Berlin. The West believed this was part of a plan to make West Berlin part of East Germany – and therefore communist. They refused to agree.

Meanwhile, in Berlin, the refugees increased. In 1960, 199,000 East Germans left their country to live in the West. In the first six months of 1961, another 103,000 left. In August, over 3000 refugees a day were reaching West Berlin.

It was bad for communist propaganda that so many people seemed to prefer capitalism to communism. Even worse, East Germany could not afford to lose all these people, especially as many of them were skilled workers.

Khrushchev had hoped to reach an agreement over Berlin at the 1960 **summit meeting**. When talks collapsed, the USSR looked for a different solution to the problem of East Berlin.

### THE BERLIN WALL (1961)

Just after midnight on 13 August 1961, the East German government took action. Police sealed off most of the crossing points in Berlin with a barrier of barbed wire. On 17 August, communist troops began to build a wall of concrete blocks. Anyone trying to escape was shot. Four died in the first two months.

Western leaders protested but there was little they could do. Extra American troops and British tanks were sent to West Berlin – but the wall stayed. To the outside world, it looked as if the USSR had won.

Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' had become real. In later years, West Berlin became a symbol of the resistance to the spread of communist oppression.

President Kennedy visited it in 1963. His eloquent speech there gave hope to those trapped on the communist side of the Wall (see Source A).

The West Berlin crowd went wild. On the other side of the wall, East Germans cheered and someone threw a bouquet over the wall.

## A SOURCE

In 1963, President Kennedy told West Berliners.

*There are many people in the world who really don't understand what is the great issue between the free world and the communist world.*

*Let them come to Berlin!*

*There are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the communists.*

*Let them come to Berlin!*

*All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin. Therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words 'Ich bin ein Berliner' [I am a Berliner].*

## B SOURCE

An American cartoon of the time: 'See how many are staying on our side'.



Explain how the following affected relations between the USA and USSR. Write a few sentences under each of the following headings:

- The 20th Party Congress, 1956
- The Hungarian Uprising
- Peaceful coexistence
- The Berlin Wall.



This East Berlin frontier guard leaps to freedom in West Berlin, August 1961.