

The American Mercury

BEHIND THE SCENES IN BERLIN

BY

FRANK L. KLUCKHOHN

AFTER the collapse of Germany, but before the defeat of Japan, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov arrived in Washington on his way to the first meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco. He called on President Truman at the White House and made a momentous statement to the new Chief Executive. The Soviet Union, he said flatly, had won the war against Germany. His government therefore wanted all American and other Allied troops to leave the Reich at once.

President Truman was naturally astounded by this pronouncement. He got rid of Molotov as quickly as he could, and then called in Secre-

taries Stimson and Forrestal, Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, and General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff. He also visited ex-Secretary of State Hull, who was then in a hospital. To all of them he repeated Molotov's statement and asked for advice.

The next day the President called Molotov back to the White House and calmly told him that the United States would like to cooperate with the USSR. If, however, Soviet Russia intended to act unilaterally, Mr. Molotov and his government should bear in mind the fact that the United States had the strongest military forces in Europe. At that time, with

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the world's greatest air force still intact, the President's statement was true.

Molotov apparently was not prepared for this sort of reply. He proceeded to San Francisco in such a frame of mind that he came close to strangling the UN at its birth over a technical issue of voting procedure. Harry Hopkins had to be rushed to Moscow to mollify the Kremlin and to arrange a conference of the Big Three on Germany.

There were repercussions in Washington, too. One heard reports that Admiral King favored placing a blockade on the Soviet Union immediately. General Marshall, however, was known to oppose taking a strong line with Russia; he felt that if the American Army had to go into the Soviet Union it would have the same difficulties with lines of supply that the *Wehrmacht* had experienced. Marshall's point of view persuaded the President.

Molotov's demand was the first postwar statement of Soviet intentions of dominating Germany. Three years later — with American forces largely demobilized — these intentions have created a new world crisis: Russia is attempting to force the United States, Britain and France at least out of Berlin, using every tactic short of war.

The Kremlin's decision to close the land corridors in and out of Berlin emphasized that Stalin is more determined than ever to corral Germany into his own sphere. Germany's

strategic position in the heart of Europe is obvious; if the USSR held or completely dominated the Reich, continued French and Italian resistance to Communism would become virtually impossible. What is less widely recognized is that the German industrial potential is higher today than it was in 1936. We now know that the vast amount of industrial expansion that took place from 1936 through the war more than compensated for the destruction caused by Allied bombing. Hence, the USSR would be immeasurably strengthened if it could absorb the German industrial plant into its own shaky economy.

The American counter-decision to make use of the air corridors to Berlin created a far more dangerous situation than was at first realized in the States. Our decision to hold on in Berlin at all costs has converted the bomb- and shell-gutted city into a symbol. By making a test case of Berlin we have worked ourselves into a position where any evacuation would be as disastrous as Chamberlain's surrender at Munich in 1938.

A number of high-placed Americans were frankly critical of our decision to make Berlin a symbol of our determination to stay in Germany. Strategically the city is virtually useless to us, and since it is entirely surrounded by Soviet-controlled territory it would be impossible to hold in any test of arms. Moreover, our legal position in Berlin is not as strong as it might be. The formal agreements

signed by us at the end of the war do not specifically give us the right to use the highways in and out of the city, and are otherwise full of loopholes. In 1945 General Eisenhower — who may have been acting on orders from above — agreed to the terms of the four-power setup in Berlin in the belief that we could settle any problems with the Russians amicably.

Throughout Europe this summer there were widely-circulated rumors that Walter Bedell Smith, formerly Eisenhower's Chief of Staff and now our Ambassador in Moscow, privately favored evacuation of Berlin despite the status it had assumed as a symbol; and that in this respect General Smith was at odds with General Lucius P. Clay, American Military Governor in Germany. There is no longer any question that General Clay's policies will be upheld. Despite the military difficulties involved, we have morally committed ourselves to stay in Berlin. If we hauled down the flag over the city now, we might as well pull out of Europe.

II

Early last spring, long before the Berlin situation came to a head, some officials in Washington thought that Soviet leaders were prepared to drop their policy of moving into areas where Allied strength had weakened — as in Greece and Czechoslovakia. Instead, it was prognosticated, the Russians were prepared to adopt an outright policy of attempting to overrun Western strong points.

As far as Berlin was concerned, General Clay was definitely in favor of meeting this Soviet strategy head-on. There were enough trains, trucks and barges in the Western sectors of Berlin to assure its huge German population of adequate supplies. Clay felt that any blockade could be beaten by sending an armed train, or an armed motor convoy, into the city; he thought that the Russians would either have to let it go through or undertake a battle that might well lead to another world war.

Whether sending an armed train through to Berlin at that time was feasible is extremely dubious; the Russians probably could have blocked it without undertaking a pitched battle, merely by blowing up a few bridges. In any case, President Truman decided against the idea. On the basis of the highly reliable estimates he had of what the Russians would do, the President last spring arrived at a decision of far-reaching consequence. He would not, he said, take any steps in Berlin which could be interpreted as bellicose or which might, even remotely, support charges that the United States was instigating war.

This decision, coupled with the Soviet blocking of all the railroad lines and autobahns into Berlin, left the United States in a position of moral superiority but practical embarrassment. It was at this juncture that the Air Force conceived and urged the idea of the air lift to Berlin. The lift provided us with a completely legal way out of our dilemma, at least

temporarily. The three Western powers immediately got the lift working and quickly began to strengthen it.

No one who has seen the lift can fail to admire the organizing genius and courage that went into it. Two-motored C-47s (later replaced by four-motored C-54s) began to land every three minutes, day and night, at the Tempelhof Airdrome in Berlin. The loading operations at Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, and the unloading at Berlin, were handled quickly and efficiently. Flying arrangements and maintenance work were handled by experts who had got their experience flying supplies "over the hump" into China. At the beginning of the operation, some pilots had to work around the clock; but later, as more men became available, they were able to taper off to two short hops every 24 hours. Special landing arrangements for bad weather, of which there was a great deal in the early period of the lift, permitted a squadron of planes to land at one time. They would come down one after another in the center of Tempelhof and then move out at angles of ten degrees, like spokes on a wheel, in order to eliminate collisions.

The air lift evoked a tremendous amount of pro-American and pro-British feeling in Germany, and a corresponding increase in hatred of the Russians. It also provided us with a respite, with time in which we could negotiate. However, it was not a permanent solution. To supply our sectors of Berlin adequately, some 16,000 tons of coal, food and clothing

a day are required. The air lift moved quickly to 3000 tons a day, and later to 4000. As this is written, the record for a single day's delivery is 7000 tons. There is not much prospect that we will be able to lift that figure to 16,000. Our own forces in the city can be supplied permanently, especially since their dependents have begun to leave, but the Germans in our areas have already begun to feel the pinch.

For the United States and Britain to send in more planes in support of the air lift would be a highly dangerous gamble. The fact is that any transport air fleet that we maintain in Germany must be regarded as expendable if war breaks out.

The Russians have 2000 to 4000 fighters, many of them jets, in their area of Germany. To protect our air lift, at least in its initial phases, General Curtis LeMay had only two groups of obsolescent P-47s, thirteen jet fighters and three groups of B-29 bombers.

The Russians surely knew this. They must have known that, if they were willing to risk war, they could have smashed the air lift in twenty minutes, coincidentally wiping out a sizable portion of the Anglo-American air transport fleets. In addition, the Russians had in their numerous fighters a powerful screen against the relatively small American bomber force in England and Germany.

This writer, in a brief conversation with General LeMay (who has since been replaced in Europe by General John K. Cannon) last summer, ex-

pressed surprise at the weakness of our available air fighting fleet. The general agreed tacitly, and commented that the fault lay with the American people, who had insisted on a quick demobilization after the war. However, he said that our air power in Europe would be built up steadily, and that in the meantime the air lift was providing good training for our pilots and crews.

Along the air corridor to Berlin, one could easily study the Soviet air strength. From American planes, flying carefully within the twenty-mile-wide air route, one could see airfields jammed with Soviet jet fighters and huge tank "parks" with oil tanks being moved about. Anti-aircraft gun emplacements were visible to the naked eye. One afternoon this writer flew with General Clay and Ambassador Robert Murphy, his political advisor, down the corridor from Berlin to Frankfurt. It was such a quiet trip that I slept most of the way. The next day, however, Soviet jet fighters buzzed the corridor around the American sector in Berlin.

III

Even before the air lift got under way it became obvious that an impasse was shaping up, that an atmosphere of tension was being generated in Berlin which might easily lead to war. The British became seriously concerned about this danger last spring. Their natural desire to avoid war was reinforced by the knowledge that England, which we have come to regard

as a potential "island aircraft carrier," could have its civilization destroyed in a new war. Americans often tend to think of a possible war with the Soviet Union as a long-term affair, in which our atomic weapons and superior industrial power would eventually decide the issue. But Europeans, including the British, are aware that in a war with Russia the first stage might be Soviet occupation of all Western Europe. Most Europeans doubt that their culture could survive such an occupation, even if the United States ultimately won the war.

For this reason the British, Socialists and Conservatives alike, insisted on diplomatic conversations to keep the way open for a peaceful solution of the Berlin situation. Malcolm McMillan, who may well be the next leader of the Conservative party, pressed this point of view on Gardner Cowles. Cowles, the publisher of *Look* magazine and the co-owner of a string of midwestern newspapers, agreed with McMillan, and wrote a widely circulated newspaper article advocating the talks.

President Truman and his advisors were originally reluctant to become involved in a formal conference with Russia until they had some idea of what the basis of discussion could be; they were afraid of being forced into another Munich. However, as the pressure for a conference became greater Generals Smith and Clay were called to Washington to talk to the President. Lewis Douglas, the Ameri-

can Ambassador to the Court of St. James, was meanwhile active in London and Berlin, laying the groundwork for a conference. After a vast amount of preparation the talks finally opened in Moscow on the thirty-first of July.

Shortly after the talks began, a wild rumor came out of Moscow. It was said that Marshal Stalin, in the course of his first conversation with the Western representatives, said: "I am ready for war. When are you going to get out of Berlin?" The story was probably false. But the talks proved as fruitless as they would have been if it had been true. Precisely nothing was accomplished. Eventually, we were forced to break off the talks and bring the dispute before the United Nations.

IV

In the Western capitals early last spring it was foreseen that the summer and fall of 1948 would be a critical period. It was calculated that the Marshall Plan would be in full swing by November or December. ECA assistance would strengthen friendly European countries, and its disrupting effects would very possibly be felt by the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. Moreover, the armed strength of the world's greatest industrial power was beginning to grow to the point where it would be capable of checking any Soviet military designs. For all these reasons, we could not rule out the possibility that Soviet leaders would feel the time had ar-

rived, early in the fall, to use their superior armed power.

We have seen that the Russians are immensely stronger than we are in the air. But this would not be a deciding consideration for the Politburo: as General Carl Spaatz, retired Chief of the Air Force, asserted in a recent magazine article, the Russians have not learned to think first in terms of air power. Stalin himself always asked Roosevelt, Churchill and their aides during the war: "How many divisions have you?" And it is here that the real Soviet superiority lies at present. Russia now has 200 divisions in Europe. The United States has one — the First Infantry, stationed in Germany. The situation must constitute an enormous temptation for the Politburo.

Unconfirmed reports coming out of Finland and other countries adjacent to the USSR this summer had it that the Politburo was indeed split over whether to go to war. The accuracy of these reports could not be thoroughly checked. It is always difficult to estimate the motives of Soviet conduct, for only two members of the Politburo — Stalin and Molotov — have ever been outside the Soviet Union or had much contact with the West.

It was clear enough, however, that Soviet pressure all over the world was strong and unrelenting. In Berlin and Vienna strong-arm methods were being used in an attempt to break up the local police forces and intimidate Western nationals. At the Danube

Conference Andrei Vishinsky, Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, brusquely dismissed all Western claims to equal traffic rights on the lower Danube. This conference also made it abundantly clear that, whatever eventually happened between Marshal Tito and the Kremlin, the Balkan dictator would almost certainly not move into the Western camp. In Finland, France and Italy the Communist Parties were stepping up their campaigns of agitation and violence. Territories adjacent to the USSR in the Near East, India and Burma were also beginning to feel the pressure.

Official American reports indicate that Soviet leaders have been subject to severe postwar pressures at home, that there has been mounting dissatisfaction among the people. There have been widespread desertions, not only among Russian teachers in New York City, but among Soviet officers all through Europe. The Kremlin's reaction to this has been distinctly disquieting. First, a series of sweeping purges has been hitting the Communist Parties all over the world — including the United States — with a new emphasis being placed on creating disciplined, ironclad formations that can be relied on for anything. Second, the Kremlin has begun calling its nationals home. From all over the world Soviet citizens are streaming back to the homeland in a mass exodus.

These policies, combined with the Soviet practice of squeezing American

officials and correspondents out of Moscow, usually under false charges of espionage, may indicate that the Kremlin is really girding for action.

Has the Soviet Union, then, been using the Berlin crisis only as an excuse for precipitating a general war? Stalin's intransigence during the Moscow conferences, his refusal to engage in any genuine bargaining, might seem to indicate an affirmative answer. But one profound military fact stands in the way of such an interpretation. The Soviet Union never had more than 350,000 troops in its zone of Germany. Western military experts have always felt that a force of this dimension could be halted at the Rhine, largely because of its communications difficulties, unless there was some vast build-up of troops behind it. Such a build-up would take the Soviet Army at least a month, according to their estimates. And so far, at least, there have been no signs that any such deployment of troops has taken place in Germany.

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Even here, however, one cannot be certain. There remains the possibility that the Berlin mess was merely a blind to attract American attention to Europe, and that, if war is coming, the first blow would be delivered against American industrial production. We know that the Soviets have only a handful of medium bombers in their areas of Europe. There is considerable reason to believe that, at present, the main Soviet bomber

fleet is concentrated in Siberia — within striking distance of Alaska and Canada. General Spaatz has estimated that the Russians now have about 300 copies of our B-29 long-range bomber.

The next few months should tell the story. The Western powers' hopes for peace are based on the belief that, as the Marshall Plan restores some measure of strength to Western Europe, the Politburo will bow to the inevitable and agree to make a practical world-wide settlement of differences.

In the meantime it would be well for Americans to try to gain some insight into the nature of Soviet methods. The following story, whose complete authenticity I can vouch for, illustrates both the extent to which the Russians maintain security and their brazen forthrightness.

The Soviet government has never permitted Ambassador Smith to maintain his private plane in Russia. His plane has to be based in Berlin, and

before he can have it flown into Moscow he must get special permission from the Soviet authorities. When such permission is granted the Ambassador's plane, with its American Army crew, must carry a Soviet co-pilot and a Soviet radio operator. The Soviet co-pilot always insists that the plane fly "just off the deck," *i.e.*, low over the ground. The purpose is to prevent the American crew from seeing out over the Russian terrain for any great distance.

On one occasion the plane was flying into Moscow when the weather turned bad. The American pilot began to move the plane up in order to get out of the mist. To his horror, the Russian co-pilot pulled a revolver on him. The American radio operator, seated just behind the co-pilot, reached for his own gun only to find that he was already covered by the Russian radio operator, situated directly behind him. The plane stayed low, despite the bad weather.



THE INDEPENDENT VOTER AND MR. DEWEY

BY RUSSELL W. DAVENPORT

THERE are several kinds of independent voters. There are what might be called Republican Independents, who have affiliations with the Republican party but who will vote for a Democrat if the occasion warrants. Conversely, there are Democratic Independents, whose primary affiliations are with the Democratic party. And there are still others who have no noticeable affiliations with either party. But despite these and other distinctions, all independents have a fundamental attitude in common: they can never bring themselves to put "party regularity" above what they conceive to be the interest of the nation or of the state. On the whole, therefore, they are more interested in candidates and issues than in party success.

It is quite evident that if everybody acted in this independent manner a two-party system could not survive. In order to govern ourselves through parties it is necessary for us to have political structures manned by loyal

workers. So the enlightened independent never takes the view that party-line voting is wholly wrong. But he does make the claim *that the independent vote is just as important to the operation of our democracy as the party vote*. Wendell Willkie used to call the independent voter "the conscience of American politics"; and he never failed to point out that, in modern times, the independent holds the balance of power. The sum of the matter is that both kinds of voters are necessary. Without the party voter the independent would find himself in political chaos. Without the independent to check on him, the party voter would find himself ensnared in political corruption, bossism, and even tyranny.

During the last decade the independent has had difficult choices to make. In 1940 he had to choose between Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Willkie, with the former breaking a deep-seated American tradition by running for a third term. Most independents

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