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Department of Justice

ADDRESS

BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Robert F. Kennedy

Free University of Berlin

February 22, 1962

We meet here tonight on the 230th anniversary of the birth of a distinguished and courageous leader, George Washington, the father of my country, to pay tribute to the memory of a distinguished and courageous leader, Ernst Reuter, the father of freedom in West Berlin.

These two men were widely separate in time and in space. But they shared ideals of courage and freedom--ideals which continue to inspire men across the world. They asserted those ideals in dark and perilous times. And the reverence free men do to their memories proves the continuity of purpose and faith which makes the history of freedom identical with the history of progress.

George Washington led Americans in the assertion of their independence against colonialism. Ernst Reuter led the citizens of free Berlin in the defense of their independence against totalitarianism. Both men were brave, wise, prudent and steadfast. Both embodied principles greater than themselves. Both, striving for the independence of their fellow-citizens, were advancing the cause of freedom everywhere.

Though George Washington's struggle soon came to a successful conclusion, Ernst Reuter's struggle still continues. Because the fight for the independence of free Berlin is a concern of all free men, Ernst Reuter has become a 20th-century symbol of liberty--and his cause enlists the active support of nations like my own, thousands of miles from the Brandenburg Gate.

Let no one mistake the firmness of our commitment to this cause. Our position with regard to Berlin is well known--but, to remove all doubt, let me reaffirm its essential elements today.

We have stood in the past--and we will stand in the future--for the full freedom of the inhabitants of West Berlin and for the continuation of West Berlin's ties with the Federal Republic and the world beyond.

We have stood in the past--and we will stand in the future--for the presence of allied forces in West Berlin, as long as they are necessary and as long as you so desire. We will not allow this presence to be diluted or replaced.

We have stood in the past--and we will stand in the future--for uncontrolled access to and from Berlin. We will permit no interference with this access, as we have recently demonstrated with regard to the air corridors.

We have stood in the past--and we will stand in the future--for an active, viable West Berlin. Berlin will not merely exist. It will grow and prosper.

We stand behind all these positions with the full strength of American power. I am glad to have the opportunity today to reaffirm the solemn statement of the President of the United States: "We do not want to fight but we have fought before. We cannot and will not permit the Communists to drive us out of Berlin, gradually or by force."

We do not feel that the maintenance of the integrity of West Berlin threatens any legitimate interests of the Soviet Union, and we remain confident that, in due course, this problem will be resolved through the processes of peaceful negotiation.

We have no question about the destiny of West Berlin. It will neither be snatched from the tree--nor will it wither on the vine. Its future will be greater than its past--and the flowering of this great city will be the most fitting of all memorials to Ernst Reuter.

And we have not forgotten the men and women of East Berlin and East Germany. We know the hardships they endure under a harsh and repressive regime. We look forward to the eventual reunion of Germans in freedom.

When historians consider the significance of the Berlin crises of the mid-20th century, I do not believe that they will record it as an incident in the

encirclement of freedom. The true view, in my judgment, will be to see it rather as a major episode in the recession of communism.

I well know that for those in free Berlin, the persistent communist pressure has been a source of peril and anguish. Yet what has happened in Berlin is that the Soviet Union has reacted to the initiatives of democracy--to you, to your spirit and to that series of actions, beginning with the Marshall Plan, which have brought about the extraordinary political, economic, and cultural renaissance of Western Europe.

The post-war revival of democratic Europe has exerted a magnetic attraction on communist Europe. On the dark side of the Iron Curtain, despite rigid communist controls, democratic ideas, democratic techniques, democratic fashions and democratic ideals are stirring. Among its own intellectuals and its own youth, communism finds itself on the defensive. The flow of influence is now always from west to east, not from east to west; from democracy to communism, not from communism to democracy.

Because the flow of influence goes one way, the flow of people goes the other. This surely is the meaning of the Berlin Wall--that ugly mass of concrete, brick and barbed wire which lies across the heart of your city like a medieval instrument of torture.

For the people of Berlin, the erection of that Wall was of course an affront and a source of anguish. But I can report to you from around the world, from my travels through Asia, that the Berlin wall is regarded everywhere as a proof of communist bankruptcy, and a symbol of communist failure.

Herr Ulbricht himself has confessed that it was to stop the flight of people--to lock up his workers in the workers' paradise--that the wall was built. For the first time in the history of mankind, a political system has had to construct a

barrier to keep its people in--and the whole world recognizes the desperate meaning of this act.

They wall their people in.

We set our people free.

Robert Frost, who read from his poetry at the inauguration of our President, once wrote these lines:

"Before I build a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out
And to whom I was like to give offense,
Something there is that doesn't love
a wall, That wants it down."

What wants this wall down is the whole free spirit of man.

The statistics on the flight of scholars offers us an idea of what communism has done to this free spirit. Since 1958, a total of 1606 scholars--mainly teachers in the humanities and sciences at long-established universities and technical institutes in East Germany--have left the eastern zone and registered in West German reception camps. More than half are members of faculties. 118 of them are full-fledged professors--a number equal to the professorial component of East Germany's third largest university, at Halle. In the last four years, Halle has lost a total of 147 faculty members--more than the current size of its teaching staff. Humboldt University has lost 275 members of its staff; Leipzig, 199; and so on down the list.

As the chief law officer of the American government, I am particularly interested to note too, the flight of many judges and lawyers from East Germany.

The Wall is more than a demonstration of communist failure in the struggle for men's faith and hope: It is equally a desperate effort to stem the tide of unification in democratic Europe. By attempting to isolate West Berlin, the communists hope to subtract West Berlin from West Germany and then to separate West

Germany from Western Europe; and, by subtracting West Germany from Western Europe, they hope to defeat and wreck the great cooperative instrumentalities of the re-gathering of democratic strength, the Common Market, OECD and NATO.

I can assure you that the Wall will fail as spectacularly in this purpose as it has failed to seal off communist Europe from the magnetic attraction of democratic Europe.

Ernst Reuter said a dozen years ago, "Here in Berlin all the slogans that rend the air during the East-West struggle take on a real meaning. Here no one needs any professional lectures about democracy, about freedom and all the other nice things that there are in the world. Here one has lived all of that; one lives it every day and every hour."

You live it still in free Berlin--and the ever-increasing strength and purpose and unity of the democracies will vindicate your struggle.

And while today Berlin is divided, as Germany is divided, by the decision of the communists, you know and I know that in the end all Berlin and all Germany are one. My country shares with you the peaceful but persistent purpose that Germans shall one day find themselves reunited. This is the true path toward lower tensions and to lessened dangers. We shall continue to hope that as policies of repression fail, and as fears of "revenge" prove unfounded, the Soviet Government, in its own true interest, will come to share this purpose and to cooperate in its realization.

But freedom by itself is not enough.

"Freedom is a good horse," said Matthew Arnold, "but a horse to ride somewhere."

Ernst Reuter knew that what mattered finally was the use to which men put freedom--that what counts is how liberty becomes the means of opportunity and growth and justice.

We do not stand here at Berlin just because we are against communism. We stand here because we have a positive and progressive vision of the possibilities of free society--because we see freedom as the instrumentality of social progress and social justice--because communism itself is but the symptom and the consequence of the fundamental evils, ignorance, disease, hunger and want, and freedom has shown mankind the most effective way to destroy these ancient antagonists.

The free way of life proposes ends--but it does not prescribe means.

It assumes that people, and nations, will often think differently--have the full right to do so--and that diversity is the source of progress. It believes that men advance by discussion, by debate, by trial and by error.

It believes that the best ideas come, not from edict and ideology, but from free inquiry and free experiment; and it regards dissent, not as treason to the state, but as the tested mechanism of social progress.

It knows that diverse nations will find diverse roads to the general goal of political independence and economic growth. It regards the free individual as the source of creativity--and believes that it is the role of the state to serve him, and not his role to serve the state.

I come to Berlin from thousands of miles of travel through Asia. I have seen men and women at work building modern societies so that their people can begin to share in the blessings of science and technology and become full members of the 20th century. Social progress and social justice, in my judgment, are not something apart from freedom; they are the fulfillment of freedom. The obligation of free men is to use their opportunities to improve the welfare of their fellow human beings. This, at least, has been the tradition of democratic freedom in America. And this is what lies behind

the great democratic effort under way in the United States known as the New Frontier.

The New Frontier is the contemporary expression of the perennial progressive impulse in American life--the impulse to redress the balance of social power in favor of those whom Andrew Jackson called "the humble members of society." Jefferson and Jackson and Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and the New Nationalism, Woodrow Wilson and the New Freedom, Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, Harry Truman and the Fair Deal--these were earlier episodes in this continuing tradition of militant progressivism.

My country has attained standards of freedom and abundance which are the envy of much of the world. But we do not account this an excuse for complacency or a signal for relaxation. It will be the permanent effort of Americans--and it is the specific purpose of this administration--to keep moving ever forward until we can realize the promise of American life for all our citizens--and make what contribution we can to assist other peoples to win justice and progress and independence for themselves.

One vestige of injustice in my country has been the treatment of fellow citizens of another color. For a hundred years, despite our claims of equality, we had, as you know, a wall of our own--a wall of segregation erected against Negroes. That wall is coming down through the orderly process of enforcing the laws and securing compliance with court decisions, an area of government where my own responsibilities, as Attorney General, are heavy.

The battle against discrimination in interstate transportation has been won; the conquest of segregation in the public schools is making new progress each school year. Throughout the nation, the conscience of America has awakened to press the fight against discrimination in employment, in housing, in the use

of common facilities. We still have far to go--but the progress we have already made has changed the face of America.

We are increasing the pace of our economic growth. We are harnessing the advances of science and technology to produce new abundance at an ever lessening human cost. We are expanding social programs to eradicate poverty and disease. We are increasing the quality of our educational system. We have raised the level of our minimum wage. Our appropriations for housing today are the largest they have ever been. We are seeking medical care for the old as part of the existing program of social security. We are stimulating cultural effort and honoring artistic achievement.

Every free nation has the capacity to open up its own new frontiers of social welfare and social justice. Communist leaders have sometimes spoken of peaceful competition as to which society serves the people best. That is a competition which free society accepts with relish.

I know of no better controlled experiment for such competition than Germany itself. The people of West Germany and East Germany are culturally and ethnically the same. Both parts of Germany were ravaged by war. Both had the same opportunities in peace. But West Germany elected the free system, and East Germany had communism thrust upon it.

We have only to look about us to see how this competition comes out. Berlin was once a united city. The people of West and East Berlin are the same. There are brothers, cousins, parents and children, - some living on one side of the line, some on the other. But since the war the western sector of the city has been under democratic control and the eastern under communist control.

The contrast in progress speaks for itself. West Berlin met the challenge of rehabilitation and rebirth of justice and of freedom; East Berlin has not.

Here in this city lies an answer to the question of competition. It is an answer so overpowering that it has had to be shut from sight by concrete and barbed wire, tanks and machine guns, dogs and guards. The competition has resulted in so disastrous a defeat for communism that the communists felt they had no alternative but the Wall.

We find the same answer all over the world. Few countries were as devastated by the war as was Japan. She alone suffered from nuclear attack. Her great industrial cities, Tokyo and Osaka, were in ruins when she surrendered. No comparable city in China endured comparable destruction. Peking, Shanghai, Canton, Hankow--all were left substantially intact.

Yet today Japan, which I visited two weeks ago, has a thriving economy. Her standard of living is higher than that of any nation in the Far East. Her ships roam the far seas, and her airlines fly from Tokyo to New York and London. Communist China, on the other hand, suffers in her fifth year of hunger. The tragic "commune" experiment has collapsed. Industrial production has slowed down. Poverty and disease stalk the land. Even worse, thousands of innocent people have been imprisoned and killed, and the more fortunate have fled to other lands, more than a million to Hong Kong alone.

Communism everywhere has paid the price of rigidity and dogmatism. Freedom has the strength of compassion and flexibility. It has, above all, the strength of intellectual honesty. We do not claim to know all the answers; we make no pretense of infallibility. And we know this to be a sign, not of weakness, but of power.

The proof of the power of freedom lies in the fact that communism has always flinched from competition in the field where it counts most--the competition of ideas.

The flight of scholars and jurists from East Germany shows the fate of intellectual freedom under communism. To this day--nearly half a century after the Russian Revolution--one virtually never sees on a Moscow newsstand any book, magazine or newspaper exported from a democracy except communist party publications. Yet one is free in Washington and London and Paris to buy all the copies of Pravda and Izvestia one wants.

When will the communists be confident enough of their ideas to expose them to the competition of democratic ideas? I was disappointed to note that only a few days ago a Russian leader, while saying that coexistence with democratic social systems was possible, asserted emphatically that coexistence with democratic ideas was "impossible and unthinkable."

It would amount, he said, to communist ideological disarmament. I would have thought that he might have more faith in the capacity of communist ideas to survive such competition; but he may well be right in fearing to let communism stand on its own in a free forum.

President Kennedy, since his inauguration, has steadily sought new ways and means of increasing the exchange of ideas with the Soviet Union. This is why he has been ready to arrange interviews and to offer our full courtesies and facilities in return.

We proudly press the challenge: let the ideas of freedom have the same circulation in Communist states that communist ideas have in free states. We can have formal peace without such reciprocal competition in the realm of ideas; but until we have full freedom of intellectual exchange, I see no prospect of a genuine and final relaxation of world tension.

For a long time some people have supposed that freedom was the enemy of social and intellectual welfare. A century ago Karl Marx condemned the free

economy as cold and heartless--as primarily a mechanism for the degradation of the intellectuals and the exploitation of the workers.

Marx also said that, in borrowing the dialectic, he had stood Hegel on his head. In the century since the Communist Manifesto, history has stood Marx on his head. For the free state, contrary to Marx's predictions, has proven its ability to raise mass living standards, even out the distribution of wealth, organize social compassion, advance intellectual endeavor, and produce an ever more equalitarian society.

Marx's condemnation of the heartless laissez-faire capitalism of the early 19th century now--by an irony of history--applies with fantastic precision to 20th century communism.

It is communism, not free society, which is dominated by what the Yugoslav communist Milovan Djilas has called the New Class--the class of party bosses and bureaucrats, who acquire not only privileges but an exemption from criticism which would be unimaginable in democratic society. Far from being a classless society, communism is governed by an elite as steadfast in its determination to maintain its prerogatives as any oligarchy known to history.

And it is communism, not free society, which has become the favorite 20th century means of disciplining the masses, repressing consumption and denying the workers the full produce of their labor. In China today, for example, the state takes away nearly one-third of the agricultural output from the peasant through heavy taxation and compulsory grain purchases below market prices. Far from being a workers' paradise, communism has become the most effective system ever devised for exploitation of the working class.

By this historical paradox, it is free society, and not communism, which seems most likely to realize Marx's old hope of the emancipation of man and the achievement of an age of universal abundance.

In his State of the Union address a few weeks ago, President Kennedy quoted Woodrow Wilson, who once said, "I believe in democracy because it releases the energy of every human being." The spirit of the New Frontier is a spirit which constantly pushes toward distant horizons.

It is the spirit of a society committed, not to the past, but to the future-- forever striving to give an ancient vision of peace and liberty and justice new fulfillment. It is a spirit which does not linger in the valley but breaks new paths in the hills--a spirit which welcomes innovation and adventure--which faces the unknown, not with fear, but with faith.

Its vitality springs from the limitless strength of the fundamental revolution of our age--the revolution of liberty and justice--the permanent revolution of the free individual. Its power is that it enables men to live--and that it inspires them to die, so that the world of freedom may be secure.

If freedom makes social progress possible, so social progress strengthens and enlarges freedom. The two are inseparable partners in the great adventure of humanity: they are the sources of the worldwide revolutionary movement of our epoch. This movement, of which Ernst Reuter is a contemporary hero, did not begin in the 20th century. It began two thousand years ago in Judea--and I like to believe that it took its modern form in 1776 in the American colonies.

In some parts of the world today the communists seek to capture that revolution. But it is always stronger than those who would subvert and betray it. It is stronger in arms--and the determination, if necessary, to use them. And it is stronger because it expresses the deepest instincts of man.

President Kennedy said recently, "Above all else, let us remember, however serious the outlook, however harsh the task, the one great irreversible trend in the history of the world is on the side of liberty." He added, "And we for all

time to come are on that side." His speech was addressed to Americans—but I know that he would wish me to apply it here, as he does in his own mind, to all the world.

You know that you do not stand alone. President Kennedy made our position unmistakably clear to the world when he said your freedom "would not be surrendered to force or through appeasement."

And that is the position of our allies as well. As an official and a representative of the United States Government, I am proud of that stand and I salute the men who lead you and have so bravely carried on in behalf of our common ideals. And, as an admirer of your courage and your determination, we salute you--the people of Berlin--and we wish you well.