

On 16 October 1961, an American soldier faces an East German officer across the white line that divided Berlin.



### A White Line

Between 1949 and 1961, Berlin was a divided city but there was no wall separating its two halves. Indeed, in some places in 1949 there was only a white line painted on the road to show where the border was. Buses and trains ran freely across the whole city and so did telephone lines. Depending on which side of the city citizens lived, they were required to pay for train tickets and settle such things as telephone bills in either East German or West German currency.

**E**VEN AFTER EAST GERMANY and West Germany closed their border in 1952, people could move freely across the whole of Berlin. But the political divisions of the Cold War were already clear in the city. Each side of Berlin had its own police force. Each side also had its own army. The people of West Berlin lived in a city surrounded by the East German state, and to reach West Germany they had to travel 190 kilometres by one of three ways: air, train or road. There was only one railway line and one road, with no garages or rest facilities between West Berlin and the West German border. Commercial flights into West Berlin could only be provided by American, British and French airlines. These airlines could only fly through East Germany along three air routes or 'corridors'. These corridors had been agreed between the four wartime allies in 1946, and had been used to airlift supplies during the Berlin blockade.

Although West Berlin was physically isolated inside East Germany, West Berliners did not live the kind of



restricted life that many people imagined. In fact, the effect of the Cold War resulted in some advantages for West Berliners. Western powers wanted to make their part of Berlin a showcase for capitalism and democracy. American money was used to help rebuild West Berlin, and West German companies were encouraged to set up their factories there.

East Berlin developed in a different way. Under the communist system of East Germany, East Berlin provided its citizens with guaranteed employment, low rents and free medical care. But there were also disadvantages. There was not the same level of wealth. The economy was not supported as generously as in West Berlin, and the city began to fall into disrepair. In June 1953, the poor conditions in East Berlin led to an

uprising when thousands of workers went on strike in protest at their working conditions. The strikes ended only after troops from the Soviet Union were sent in to restore order.

Berlin remained at the centre of the continuing Cold War. Politicians from both sides talked about reuniting Germany. But Berlin not only remained divided, it became a symbol of the differences between the two superpowers. In 1958, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, criticized the USA for placing nuclear weapons in West Germany. He also called for the whole of Berlin to become the capital of East Germany. In contrast, the American president John F Kennedy spoke in July 1961 of West Berlin as 'the great testing place of Western courage and will'.



West Berlin police take an East Berlin citizen into protective custody after he crossed the border during the riots of 1953.