



David E. Barclay. *Schaut auf diese Stadt. Der unbekannte Ernst Reuter.* Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 2000. x + 448 pp. EUR 20.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-88680-527-3.



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Ernst Reuter returned from his Turkish exile in 1946 to become a major shaper of the future of Cold War Era Berlin. One of the leading figures of German Social Democracy in the later years of the Weimar Republic, he served as mayor of western Berlin during the Soviet Blockade. His inspiring leadership of the besieged city catapulted him to international fame. He refused to yield to Soviet pressure to abolish democratic governing processes in Berlin, and demanded that the Western powers maintain the former German capital as “the bulwark, the outpost of freedom,” in this life and death struggle against “the power of darkness” (p. 196). In his most famous speech, after which this biography is entitled, Reuter exhorted the western powers, “you people of the World ... look at this city and take note, you may not and cannot abandon [the people of Berlin] ... [We must all fight] for the common ideals that alone will be able to insure our future as well as yours” (pp. 195-196). He devoted his last seven years, 1946-1953, to establishing West Berlin as a world city that embodied many of the ideals of political equality and economic justice, to achieving the core values of social democracy, and to upholding these values in the face of Soviet challenges.

Through the prism of Ernst Reuter’s life, David Barclay penetrates the political conflicts that plagued the reestablishment of government in Berlin after the

war. Not only did city administrators and political leaders need to contend with the Allied Control Council, even more, they had to reconcile their own differing visions of how postwar order would be achieved. More difficult than the predictable struggles between Socialists (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberal Democrats (LDP), were the conflicts among Socialists themselves. These conflicts broke along pre-war fault lines and exacerbated accelerating disagreements between the western allies and their Soviet counterparts about Germany’s future. Ernst Reuter stepped back into this contested territory in late 1946, a determined opponent of Soviet policies and hence a person intensely distrusted by the Soviet members of the Allied Control Council. At the same time, he was held in suspicion by some Social Democrats and members of the CDU and LDP because he had been an active Communist Party functionary during his early political career (1917-1922.) Moreover, the same independence of mind that prompted his abandonment of Soviet communism in 1922 also frustrated western members of the Allied Control Commission, because they found his obstinate, outspoken demands to protect and defend West Berlin often in conflict with their own views about the city’s future.

What Reuter’s friends defined as independent-mindedness was defined by his enemies as the worst kind

of political opportunism. A clear example of this divergence of opinion may be seen in the Soviet veto of Reuter's election as Mayor of Berlin in 1947. Rather than state their mistrust of Reuter because of his refusal to accept the authority of the Comintern over the German Communist Party in the early 1920s, the Soviets claimed that Reuter had not been a reliable opponent of Nazism during the Third Reich. Since he had served in the Turkish civil service after he went into exile in the mid-1930s, the Soviets portrayed Reuter as pro-Nazi in view of the fact that "Turkey had followed a pro-German policy during the war" and because the German embassy in Turkey had extended his visa. According to Soviet accounts, these facts had revealed Reuter's true face (p. 222).

What was it about this world-renowned, highly respected Cold Warrior that made friend and foe alike so uneasy? How had this offspring of educated, middle-class German parents developed into such an independent-minded spirit, so devoted to individual autonomy in service to the public good, that he chose at an early age to become a socialist, to dissent against Germany's military objectives during the First World War, to become a revolutionary communist and then to abandon communism for a political career in Germany's Social Democratic Party? With such political baggage, how had he managed to survive the political vicissitudes of the Weimar era and the consequences of imprisonment and torture at the hands of the National Socialists in 1933/34? With his personal history, how did he manage to prevail as a major political influence in Berlin in the years immediately following the war? It is these questions that David Barclay sets out to answer in his biography of the "little known Ernst Reuter." And through his attempt to understand the complexities of the man, Ernst Reuter, Barclay illuminates the political biography of German socialism at its most local, and most conflicted.

Barclay explores these questions by analyzing the controversies that Reuter confronted throughout his tumultuous political career. These include allegations that he had cooperated in the demise of Volga Germans during his brief appointment to the Commissariat for German Affairs in the newly formed Soviet state; allegations of opportunism stemming from his opposition to a Comintern-dominated German Communist Party (KPD) in the early 1920s, and his ouster from the KPD in 1922; allegations of pro-Nazi sentiment during his tenure as a Turkish civil servant while he was in exile from 1938-1946; and further allegations of political opportunism stemming from his role in upholding the distancing of the SPD from the SED in 1946/47. Barclay's thorough ex-

amination of these allegations, using recently accessible archival data from the former German Democratic Republic, adds significantly to our knowledge about Ernst Reuter's consistent commitment to upholding human dignity and social and economic justice, as well as adding to our knowledge of the controversies and conflicts between communism and socialism during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Equally valuable is Barclay's ability to follow these allegations through Reuter's political career, showing how Reuter's practical idealism, and especially his articulate support of social democracy as the necessary political pre-condition for human autonomy, prevented his enemies across the political spectrum from destroying his political career.

Another intriguing part of Barclay's biography is his attention to the role played by municipal politics and administration in the fortunes of Germany's main political parties in the period from 1920-1950. Although the major stage of this discussion is Berlin, both before and after 1933, Barclay offers keen insight into the ways in which the political leadership of the Federal Republic gained important experience as administrators of large municipalities like Cologne and West Berlin. Through his study of Reuter's career as a municipal politician, Barclay also draws attention to the history of early German efforts to develop transportation infrastructures for modern urban environments. We learn a great deal about the frustrating and interacting tensions between the municipal requirements of modernization, poor economies, and voter reluctance to fund these efforts. Indeed, Ernst Reuter emerges in these pages as a skilled negotiator who kept the concerns of his constituents foremost in his mind without sacrificing municipal modernization. These practical skills, together with his political acumen and his deeply-held convictions about Germany's future as a social democracy, kept alive Reuter's desire to return to Germany after World War II. These same traits made him highly-sought after as a political leader in Berlin during the early years of the Cold War.

While Barclay is clearly sympathetic with Reuter, he is not uncritical of his subject. Indeed, his criticisms are embedded in his narrative analysis of the tacit components of Reuter's beliefs and the little known particulars of his early political career. At Barclay's hands, Reuter comes to life in all his human complexity, his mistakes as well as his successes. His reliance on archival sources, especially those of the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin* makes Barclay's biography of Reuter a welcome addition to previous works authored by friends and colleagues like

Willy Brandt and Richard Lowenthal as well as editions of Reuter's papers prepared by his former press secretary Hans Hirschfeld. Barclay's work returns Ernst Reuter to public attention as one of the leading and founding figures in the early history of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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