

**Margaret Thatcher's Remarks on the Berlin Wall (fall thereof)
10 November 1989**

Question

Can I ask you what your reaction is to the events in Berlin?

Prime Minister

I think it is a great day for freedom. I watched the scenes on television last night and again this morning because I felt one ought not only hear about them but see them because you see the joy on people's faces and you see what freedom means to them; it makes you realise that you cannot stifle or suppress people's desire for liberty and so I watched with the same joy as everyone else and I hope that they will be a prelude to the Berlin Wall coming down.

Question

Did you ever imagine that that would happen? You have been to the Berlin Wall yourself, you have seen it. Did you in your heart of hearts think that it would open up this fast?

Prime Minister

I do not know that we realised the speed with which things would go after Mr. Gorbachev opened up the whole question in the Soviet Union of more liberty for the Soviet people and after we saw Poland, which also began to run very fast and Hungary. We just have to remember that in the interim it was in East Germany that we got the first uprising after the last War; then in Poland; then in Hungary; then in Czechoslovakia and, of course, we hope that this will spread to other East European countries too.

Question

Are there dangers in a possible reunification of the Germans?

Prime Minister

I think you are going much too fast, much too fast! You have to take

these things step-by-step and handle them very wisely.

They say now that they want a genuine democracy in East Germany. It is one thing to say it, but you really have to apply yourself to build it. You have to build up the parties, you have to build up an election system and bring it into effect. That is the first stage—they are also doing that in Poland and Germany [sic].

Poland and Hungary are poorer countries and, of course, as well as the political reform they have to bring about the economic reform. That does not just happen, you have to work for it, so let us go one step at a time. The task now is to build a genuine democracy in East Germany.

I shall hope to be talking to Chancellor Kohl this evening. He is returning today and I hope to have a word with him on the telephone—as we do from time to time—about these great matters and then I shall also be going to see President Bush on November 14. It has been arranged for some time and, of course, will be before he sees Mr. Gorbachev.

It is a great day for liberty!

Question

Do you agree with Chancellor Kohl that it would be better if people stayed in East Germany?

Prime Minister

Well you cannot have everyone pouring out of East Germany, 17 or 18 million people, it is not possible.

Some people have come out but I think that now they realise that there is going to be a democracy and they have to apply themselves to bring that about so that it is quite clear that it is an irreversible movement, it is a genuine democracy, they are going to have genuine democracy there, that it is a very good stimulus to stay and take part and help to build it.

Question

What pressure can Britain bring to bear to help East Germany reform itself or, indeed, what aid can it give?

Prime Minister

I think the whole world has welcomed this as a great day for freedom. I hope it will be the prelude to the Wall coming down.

We shall, of course, discuss aid in the European Community but I think you would expect that the major portion of aid would come from Germany which after all is a very prosperous country and has an enormous balance of payments surplus with the rest of Europe.

Already East Germany does have some very special privileges with the European Community because goods from East Germany come into the Community without paying any levy and if the rest of us import goods from other countries outside then we have to pay a levy.

Question

Is a united Germany an idea you could live with within your lifetime?

Prime Minister

I think you are going much too fast.

The first thing is to get a proper, genuine democracy, a multi-party democracy, in East Germany. That is what will keep people rebuilding East Germany and staying there, and I hope that that movement will spread to the rest of Eastern Europe.

Question

Are you worried in a sense that things are going just too fast?

Prime Minister

I think when things go very fast it does require great steadiness to deal with them. That is why when some of the questions come they

are sort of instant questions and one must not give instant answers. The joy has happened and it is great joy. We do not realise what it is like to come to freedom not having had it, but we must be immensely grateful to those people behind the Iron Curtain who never lost their faith in liberty. But now it is the hard work, the practical work of building the democracy and then we have to see what happens.

It does remind me very much of what I did say at the beginning of the Bruges speech—that Europe is not just the Community, that Warsaw, Prague and Budapest were just as much European cities and therefore the Community must not be inward-looking, must not be an enclave, but must be outward-looking, and I think that we shall all have to discuss this very carefully indeed and we shall have to adhere very firmly to NATO because it is that which has safeguarded our liberty until this happened. This could never have happened if we had not way back before many of you were born, in 1948, stood firm and had a Berlin Air Lift, stood firm and created NATO, and we must adhere to those things which have kept liberty.

Question

Does the pace of change in Eastern Europe make you think at all about the pace of integration in Western Europe?

Prime Minister

Western Europe is a community. I think that this coming to liberty really puts some of the problems of the European Community in perspective, very much in perspective, when we see these much larger movements which will affect the lives of people even more than some of the internal problems we have in the Community.

Question

What about specific help from the British Government for this huge task of resettlement?

Prime Minister

There is no possibility of all the people from East Germany coming to West Germany. As you saw on the television, most of them do not want it, they want to be in their homes; they have a very much greater incentive to stay in their homes when they are going to real democracy.

The Federal Government of Western Germany did approach us because on our military bases in Western Germany, our NATO bases, there is some land which could be used for housing some of the people and, of course, we have offered it—of course you would expect us to do that.

Question

It all puts a tremendous responsibility, does it not, on Mr. Gorbachev? There are those who worry that the reactionary forces still will take fright at the terrific speed that all this is going at.

Prime Minister

I hope not. Look! The fact is none of this would have happened without the vision and the courage of Mr. Gorbachev, who started to enlarge liberty in the Soviet Union, who saw what was happening in Poland and then said: "Look! So long as you stay in the Warsaw Pact group of countries, yes, rebuild your own democracy!"—and in Hungary. That is really a visionary man who has known what it was like to live under the old system and wishes better things for his people.

But you know, we have always known that when you get a reform movement started it tends to go faster than you ever thought. That is natural. You saw it in coming from Colonial territories to independence; it does tend to go faster but that is a case for keeping a very cool head and being very steady and being very practical about it and saying: "Now get down to building the democracy! If we can help, if you want any advice, we will give it gladly!" but be very practical and very steady.

Question

Do we still need to modernise battlefield nuclear weapons in this

context?

Prime Minister

We shall have to discuss in NATO but do not forget none of this would have happened unless we had been determined to defend our liberty in the post-war period when we did not think it was going to be necessary to form military alliances. Then, as you know, Berlin was cut off, the corridors to Berlin were cut off and we had an air lift. We formed NATO.

It is NATO's determination to defend liberty—and we never flinched—which has been one of the factors which have helped to bring about change in the Soviet Union. We knew our system was much better; we were not going to risk it. It is still the best system and do not think that people just by wanting to have a democracy can have it—that does not build it—you have got steadily to build it.

Question

But the Germans are going to be even more hostile now, are they not, to rearmament?

Prime Minister

NATO is still vital.

May I say this to you: had America stayed in Europe after the First World War and we had had a NATO then, I do not believe we should have had a Second World War. Let us learn that lesson!

Thank you very much!

Sorry it is raining!