End Of the Berlin Blockade. -Lifting of Soviet and Western Restrictions on Inter-Zonal Road and Rail Traffic. Mr. Bevin's Visit to Germany. - Air-Lift Achievement.

The Soviet blockade of Berlin, and the Western Powers' counter-measures ended at one minute past midnight on May 12, when British and American lorries and military vehicles crossed the Soviet journal frontier and proceeded to Berlin without interfering along the Helmstedt-Marienborn- Berlin Autobahn. Soon forwards the first British-U.S. train from Bielefeld and Frankfurt to Berlin likewise crossed the zonal border at Mari station.

The Soviet Governor, General Chulkov, had issued a directive on May 4 announcing the lifting of the blockade at 00.01 hours on May 12, and, providing (1) for the reopening of the Berlin- Magdeburg-Helmstedt railway for the provisioning and supply of the people of the Western sectors of British, American and French occupation forces In the city, a, figure of 16 trains for this purpose being given; (2) for the reopening of the Berlin- Marienborn- Helmstedt Autobahn; (3) that members of the Western occupation forces in Berlin, as well as civilian employees of the Western authorities in the city, would be allowed to cross into the Soviet zone without permits at Marlenborn and Nowawes, and at other points with permits issued by the Soviet authorities (a reversion to the procedure in force before March 1, 1948); (4) for freedom of import and export trade between Berlin and the Soviet zone on the one hand and the. Western zones on the other, in accordance with the regulations existing on March 1, 1948; (5) for military freight of the Western occupation forces in Berlin, as well as personal belongings and luggage of Western civilian and military officials in Berlin, to pass through the Soviet control post at Marlenborn without examination; (6) “pending a settlement of the currency question In Berlin,” all currency, including Eastern and Western marks and foreign currency, to remain subject to existing regulations at the Soviet zonal frontier; (7) for the removal of inter-sector road-blocks in Greater Berlin; (8) for the resumption of postal services between Berlin and Eastern Germany and the Western zones; (9) for improvements in the service and petrol-filling stations along the Berlin- Helmstedt Autobahn.

The agreement on the raising of the Berlin blockade and on the forthcoming meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers was announced to the House of Commons on May 5 by Mr. Bevin, whose statement was warmly welcomed by all parties.

Mr. Bevin, after paying tribute to the people of Berlin for having borne their ordeal with “courage and restraint,” said: “I feel sure that the agreement which has been made shows that the firm yet reasonable policy we have followed has been fully Justified by the results.

H.M. Government win approach the now meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in the same spirit of firmness and reasonableness. I am hopeful that the basis for an. enduring settlement At the German problem will be found at the forthcoming meeting. We shall not abandon in that settlement the principles for which we have always stood in regard to Germany. We have succeeded in standing firm in Berlin because of the air-lift. I have paid atribute to the air-lift before, but now more than over is it right to say how much this country owes to the skill and devotion of the crows and the ground staff, both British, American, and Commonwealth, who have taken part in this gigantic operation. It will continue until the situation has been finally cleared up, but I am sure that the House will agree that no praise and no thanks can be too much for the men and women who have contributed to its success. I propose to visit Berlin in order to see the air-lift in operation, and to convey the thanks and congratulations of H.M. Government to all concerned for all that they have done.”

Mr. Churchill, after Baying that Mr. Bevin's announcement would be received with “general rejoicing and relief,” declared: “I feel that the firmness which has been shown, and the powerful aid and consistent policy of the U.S.A., with whom we have worked hand in hand, have appreciably lessened the sense of war tension which has hung over us as each day brought out the difficult incidents in Berlin. It is a matter in which we all rejoice, and on this Bide of the House we are glad that we have never faltered in steady support of the policy of the Government and the Foreign Secretary in the whole of this anxious business. It
shows the importance of national unity in these matters, and how desirable it is to exclude party fights as far as possible from these large and important fields.”

Mr. Clement Davies, for the Liberals, paid a tribute to Mr. Bevin, and added that the past 10 days had been “historic” in that they had witnessed firstly the agreement on India and the Commonwealth, secondly the agreement on the Council of Europe, and thirdly the raising of the Berlin blockade, “which may well lead to a final peace.”

Mr. Bevin visited Berlin on May 7–9 to inspect the air-lift in operation and to congratulate the British and U.S. personnel. While in Berlin he met the British and American Military Governors in Germany (Generals Robertson and Clay); the French Deputy Military Governor (Major-General Noiret), and Prof. Ernst Reuter (the Oberbürgermeister) and other municipal officials, and prior to returning to London on May 10 had conversations at Düsseldorf with Dr. Adenauer, president of the German Parliamentary Council in Bonn, Dr. Selrumacher, leader of the Social-Democratic Party, and Dr. Arnold; Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia.

At a press interview in Berlin on May 8, Mr. Hevin expressed the opinion that a unified Germany might emerge from the forthcoming Council of Foreign Ministers; declared that it was “not beyond the bounds of possibility “that there-might be” 200 years of peace “in Europe; emphasized the necessity for a democratic Germany to play her full part in a democratic Europe; and added,” I dream of ending the ago-long feud between France and Germany, I want to have lived, and to end my career as Foreign Secretary, with the feeling that Germany and Britain, and Germany and France, will never fight each other again, and that our countries will work together—great industrial countries as they are, with the great scientists they have produced—to use all their efforts to lift the standard of humanity to a night not yet known.”

The Berlin City Assembly met in special session in the Schöneberg Riahaus (U.S. sector) on May 12 in connexion, with the ending of the Berlin blockade, the ceremony being attended by Generals Clay and Robertson and Major-General Noiret (the latter representing General Koenig), by the American, British, and French Military Commandants in Berlin, and by Dr. Adenauer, chairman of the German Parliamentary Council in Bonn. Prof. Reuter expressed the gratitude of the people of Berlin to the Western Allies for supplying the city by air throughout the blockade, the Assembly standing in silence as a tribute to the 54 British and American airmen killed while flying supplies to Berlin. Herr Franz Neumann, chairman of the Berlin Social Democratic Party, announced that the square in front of Tempelhof airfield would be renamed Platz der Luftbrücke ("Air-Lift Square”), and that a memorial to the fallen airmen would be erected in due course in Berlin.

Mr. Arthur Henderson, the Secretary for Air, gave details in London on May 11 of the Berlin air-lift—“the most outstanding transport operation in the history of aviation”—which, during the 10½ months of the Russian blockade, had succeeded entirely by air in maintaining a population of 2,500,000 people.

In the 318 days since the air-lift began on June 28, 1948, he said, British and U.S. aircraft had made 195,530 flights to Berlin, carrying 1,583,686 short tons of food, coal, and other stores, of which British aircraft had made 63,612 flights carrying 369,347 tons, and American aircraft 131,918 flights carrying 1,214,339 tons. The British total (of which the R.A.F.’s share was 49,733 flights and 281,727 tons, while British charter aircraft made 13,879 flights with 87,619 tons) was made up of approximately 185,000 tons of food, 97,000 tons of coal, 50,000 tons of fuel, 21,000 tons of miscellaneous cargoes, and 15,000 tons of supplies for the British services in Berlin. In the reverse direction, British aircraft carried out of Berlin about 30,000 tons of freight and over 65,000 passengers. Although the British contribution to the air-lift, In number of flights and tonnage, was about one-quarter of the total, the R.A.F. had been responsible for the bulk of the ground organization (6 of the 8 despatching airfields being in the British zone), and over 500,000 tons had been flown into Gatow airfield (British sector of Berlin) alone; Mr. Henderson added that Gatow, which at present handled nearly 1,000 aircraft movements in 24 hours, could claim to be the busiest airfield in the world, that it had averaged 540 movements a day over the whole period of the air-lift, and that landings at Gatow during the 10½ months had been made up of 33,000 U.S. Skymasters, 24,000 R.A.F. Dakotas, 23,000 R.A.F. Yorks, and 6,000 civil aircraft.

In conclusion, Mr. Henderson pointed out that the air-lift had been the greatest all-weather operation ever undertaken by the R.A.F., and had given invaluable experience and training in instrument-flying and air traffic control; stated that the day before the blockade ended the R.A.F. had set up a new record by carrying 2,182 short tons into Berlin; and announced that in view of the necessity for building up stocks in Berlin, and as it was impossible at the present stage to say how the railway, road and canal systems would function, the air-lift would continue on its present scale until the situation was clarified. - (Times - Daily Telegraph - Manchester Guardian- New York Herald Tribune - Soviet Weekly) (9971 A.)