

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Berlin is again the capital

The German Parliament's vote in favor of restoring Berlin as the capital is a signal to the East.

A margin of 18 votes secured a majority in the Bundestag (the Parliament) after an 11-hour debate June 20, making Berlin once again the capital and seat of government. Of 662 deputies, 338 voted for Berlin, 320 for Bonn, two votes were invalid, and another two deputies were absent.

The move of key government and state functions would be done in "a 10-year time-frame, approximately," Chancellor Helmut Kohl declared after the historic vote.

The debate on the issue had been a heated one, with domestic politics absorbed under the slogan, "Bonn or Berlin," to an extent difficult to understand for many Germans and most foreigners.

The debate saw provincialism of politicians who said, "Why do we need the old capital anyway?" It also saw the intervention of financial and business interests linked to circles in the West who feared that a vote for Berlin would be one for state programs to reconstruct the capital. This, they thought, would weaken the "free market" system in Germany.

The case of Count Otto Lambsdorff, the party chairman of the liberal Free Democrats, who voted for Bonn, is exemplary. A devout free market "democrat," he voiced "great concern" as much as a year ago that the government-initiated programs planned for the economic reform in Eastern Europe (and eastern Germany) would bypass restrictive General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and International Monetary Fund rules.

Lambsdorff and his co-thinkers knew that a decision for Berlin would make the biggest industrial city in Ger-

many a 10-20 year magnet for infrastructure and industrial investments in the range of several tens of billions of deutschemarks. It makes a big difference whether Berlin with its 3.5 million citizens, or Bonn with its 260,000 citizens, is the German capital.

It also makes a big difference in terms of "political geography." Those who argued for Berlin referenced the signal function the city has, and will have, for the commitment to help Eastern European countries in their difficult job of recovery from 46 years of communist rule. One must add the damage that remained from the First World War, the depression of the 1920s and 1930s, and the Second World War.

During the Bundestag session June 20, speakers like Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, (a potential successor to Kohl after 1994), and former Chancellor Willy Brandt, stressed the key issues:

Schäuble reminded listeners that the changed parameters of politics after reunification did "not allow things to remain as before in the 11 old German states—neither in Bonn nor in the Rhineland." He called the 1948-49 Berlin air lift and the international sympathy for Berlin, vital to the birth of the Western-oriented, anti-communist state of the Federal Republic of Germany. He said that that sympathy for Berlin should not be betrayed now, nor should it be overlooked that the return of government to the city would exemplify the key role of Germany in the rebuilding of Eastern Europe.

Brandt, who is Berlin's former mayor, declared that "Germany will

not remain the East of the West, but rather become the new center of Europe. Berlin is well situated there—in respect to both axes: North-South and West-East." His remark that "not even France would have had the idea to remain in idyllic Vichy" after the liberation of Paris in 1944, embarrassed the pro-Bonn lobby, which included leading members of his own Social Democratic Party, including the two party vice chairmen, Oskar Lafontaine and Johannes Rau, and the chairman of the parliamentary group, Horst Ehmke.

A few days after the vote, the main industry and trade associations welcomed the decision. The U.S. Embassy in Bonn (Amb. Vernon Walters endorsed Berlin) was among the first to announce plans to move to a site near the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

Most important, the budget commission of the German Parliament unfroze DM 30 million (\$16.6 million) for the development of the Transrapid maglev train project, with the recommendation that at least one of five maglev routes proposed, with Berlin having a central role in all of them, be placed on the new National Transport Infrastructure Development Plan that is to be passed at the end of this year. The five proposed routes are:

- Bonn-Cologne-Berlin: to connect the two administrative centers of the future German government;

- Frankfurt-Berlin: to connect the north-south high-speed ICE train route that runs through Frankfurt, with Berlin, via Potsdam, Leipzig, and Erfurt;

- A "triangle" connecting the three northern airports of Hanover, Hamburg, and Berlin;

- A "midway" route from Hanover to Leipzig, via Magdeburg and Halle, with a branch arm from either Magdeburg or Halle to Berlin;

- A Berlin-Leipzig or Berlin-Leipzig-Dresden route.