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Berlin

The new capital

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Berlin is fascinating. Like no other German city, it symbolises German history. In 1871 it became the capital of the newly founded Germany, and it was a major site of the 1918 revolution. Berlin was the cultural centre of the 1920s and the 1930s, and in 1933 it became the capital of Hitler's National Socialist Reich. From 1949 to 1989 it was famous throughout the world as a divided city, until it was reunited in a blaze of television publicity. It is now once more the capital of the whole of Germany, and early in the twenty-first century it will become the seat of the German government. One short chapter cannot do justice to the exciting complexity which is Berlin, and this chapter does not attempt that. It merely attempts to give some indication of the atmosphere of Berlin, with particular reference to the building programme, the speed and extent of which is unique in present-day Europe and which profoundly affects this atmosphere. Of the many issues which could be discussed, two in particular have been highlighted: the choice of Berlin as capital and the unsuccessful attempt to merge the *Länder* of Berlin and Brandenburg.

BEGINNINGS AND DEVELOPMENT TILL THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In order to understand what Berlin is now, it is necessary to know something about what it was. Berlin's development as a city, both in size and in importance, has not been one of steady progress, more a series of leaps and setbacks. Although today it may seem the 'natural' capital of Germany, it was the united capital of a united Germany for a relatively short time.

Berlin began as two towns, Berlin and Cölln, which grew up as trading settlements halfway between the fortresses of Spandau and Köpenick. Berlin was on the north-east bank of the River Spree; Cölln opposite it on an island in the Spree. This part of Berlin is still known as the Spreeinsel. The first documentary evidence of Cölln comes from 1237; Berlin, the older settlement, was first mentioned in 1244, though not as a town. Both places probably became towns around 1230. They remained separate

until 1307, when they agreed a common defence policy.¹ The local rulers, the Margraves of the Province of Brandenburg, diverted the trade route between Spandau and Köpenick so that it ran through Berlin-Cölln, and the double town grew rapidly. In the fourteenth century, to defend themselves against spreading lawlessness outside the towns, Berlin and Cölln strengthened their co-operation with each other, and joined the Hanseatic League of Baltic towns. In 1448 the Electors of Brandenburg chose Berlin-Cölln as their official residence, and the town was to remain the home of the ruler—whether Elector (Kurfürst) of Brandenburg, King of Prussia, Emperor of Germany or Führer of the Reich—for the next five centuries, until the collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945.

The Thirty Years War (1618–48) reduced the population of Berlin by half. Thus the town was happy to welcome the Protestant Huguenots fleeing from persecution in France. About 6,000 of them found their way there. As the royal capital of Prussia, Berlin became an important economic, political and cultural centre. This was one of its first big leaps both in size and in area. Between 1700 and 1850 its population grew proportionately more than at any other time, from under 30,000 to nearly 430,000. New residential suburbs grew up, and in January 1710 Berlin, Cölln and the new suburbs were formally constituted into one town—Berlin. Since the old town walls made communications with the new, more spaciouly built suburbs difficult, they were gradually demolished from 1734 onwards. The new city walls, finished in 1736, had fourteen gates, of which only one, the Brandenburger Tor, has survived. However, you can still trace the line of these walls by the streets linking the Underground stations which bear the names of the old gates. If driving from Hallesches Tor to Schlesisches Tor via Kottbusser Tor, or taking the train from Frankfurter Tor to Schönhauser Allee, you are travelling more or less along the line of the 1736 walls. The area thus surrounded was sufficient for Berlin's building needs until the late nineteenth century.

Berlin became the capital of Imperial Germany in 1871. This, combined with industrialisation, meant that between 1880 and 1905 the population grew from 1.1 million to over 2 million, and land and financial speculation was rife. In 1872 alone, 174 new companies were founded in Berlin, most of them short-lived. The mass housing built for the poorer sections of the population began to establish Berlin's reputation for having the largest concentration of tenement housing in the world. Many firms moved out to the suburbs, where new industrial estates² were being built. In 1902 its first Underground railway was opened. By 1903 this railway was transporting 30 million passengers a year. Berlin became a magnet for artists and scientists, but also attracted large numbers of unemployed.

This upswing came to an abrupt halt at the outbreak of the First World War (1914–18). After the war the Weimar Republic was established; in

Berlin the Republic was actually proclaimed twice: by the Communist Karl Liebknecht at the Stadtschlo and by the Social Democrat Philipp Schneidemann at the Reichstag, the German parliament (Behrend 1992).

Berlin's next big leap in size was a purely administrative one. In 1920 eight towns, fifty-nine rural areas and twenty-seven landed estates were incorporated into Greater Berlin (*Gebietsreform*), giving it a population of 4 million. It was now the largest industrial town on the continent, the newspaper centre of Germany with 149 daily papers published here, and also an intellectual and cultural centre where cabaret and variety flourished. However, this golden age (1920–33) lasted only thirteen years, until Hitler came to power in 1933. This was to change the make-up of the city drastically, if only because virtually all the Jews disappeared.³ The Nazi period and the resulting Second World War (1939–45) had a similar effect on Berlin to the Thirty Years War three centuries previously. By 1945, 600,000 dwellings had been destroyed and the population almost halved to 2.8 million.

BERLIN DIVIDED

After the Second World War, Berlin became a four-power city: that is, sovereignty over it belonged to all four Allied powers equally. However, the Western Allies (the UK, the USA and France) did not see eye to eye with their Soviet colleagues. The introduction of the Deutschmark into the British, French and American zones, but not into the Russian zone (*Währungsreform*), precipitated the division of Germany in 1949.⁴ Even so, for a few months the many Berliners who lived in one sector of the as yet undivided city, and worked in another, found themselves being paid in money their local shops did not use.

Over the next forty years the Russian sector grew away from the others as the German Democratic Republic was gradually transformed into a Socialist state.⁵ West Berlin, formed from the other three zones, came under Western influence, and acquired many of the characteristics of a West German *Land*. Both Berlins were in some measure untypical of life in the rest of the part-states they belonged to. West Berlin was the eleventh *Bundesland*, but its character was in part determined by the Western Allies. It could not be governed directly by the Federal Republic, and a number of Federal laws did not apply. Living or studying in West Berlin exempted you from military service. There were twenty-two members in the Bundestag, who were not directly elected but delegated by the Berlin parliament (*Abgeordnetenhaus*). These delegates had no vote in plenary sessions, nor could they participate in the election of the Chancellor.⁶ On the other hand, Berlin was generously subsidised by the Bonn government.⁷ As a part-city and an ex-capital, cut off from its natural hinterland, it would not otherwise have attracted investment. It was,

however, politically important both that the standard of living in West Berlin should appear demonstrably higher than that of the East, and that the West Berliners should not feel abandoned by Bonn.

As citizens of a Socialist state, East Berliners might well have countered that your standard of living is not only a function of how much money you have to spend. 'Invisibles' like accessible child care and guaranteed employment also matter.⁸ However, East Berlin was also subsidised. As the capital, for all practical purposes, of a command economy, it could ensure that the best of what was available got there. Moreover, in East Berlin the West lay next door, and most inhabitants knew someone⁹ who after 1972 had access to the West of the city and could bring goods back.

THE BERLIN WALL

Physically Berlin remained one city until 1961. The Wall was erected during the night of 12/13 August 1961. It surrounded the Western sector and carved a jagged path across the city. Its declared—and in economic terms (though not in human ones) quite understandable—function was to stop East Germans from pouring to the West and thus depriving the GDR of much-needed manpower, brain power and dynamism. Its effect on families living on both sides was devastating. In Bernauer Strasse, for example, between Prenzlauer Berg in the East and Wedding in the West, the Wall split the street in two. When guards and a brigade of masons arrived to wall up tenement windows on the GDR side, people began jumping out of windows and into firemen's sheets below. This was documented on archive film at the time (Hadrow and Kirby 1994).

Over the years the GDR strengthened and realigned its defences until a tight network of 3m (10ft) wall, fencing, barbed wire, open death strips, watchtowers, searchlights, and dog and human patrols extended for 100 miles round West Berlin. Houses close to the border were pulled down to improve firing lines. Guards had orders to shoot to kill, and most obeyed them, having little choice. In all there were 258 killed while escaping, eighteen drowned, and twenty-five border guards killed.¹⁰

Despite the human costs of the Wall, the economic stability it brought to the GDR meant that the two German states could organise their relationship on a more permanent basis. By the 1980s it seemed that Berlin could well remain a divided city indefinitely. Plans were even put forward to incorporate the Wall into buildings (*zumauern*) on the Western side. And then the Wall fell, almost as suddenly and unexpectedly as it had risen. Its building, like Bismarck's 1871 Empire, had been imposed from above. To bring it down, the people took the law into their own hands.

In autumn 1989, Hungary opened its border with Austria. Thousands of GDR citizens could now leave for the West via Hungary,¹¹ as they

could via Berlin before the Wall was built. The resulting mass exodus and the storming by East Germans of the West German embassies in Prague, Budapest and Warsaw prompted those who intended staying to demand reforms. Huge street demonstrations began in Leipzig and quickly spread to other East German cities, including Berlin. On 4 November 1989 around half a million people gathered on the Alexanderplatz to voice their protests. On 9 November the rumour spread that the Berlin Wall had been opened. Opinions differ as to whether this was formally true, but the people of Berlin made it true that very night. Thousands of East Berliners walked or drove to the crossing points of the Wall and demanded to be let through. Finally the numbers were too great for the crossing-point guards, who in any case had received no definite instructions, and the barriers were simply lifted. East and West Berliners walked through, on to and over the Wall. The mood was one of mass hysteria and euphoria; what happened that night in Berlin was broadcast live around the world on radio and television (Aust 1989). Hundreds of thousands celebrated throughout the city, and the frenzy of enthusiasm lasted for weeks.

The destruction of the infamous Wall began that same night. Pieces were chipped out almost immediately as souvenirs by the so-called 'woodpeckers of the Wall', the *Mauerspechte*. Over the next few days huge slices were carved out to make new crossing points. Six months after the opening of the Wall its systematic destruction began. Selected painted pieces were sold throughout the world, and the rest ground down to build roads. A year later 1 million tons of concrete had been disposed of. Roads that had been severed have been reconnected, and new buildings, grass and trees are covering the scars left by the Wall's removal. On the ground, its cross-city route is almost impossible to follow. Perhaps predictably, the pendulum eventually swung back once more. The one single watchtower left of the original 215 has been declared a national monument. In 1995 it was decided that the line of the Wall through the city should be marked. Test patches of coloured concrete, a copper and an aluminium strip, and double lines of paving stones have already been laid. This is a mainly Western interest; the East Berliners had other, more pressing problems. When the Wall was there, East Berliners avoided it as much as possible, leaving that area of Berlin to the tourists and the police (*Der Spiegel* 45/1995:80–85).

BERLIN REUNITED?

Ironically, those who had said that in a sense there had 'always' been two Berlins were not entirely wrong. Even though there is no longer a physical barrier between East and West, there is still a psychological one (*die Mauer in den Köpfen*).¹² The Wall itself may be gone, but for most

Berliners there is still an East and a West Berlin. According to a survey carried out by the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1991, only 7 per cent of West Berliners went regularly (more than once a week) to East Berlin, but 30 per cent of East Berliners went regularly to West Berlin; 64 per cent of these went shopping: the selection was better in West Berlin, and sometimes the prices were lower. Sixty per cent went for a look round. Only 4 per cent of West Berliners went to East Berlin to go shopping, and 49 per cent to look at the sights. Forty-five per cent of East Berliners wanted, now that it was possible, to see *all* of Berlin; only 30 per cent of West Berliners wanted to do so.

This is perhaps understandable. One could say that between 1961 and 1989 the East Berliners had been unable to travel anywhere very much, whereas West Berliners had had the run of the world. One could also say that, because Berlin had expanded so quickly during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, it had essentially remained a federation of only loosely connected and relatively independent small towns, each with its own centre. Thus the inhabitants of what was still basically Köpenick, though officially part of Greater Berlin, felt no particular need to go to other parts of Greater Berlin such as Reinickendorf or Weissensee. The post-Wall Berliner, therefore, still sticks to his or her own area.

It can also be argued that Unification had a more serious effect on employment prospects, and thus on the ability to travel, for the East Berliners than for the West Berliners, and particularly for the less well educated young. For some in the East, the world expanded with Unification. They could now travel, spend time learning abroad, and no longer had to fulfil the Marxist criteria of social acceptability to continue their education. But for others in the East the world narrowed. Every student and apprentice in the GDR including East Berlin knew that they would be allocated a job after training, and even the simplest and least demanding job had the status of a profession. These people were simply not used to applying for jobs in competition with others. Their parents did not necessarily know how to either, nor had they the connections and networks to help their offspring. Schools began providing courses in how to apply for jobs in a market economy, but because the special subsidies for Berlin had gone with the Wall the city was less interesting for investors. Many of the companies with training places in the East were closed down. The need for these young people to find jobs in an alien environment thus coincided with a reduction in the jobs available.

BERLIN AS CAPITAL: THE *HAUPTSTADTDEBATTE*

While Germany remained divided, Berlin was not supposed to be the capital of either part. East Berlin was none the less gradually incorporated

into the GDR, and by the 1980s postcards of East Berlin, and motorway signs to it, bore the words 'Hauptstadt der DDR' (capital of the GDR). After Unification the prohibition of course lapsed, and in 1991 the Federal Parliament decided, after long debate and by a majority of only eighteen votes, that the capital and seat of government of the newly united Germany would be Berlin, not Bonn. Government departments have already begun moving, and by 2002 the whole administration (if the schedule is kept to) will have transferred to Berlin.

There were practical and economic arguments on each side. Moving to Berlin is proving enormously expensive, and the people of Bonn understandably feared that losing the German government would adversely affect the economy of their region. On the other hand, Bonn's loss might be Brandenburg's gain: making Berlin the capital might reinvigorate the economy of its surrounding areas. But this sort of decision is rarely made purely on practical grounds. Behind it lay the issue of how the unified Federal Republic saw itself, and how it was regarded in the rest of Europe. In a sense Berlin meant both change and continuity: a change from the immediate past, and continuity with an earlier past, not all aspects of which were acceptable. Going for Berlin as capital meant confronting Germany's imperial and Nazi past, and raising worries in the neighbouring countries about Germany's future role. The rest of Europe had felt relatively comfortable with Bonn as capital of West Germany. Chosen in the 1950s as a temporary capital partly because it clearly could not and would not rival Berlin, it had come to symbolise a Germany that had accepted democratic values, while Berlin recalled the non-democratic and imperialist past of Prussia. However, the feelings of the rest of Europe had to be balanced against the feelings of the East Germans. Had Bonn, which lay so far to the West, been confirmed as capital, the East Germans would have felt even more strongly that they had simply been taken over (Parkes 1997:54). Perhaps Berlin did lie a trifle too far to the East; but unlike Bonn it was experiencing the effects of Unification at first hand. On another level, Bonn in all its forty years of capitalhood had never acquired the ambience and atmosphere of a lively metropolis, whereas united Berlin was rapidly rediscovering it (Watson 1995:96–102). Despite the fact that Berlin was the united capital of a united Germany for a relatively short time,¹³ one reason for the decision was undoubtedly the feeling that Berlin was somehow the 'natural' capital of Germany. Another was Helmut Kohl's emotional attachment to the idea of Berlin. He confessed on the day the vote was taken in Bonn that ever since that unforgettable night of 9 November 1989 he had been for Berlin (*Der Spiegel* 43/1995:76–86).

REBUILDING BERLIN

Once the decision had been made to transfer the capital to Berlin, civic and federal authorities agreed that the old centre of Berlin should be revived. Private investors were quicker off (or on to!) the mark, and a veritable flood of planning applications came in. The political and administrative guidelines for future development were therefore formulated under great pressure of time. The historical street network was to remain or be reconstructed. The maximum building height was to be 22 metres to the eaves and 30 metres to the roof. At least 20 per cent of each building was to be residential. The basic principle was to be the town house on one site; and the largest admissible site was the block (Kapitzki 1996:16–17).

Berlin had a lot of building to catch up on. In East Berlin the Socialist government could spend very little on repairing and maintaining the housing stock. It preferred—partly because it was cheaper—to give the people huge paved areas such as the Marx Engels Platz in which to foregather, and blocks of flats built of prefabricated concrete squares in which to live. The virtually complete destruction of the Wall, of the fortifications and of the ‘death strip’ presented the capital-in-waiting with a huge strip of derelict land right in its centre—a splendid opportunity for some visionary construction projects.

Few cities are given in peacetime such an opportunity to rebuild their centre. And what has happened in Berlin is that rebuilding after the destruction of the 1939–45 war was delayed by the division and the Wall. What we are now seeing there is effectively a speeded-up version of what in other European capitals has taken nearly fifty years. Clearly, such an enormous undertaking was never going to be uncontroversial. Equally clearly, Berlin could not afford to pass up such an opportunity for reconstruction and restoration. To give you some idea of the scale of the operation, think of a town of 100,000 inhabitants. The four largest building sites in central Berlin—Potsdamer Platz, Friedrichstraße, Leipziger Straße and Lehrter Bahnhof—were equal in area to a town that size. That is not counting the repair and rebuilding which is going on outside the centre. The noise, dust and inconvenience, for those who have to live there, are immense! Berlin has, however, made the best of things by successfully converting its huge building programme into a tourist attraction (*Die Welt*, 14 May 1996). The huge red ‘Info-Box’ on stilts in the centre of Potsdamer Platz showed up to 5,000 visitors a day an interactive electronic view of twenty-first-century Berlin. So successful has the ‘Info-Box’ proved that it will be used on other huge building sites elsewhere.

In the original town centre between Alexanderplatz and Potsdamer Platz the scars of the 1939–45 war, of unimaginative post-war rebuilding and of the building of the Wall will be finally removed. What in the

eighteenth century were the suburbs (remember Berlin was much smaller then) of Dorotheenstadt and Friedrichstadt with their once splendid baroque squares, of which only fragments remain, will dictate the layout of Pariser Platz, Leipziger Platz, Mehringplatz and Spittelmarkt, but the buildings will be new. A huge shopping precinct has been built in Friedrichstraße; some very prestigious shops have already moved in, and others are awaited. The areas of Spreeinsel and Wilhelmstraße will contain ministries and embassies—the new federal government buildings proper will be west and south of the Brandenburg Gate, and will include the rebuilt Reichstag. New offices, shops and hotels will mingle with the existing opera house, theatre and university. The U-Bahn and S-Bahn lines severed by the building of the Wall have been rebuilt or reconnected already. As a reunited capital city Berlin will receive many more travellers per day than before, so its transport system needs not simply reconstructing, but extending and modernising. To connect it to the high-speed German railway network three large new intercity stations are planned—Lehrter Bahnhof (240,000 passengers per day), Papestraße (79,000 ppd) and Spandau. Even so, the area around the Lehrter Bahnhof will be 30 per cent residential.

While this huge project takes place in the city centre, an extensive housing project is planned for the suburbs. The same principle obtains as for the town centre: use the traditional Berlin grid-system ground plan, and provide living accommodation, schools, kindergartens, shops, workplaces and greenery all within the same area, and preferably within walking distance. In the last five years 72,000 such homes have been planned or built for areas such as Biesdorf, Alt-Glieneke and Rudow.

In many ways the basic model for the rebuilding, particularly of the centre, is reminiscent of that other era of hectic building through which Berlin has gone, the end of the nineteenth century. At that time huge numbers of industrial workers came to Berlin, especially from the poorer, more easterly parts of Germany, as migrant workers in the 1950s came especially from the poorer, more easterly parts of Europe. They needed accommodation, and to provide it the town drew up in 1862 a blueprint for building until the end of the century. The plan envisaged a grid system of wide intersecting streets, generous rectangular sites interspersed with parks and greenery, decorated patrician houses on the outside of the blocks, facing on to the streets (*Vorderhäuser*), and humbler, plainer houses hidden behind these (*Hinterhäuser*), so that rich and poor could live, work and play happily in decent and appropriate accommodation side by side in the same areas. At least that was, and is, the idea.

This nineteenth-century plan both overestimated the town's interest in the common good, and underestimated the power of capital. In the long term it fostered land speculation. Thus, instead of the intended three- or

four-storey dwellings, housing on the expensive sites was packed as densely as possible, with up to seven five-storey tenement *Hinterhäuser* behind each splendid *Vorderhaus*, and tiny boxed-in inner courtyards—the minimum area was that required for access and turning by the horsedrawn carriages of the fire brigade—into which no sun could penetrate. One way of dealing with this has been to demolish every alternate block in the system (to let in more light), and renovate what is left.

In the eyes of the civic authorities, Berlin today, newly united under a market system, clearly once again has to attract those with money. Concrete spaces are cheap to produce, but they bring no capital return.¹⁴ If no one wanted to invest in the biggest building site in Europe, then the ambitious plans for Berlin would never be realised. This is partly why Berlin is targeting the well-off with this particular scheme, to persuade them not only to come and shop in Friedrichstraße but to live in the area as well, so that the property will be well maintained. The perceived alternative is the continued depopulation of the city centre and spreading of the city edges as the rich do their best to move out.¹⁵

In the centre of Europe, therefore, a fascinating experiment has begun (*Der Spiegel* 8/1995:42–56). Developments which in other European cities took forty or fifty years are being accelerated. By 2002, if all goes according to plan, the long wound through the city left by the Wall will have been closed completely. But that is not all. From north to south, the following will have been built: a new central railway station on four levels, the government buildings with office space for 1,400, up to ten new foreign embassies and twelve *Land* offices, the huge business and residential area for Daimler Benz, Sony, ABB and Hertie in Potsdamer Platz, 750,000sqkm of office and shopping space in Leipziger Platz, and the five blocks of the business centre at the former Wall crossing point Checkpoint Charlie. Underneath all this, four tunnels will have been bored, for intercity and regional railways, for Underground and urban railway, and for a road under the Tiergarten. And that is still not all, for much of East Berlin is sadly in need of long-overdue repair and maintenance, and there is nearly as much building going on in the suburbs and outskirts as in the centre. In total around twenty housing projects are planned, for over 200,000 people. The plans are bold and worthy of a capital city. After sixty years Berlin is returning to the pace and vigour, the legendary ‘Tempo’ of the ‘golden Twenties’.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

There is of course a downside to this growth. To finance the ambitious building programme, the *Land* Berlin will have to increase its debt by one-third, to DM 18,000 for every Berliner. The vast housing programme,

needed in part because many repairs in East Berlin were neglected for forty years, will cost another DM 560m in debts. By 1998 one-third of Berlin's tax bill will go towards paying off interest on building subsidies.

Clearly, not everything can be afforded. In the East Berlin district of Hohenschönhausen in 1996, for example, DM 250m was needed for repairs: toilet facilities in almost all the schools were out of order; five gyms were unusable. The budget was DM 5m. Over 100,000 turn-of-the-century tenement buildings in Friedrichshain and Prenzlauer Berg need attention if they are not to decline into slums. Demolishing every other *Hinterhaus* in each block to provide more space and let in more light, as the former GDR did when it could afford it, is least expensive in money terms. However, it means a loss of housing space, and the houses left standing still have to be modernised.

If the town cannot afford the repairs, can private funds be found? One problem here is that, if private individuals or companies buy the property, the rent can then rise out of reach.¹⁶ This is happening in parts of West Berlin: in Kreuzberg, Schöneberg and Charlottenburg the poorer inhabitants are moving out because they can no longer afford the rents. Turkish shops and small businesses are giving way to bars and computer shops. The consequent loss of simple jobs has driven the unemployment rate in Kreuzberg up to 20 per cent. One solution may have been found in the privatisation programme encouraging tenants to buy. This may, however, lead to ghettoisation, the layering of society according to where people live: the antithesis of the specifically Berlin atmosphere created by different sections of society living and working in the same place, with shops and leisure facilities just round the corner—precisely what the town planners say they wish to preserve or re-create.

The restructuring of the old GDR economy was also reflected in Berlin. Since Unification nearly 300,000 jobs in Berlin have disappeared. As in Germany as a whole, the overwhelming majority of them (about 250,000) were in the East but also about 50,000 in the West. Now unemployment is sinking in the East and rising in the West. The service sector is expanding, but in the old centre of Berlin, rather than in the West. By 1988 subsidies to West Berlin¹⁷ had reached around DM 54 million annually. When they stopped, many investors, temporarily at least, left Berlin and moved into the cheaper environs. From 1994 to 1996 economic growth was greatest in the East German *Länder*. Although geographically in the East, the *Land* of Berlin's economy did not keep pace—in 1994 it even shrank a little (*Globus Kartendienst* Bb-2212), and in 1995 it grew more slowly than Dresden's or Leipzig's (*Globus Kartendienst* Bb-2924). In 1996 it merely maintained its position overall (*Globus Kartendienst* Bb-3245), but the economy of West Berlin sank by 1.5 per cent, while that of East Berlin grew by more than 5 per cent. Such growth as there was during these two years was attributed to the prospect of the Federal Government moving

Table 2.1 Voting in the Berlin-Brandenburg Referendum 1996 (per cent)

<i>West Berlin</i>			<i>East Berlin</i>			<i>Brandenburg</i>		
<i>Pro</i>	<i>Anti</i>	<i>Turnout</i>	<i>Pro</i>	<i>Anti</i>	<i>Turnout</i>	<i>Pro</i>	<i>Anti</i>	<i>Turnout</i>
58.7	40.3	59.8	44.5	54.7	54.7	24.3	62.7	66.6

Source: Statistisches Landesamt Berlin; figures from Mackay 1996

there and to the building programme. The latter appears the more important at present. Making Berlin the capital will actually only create about 16,000 new jobs, whereas 125,000 people are employed by the building programme.

BERLIN-BRANDENBURG: TWO INTO ONE DIDN'T GO¹⁸

Berlin will be the centre of the German building industry for only about the next ten years, and the frenetic pace will certainly slow down before then. One long-term way forward might have been to combine *Land* Berlin with its surrounding *Land* Brandenburg. Provision for this had been made in the Unification Treaty of 1990, perhaps as a first step towards the restructuring of the whole Federal Republic. The Berlin and Brandenburg parliaments voted in 1995 to accept the merger, subject to a referendum in both *Länder*, which took place on 6 May 1996. A narrow majority of Berliners voted in favour and a much larger majority of Brandenburgers voted against. The merger therefore failed, but the debate and the outcome are worth a closer look. The narrow majority in Berlin overall conceals the fact that a majority of West Berliners voted in favour and a majority of East Berliners against (see Table 2.1).

As with the Hauptstadtdebatte, there were economic and practical arguments on both sides. The merger was supported by the two *Land* governments, labour and employers' organisations in both *Länder*, and had the approval of Kohl and the Bundestag. The official promoter campaign was therefore immense, with a copy of the merger treaty for every household and an 'Info-Bus' touring the entire region.¹⁹ The campaign stressed the economic advantages of the proposed merger. A unified Berlin-Brandenburg would form an extremely attractive region for investors. In many ways the area already operated as an economic unit;²⁰ unification would create optimum conditions for further growth, facilitate a coherent transport and communications policy, and end the costly duplication of administering two *Länder*.²¹ The plan also had implications for the future structure of the Federal Republic as a whole, since the successful creation of a larger, financially viable *Land* could

demonstrate one way of reducing the growing expense to the *Bund* of the federal system itself.

Its proponents were careful not to call the merger a *Vereinigung*, a union. Enough East Germans had in the event felt 'annexed' after Unification to make it inadvisable to invite any comparison—and Brandenburg lies in the territory of the former GDR. It was to be a 'fusion' or 'marriage' (*Länderfusion* or *Länderehe*) of equals, to form a new *Land* with a new name. None the less, two issues dominated the anti-merger campaign: Berlin's debts²² and the balance of power. Neither *Land* really expected to gain financially from the merger, but the Brandenburgers feared they might be landed with Berlin's debts as well. The financial relationship envisaged between the city of Berlin and Brandenburg appeared complex, and very dependent on the hope of an economic upturn (Mackay 1996:488). Another important issue was how the power in a united Berlin-Brandenburg would be divided. The Brandenburgers understandably felt that in a united *Landtag* Berlin would dominate.

The result of the referendum was no real surprise; opinion polls had consistently predicted the outcome accurately. In both areas of Berlin older people tended to vote in favour, and younger against. In the former East Berlin young people voted overwhelmingly against. Support for the PDS is highest in East Berlin, but more than just PDS members voted no. Mackay suggests that both West and East Berliners had been used to living in a city with special status. If the merger went ahead, the former West Berliners would be outnumbered two to one by former East Germans, whereas East Berliners' experiences since Unification might have made them sceptical of any promised benefits. In Brandenburg, as in Berlin, the merger was least popular with the young. Overall, however, the Brandenburg vote was essentially a vote against Berlin. Their fear of becoming a milch cow to service Berlin's debts reinforced their suspicions that as the capital Berlin would once again enjoy a special status, this time at their expense.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has only skimmed the surface of the exhilarating city that is Berlin. Some there will see the present situation as a leap forward, others as a setback. In a city of that size (3.5 million inhabitants) and complexity it is not possible for everywhere to be doing well. In the future, as in the past, some areas will do better than others. But Berlin will survive somehow, and so will the Berliners, whose 'abiding spirit...has been to look forward, to move on from the past without...nostalgia or self-pity' (Watson 1995:102). The best thing to do is to visit Berlin, perhaps even live there for a while, and appreciate the many things Berlin has to offer.

NOTES

- 1 Early European towns functioned in many ways as nation-states do nowadays. The walls, for instance, were for defence, and demarcation, and within them, though not necessarily outside, the writ of the town council kept the peace.
- 2 For example, Borsigwalde and Siemensstadt. Siemens now has its headquarters in Munich, but was originally established in Berlin.
- 3 In 1933 there were 173,000 Jews in Berlin; in 1946 there were 5,000. Now there are about 10,000 (*Der Spiegel* 40/1995:142).
- 4 The Federal Republic was created in May, the GDR in October.
- 5 The GDR lies outside the scope of this chapter, but was a relatively successful socialist state.
- 6 The four representatives from West Berlin in the *Bundesrat* did not have full voting rights either. They were however allowed to vote for the Federal President.
- 7 Detailed information on precise subsidies lie outside the scope of this chapter.
- 8 See [Chapter 6](#).
- 9 Men over 65, and women over 60, could visit the West for a maximum of thirty days a year.
- 10 Statistic from a memorial near the Reichstag. See also 'Third Reich and the Wall' in: Leitch (1993:51–62).
- 11 See [Chapter 1](#).
- 12 See [Chapter 1](#), and p. 4.
- 13 Seventy-four years, from 1871 to 1945, and only fifteen of those years under democratic government.
- 14 Christian Villiers, *Senatsverwaltung für Bau und Wohnungswesen*, author's interview on 7 May 1996.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 *Der Spiegel* 8/1995:52.
- 17 See p. 16, this chapter.
- 18 I am greatly indebted to Joanna Mackay's 1996 article for this section.
- 19 The main opposition groups were the PDS, the Brandenburg Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, various political parties not in the *Landtag* and the pressure group Bündnis für Brandenburg.
- 20 Around 200,000 workers commuted daily to Berlin from Brandenburg, and 50,000 the other way.
- 21 For a more detailed analysis of the referendum, see Mackay (1996: 485–502).
- 22 In 1996 these were DM 13.36 per inhabitant (Harenberg 1996:528).

RECOMMENDED READING/WATCHING

- Aust, S. (1989) *Fünf Wochen im Herbst*, Spiegel TV video on events leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- Behrend, J. (1992) *Berlin*. Useful if you are visiting Berlin.

- 'Berlin: Baustelle der Nation', *Der Spiegel* 49/1996, pp. 22–34 on the pros and cons of the building programme.
- Hadrow, J. and Kirby, T. (1994) *Walking the Wall*, BBC TV video. A retrospective look at events five years after the Wall fell. Personal memories in German (subtitled) and English.
- Merian Extra (1994) *Hauptstadt Berlin*. Articles on various aspects of Berlin, with photographs.
- Parkes, S. (1997) *Understanding Contemporary Germany* gives a short and clear statement of the arguments in the Hauptstadtdebatte (see especially pp. 52–54).
- Watson (1995) pp. 96–102.

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- Anon., 'Lied'l fum goldenen Land', *Der Spiegel* 40/1995:134–142.
- Anon., 'Schwer emotional besetzt', *Der Spiegel* 45/1995:80–85.
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- Leitch, M. (1993) *Slow Walks in Berlin*, Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 51–62.
- Mackay, J. (1996) 'Berlin-Brandenburg? Nein danke! The Referendum on the proposed *Länderfusion*', *German Politics*, vol. 5 no. 3 (December), pp. 485–502.
- Parkes, S. (1997) *Understanding Contemporary Germany*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Watson, A. (1995) 'Berlin', in Watson, A., *The Germans: Who Are They Now?*, London: Mandarin, especially pp. 96–102.

