

Berlin and Bonn: The significance of the German Capital.

Berlin has been the capital of Germany since 1871 and remained the capital until 1945. The last time it had been a capital before this was when it had been the Capital of Prussia and since 1871 when it was again a united capital it suffered two world wars and a campaign of genocide. Even though the capital of Germany remained in Berlin until 1945 the last time the Reichstag met there before 1945 was in 1933 when the Reichstag fire happened.

After the war ended Germany was divided into four nations and Berlin was also divided between them. When Germany was actually divided between the allies and the Soviets it was decided that Berlin could therefore no longer be the capital and so the decision was made to move the capital away from Berlin firstly to give West Germany some control, stability and an identity and also to take some of the pressure away from it caused by the frictions between the East and West. It was thought that the nation could not identify with a divided capital and the focus that was currently on Berlin would just remind them of the problems and suffering that they were experiencing. However at the time this was only seen as a temporary problem as it was expected that within 5 years that the two countries would reunite and the capital would return to its former city. After a long debate it was eventually decided to move the capital to Bonn. One of the other main possibilities as the new capital was Frankfurt as it was central in West Germany, it was an old trading post and it was a large city and was deemed a very suitable replacement where as Bonn was quite small and unknown. It was decided that Bonn would be a better choice though due to the fact that it was relatively small and unheard of and it was also decided that Frankfurt was too large and too bound up in German history. It is also said that Chancellor Adenauer favoured Bonn as he had his home nearby and he was actually the CDU deputy for the town. The main reason Bonn was chosen was because West Germany wanted to make a political statement showing that West Germany was a non-threatening country and by choosing the Rhenish University city of Bonn as its new capital emphasised this well. Bonn's lack of planning was also of great significance as it was very uninspiring and small however as Peter Conradi a social democrat said, "at the same time no one would fear it either" However the capital remained there a lot longer than the five years that was expected. In the end Bonn remained the capital and governed West Germany for 41 years.

The Bonn republic represented the central element in the general diffusion of power. The 3rd Reich actually had quite an effect on the Bonn republic and it forced the commitment to human rights in the basic law and those elements that were designed to work against arbitrary and centralised power. Another defining characteristic of the Bonn republic was its semi-sovereignty, which originally was an imposed condition, but then actually became a defining characteristic, which was represented by its federal system as well as the crucial role played by such institutions such as the Bundesbank. A second key characteristic of the Bonn republic was its concentrated party system, which was able to

meet two key tests for the first time in history – sustaining a stable government and providing for alternation of power.

A key role towards this was the CDU/CSU. They emerged as the first successful conservative party since 1949 and were helping and engaged in German political development. As reunification seemed to slip further and further away institutions which had previously regarded themselves as provisional took on longer lasting characters and roles. This was particularly so as they were housed in increasingly large and formidable buildings, which were gradually expanding larger and larger, and it was said that Bonn was starting to set itself up as the World capital. This was illustrated more and more when German government officials decided in the mid 1980's to replace the temporary buildings that had been housing the Bundestag and replace them with elaborate new structures, which were intended for long-term use.

40 years after Bonn became the capital of West Germany unification of the two German States occurred and this was formalized on the 3rd October 1990 by an official ceremony in Berlin. This then brought about another dispute The Berlin Bonn Streit: Should the capital remain in the city of Bonn or return back to Berlin. The worry was not only to contain the impact of change for the German citizen but also of how the decision would be received outside of Germany and Europe. It was thought that moving the capital back to Berlin the actual place where most of the conflict had taken place during the cold war would just remind people of the destruction and devastation caused instead of concentrating on the future. This actually ignored lots of evidence showing that foreigners have many positive images of Berlin such as the falling of the wall and the reunification of the two Germanys.

The voting took place on the 20th June 1991 and it ended up being very close with only a majority of 338 to 320 in favour of moving back to Berlin. It was found that the majority of voting for remaining in Bonn was from the SPD and the CDU/CSU. The actual significance of returning the capital back to Berlin was great as it gave people a sense of ending and also by returning the capital it showed and symbolised the reunification of Germany with its reunified capital giving the German people a sense of identity again and symbolised the future of Germany and the security it held. This did cause problems that were perhaps forgotten. A third of the population in Bonn almost 100,000 people depended on government jobs. After the decision was made panic set in as housing prices started to fall and new projects were abandoned. In an opinion poll it was found that 70% of the German people had favoured Berlin as the new capital but at the same time 60% would have been happy for it to stay in Bonn. Civil servants and junior politicians were unhappy to move to be uprooted and change their habits and lifestyle and tried to argue that Berlin was too vast and crime ridden to be a good capital and that since it had been a capital in 1871 nothing good had ever come out of it.

The last Bundestag session was held in Bonn on 1st July 1999 but at this point yet another argument broke out over whether the term the "Berlin Republic" should be used. The objection to this is associated with the Weimar Republic. Wolfgang Schäuble who was a keen advocate for Berlin as the capital of the united Germany but was against the

use of the term the Berlin Republic, describes the similarity between it and Weimar as “**ein schiefer Ansatzpunkt**”. Weimar was used as the title for the inter war republic even though Berlin very soon after became the capital and on this reasoning Bonn which had housed the parliamentary council should therefore also have the title of Bonn republic.

On the 2nd of December 1990 Berliners elected their own members of parliament for the first time and on the same day the Berlin's city parliaments were held from which the Senate was elected in January of 1991. At this time the final stage of the German administrative move from Bonn to Berlin was estimated to happen by 2000. During these last ten years there was a construction boom in Berlin, which is evident for starters from the renovated Reichstag building. Also 100 streets between the former east and west Germany have been reconnected, ghost stations and undergrounds have been brought back to life and all the watchtowers and barbed wire that once separated Berlin into two has completely disappeared. The majority of buildings on the new federal strip have had many cosmetic changes to them. The colonnades for example have been removed and the monumental stone walls that in a way defined the architecture of the 3rd Reich have now been covered by clad brick.

On the 1st of October 1991 the governing Major of Berlin and the Senate moved from their provisional home for the last 41 years in Schöneberg into the Berlin city hall, which was located in the city centre. In April 1993 Berlin's house of representatives moved into the restored building which at one time had held the Prussian state parliament – the Landtag. It was estimated that by 1999 54% of ministers would have been based in Berlin and as the minister of the time said “ We are moving to a building that embodies the old Berlin but we are going to fill it with quite new life. While we are not denying its historical roots we are beginning a new era”

By August of 1998 the first phase of the Move was complete and officials who were once scattered throughout the city were brought under one roof. However the 370-mile move from Bonn to Berlin was delayed due to construction work problems and changes of plans. The total area of 41,000 sqm was taken up by the Bundersrat offices at the cost of around 31 million DM and the estimated total cost was to be around 250 million DM . A year before the actual move took place it was discovered that a good deal of government business was already taking place in Berlin and that some areas such as German unification were being managed from Berlin rather than Bonn.

The bundersbahn invested 20 billion Dm into renewing the city's track network – replacing damaged lines due to decades of neglect and disuse .They were also developing a transrapid – the high-speed train system – which was designed to cut trips from Hamburg to Berlin to an hour.

On Monday 19th April 1999 the Bunderstag meeting in the Reichtags building in Berlin symbolised the transfer of the German capital to Berlin. President Roman Herzog relocate in 1998 and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder moved in the summer of 1999 and described the transition from Bonn to Berlin as “ a chance for a new start”.

Berlin's future is looking very good and the German government is doing everything they can to try and ensure this, as Berlin is so symbolic for so many Germans. Every year Berlin is the venue for some 15,000 to 20,000 congresses, symposia, exhibitions and business contracts. Berlin's leaders hope the city's hipness and increasing number of young and internet loving inhabitants will help turn Berlin into the country's multimedia centre as well as its political centre.

The senate has commissioned many projects to help reshape and identify Berlin as Germany's new capital which have an estimated cost of 10 billion DM. Examples of this are the love parade, Stadt fuhrung, the info box positioned in the middle of the potzdammer platz and the schaubus. These are all designed to bring people's focus on the new modern Berlin and the prosperous future it has. The move back to Berlin is in a way rejoining German history and the transition should have reinforced the impact of their history. In Bonn the terrible events of their recent history were hard to see and scarcely tangible however in Berlin everywhere you look it is clear to see especially in the city centre and near the Reichstag building. It is because of this that Berlin has such great significance for the German people as Berlin acts not only as their capital but also as a reminder of the past of a warning of what can happen yet showing them the future their nation has and of how strong and prosperous it will be.