

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Waiting for the next famine?

*The Bonn parliament seemed moved by the catastrophe in Africa, but only "thinking big" will really change things.*

**O**n Dec. 6, the Bonn parliament debated the food crisis in Ethiopia. Reports by several deputies who had just returned from the famine regions sent shock waves through the parliament: It became clear that conditions in Ethiopia were much worse than believed before, and that food and other emergency aid had to be extended.

The debate also made clear that Ethiopia was just the tip of the iceberg. One Christian Democratic deputy predicted that "a total of 150 million Africans are threatened by starvation within the next years." A statement of intent was passed that food and other aid to Africa should be increased significantly. One week later, the Bonn governmental cabinet decided to add another 75 million deutschemarks to its 100 million food-aid program for Africa, out of which 42 million were to go to Ethiopia. The aid will help, because it was granted and processed unbureaucratically.

The sad truth is, though, that those Africans who will survive this famine winter might die in the next famine period in 1985, because the food supply in Africa will not improve. A new U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization report projects a worsening food situation in Africa in 1985, which will require an increase of at least 25% in food aid for the same (limited) effect as in 1984.

Despite many words in the Bonn parliament about the decline of agricultural production and ecological and social conditions throughout Africa, the pernicious role of the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Africa was not mentioned once, nor Africa's crushing foreign debt.

As a matter of fact, the Bonn government came to the defense of the IMF, when the recent Organization of African Unity summit attacked the foreign debt as the prime reason for the economic and agricultural decline of Africa. Bonn blamed "mismanagement" and "bad policies" by African governments rather than the IMF.

Neither the Bonn government nor the parliament has ever debated a large-scale development project for Africa. But if there is no interest in development, there is also no real interest in helping the 400 million Africans or the 3 billion human beings in all of the Third World. The message developing-sector politicians have always gotten in Bonn boiled down to "aid—yes, development—no!"

When Egypt's President Mubarak asked for West German nuclear power plants for his country in early November, Bonn told him to rely on natural gas instead. Many nations have asked for material and financial support for big development projects, but learned that Bonn was only interested in "small projects." This is also the official position on the future of African agriculture. Without big development projects and without the replacement of the IMF's policy of conditionalities by a policy of development funding, millions of Africans are doomed to starvation.

West Germany's skilled labor

force and the country's industry can actually contribute a lot to Africa's development. Besides Egypt, many other African governments would like to receive German nuclear technology, because the technical standard and safety of nuclear facilities in Germany are considered among the best in the world.

German engineering skills in constructing and servicing railroad grids, in building roads and bridges, dams and ports, can be employed instantly once a large-scale accord for building up Africa's infrastructure is signed. To create a big enough framework for such projects, the German government would have to jump over its "free-market economy" shadow and adopt a dirigistic government-to-government economic development policy.

German engineering would be key to the vital development of Africa's water resources. An example is the Qattara Valley Project in Egypt, which involves building an artificial canal from the Mediterranean Sea to supply water to a new huge lake right in the middle of the desert. A grid of desalination plants and irrigation canals could turn into arable lands what is lethal desert today.

The same can be done in the construction of a huge reservoir around the Chad Sea and the Congo River Basin. A fresh-water-supply grid spread across the central segment of the African continent from there could turn the "Central African famine belt" into a garden.

Cheap credit is the key to this huge venture. The government could work out a scheme with the country's private banks to provide billions of dollars at low or no interest to Africa, and this would put tens of thousands of unemployed skilled German workers back on the job. The Bonn politicians just have to begin to think big.