

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Maglev is gaining ground

*The government is promoting export options for the Transrapid maglev system, the transport technology of the future.*

**I**n a development without precedent in German politics over the last 20 years, President Roman Herzog has invited the entire foreign diplomatic corps to join him on Oct. 30 for a test ride, at 300 miles per hour, on the Transrapid train, to get a first-hand view of the maglev technology that is to revolutionize the world's transportation systems of the coming century. Up to 250 diplomats are expected to travel in the high-speed train from Bonn to the 34-kilometer experimental maglev track in Lathen.

Herzog will be accompanied by Transport Minister Matthias Wissmann; Dieter Vogel, the chairman of maglev technology producer Thyssen; and Johannes Ludewig, chairman of the German Railway Company.

One should not expect export contracts to automatically result from this giant promotional event, at least not in the near future. But it will lead to preparatory talks about future maglev projects in many parts of the world. Such talks are already being held with China, the United States, Taiwan, Thailand, Russia, Australia, Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, the Republic of South Africa, and Argentina, among others.

Herzog's initiative comes at a moment when new momentum for the German Transrapid can be noted, particularly in the United States and China. Receiving a senior German delegation led by Economic Cooperation Minister Carl-Dieter Spranger in Beijing on Oct. 20, Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Zhu Ronghi surprised his guests with an endorsement of the German maglev system. In the context of discussing national infrastructure

priorities, he said he thinks that the technological advantages of the maglev over conventional high-speed train systems such as the French TGV, the German ICE, and the Japanese Shinkansen, make it an attractive option for the planned Beijing-Shanghai rail project. Zhu Ronghi has studied the report by Ye Quing, the deputy director of the State Planning Commission for Technology, who took a ride on the experimental Transrapid track in Germany, several months ago.

An influential role in the background to Zhu Ronghi's move, has also been played by Helga Zepp LaRouche, the international president of the Schiller Institute and wife of Lyndon H. LaRouche. In several visits to mainland China during recent years, she has told her discussion partners that maglev technology was best suited to solve the immense problems that China, with its 1.2 billion population, is facing in the public transportation sector.

Zhu Ronghi's endorsement of the Transrapid indicates significant changes in the infrastructural development plans of China. Maglev engineers in Germany have told this author that the official Chinese position was first to realize the projected conventional high-speed links of the national rail grid, to secure the mass transport of several 10 million Chinese daily. Only after the completion of that project, would China begin building a separate maglev grid, for second-generation transport between the biggest cities, sometime between the years 2005 and 2010. These evaluations were given before the recent Chinese Communist Party, however; some-

thing has changed, since then, and it is a positive change.

The situation in mainland China also radiates into Taiwan (Republic of China), where, until very recently, it seemed certain that the planned rail link across the island—from the capital of Taipei in the north, to the deep sea port of Kaohsiung in the south—would use one of the three high-speed-rail models that are on the world market today: the ICE, the TGV, or the Shinkansen. When German Economics Minister Günter Rexrodt visited Taiwan at the end of September, the government in Taipei announced that it had granted GEC-Alsthom/Siemens (the Franco-German group which produces the ICE as well as the TGV) and its local partner, Taiwan High Speed Rail Consortium, "best applicant" status for the project. But it was leaked to the press that a final decision on the project would not be taken before the end of December, and that the German maglev train might be chosen.

Transrapid International, the German industrial group that produces the maglev train, has already made an offer to Taiwan.

Advances for the maglev train have also been made in the United States, where the Senate is debating a transportation bill drafted by Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), which includes an option for maglev systems based on the German technology. Sen. John Chafee (R-R.I.), an endorser of the bill, took a ride on the Transrapid in Germany during February.

There are problems with political sabotage in the House of Representatives, according to a German maglev expert who has been in Washington, D.C. several times to promote the project. It was decided to delay any vote by six months. But in May, a big high-tech exhibit in Chicago will help to promote the Transrapid on the American market.