

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Reviving a lost spirit of cooperation

It is time to revitalize a genuine spirit of republicanism in U.S.-German relations.

A few days after U.S. President Bill Clinton, during a visit to Germany on May 13-14, prominently mentioned the role of German emigrés such as Carl Schurz in the defense of the United States against the Confederacy, Germany officially celebrated the anniversary of its first freely elected parliament, established in May 1848. The parliament, which was convened with deputies from all regions of Germany and Austria after the March 1848 revolutions, met in Frankfurt, at St. Paul's Church, beginning on May 18 of that year, and it was immediately recognized by the United States. The Americans endorsed the assembly's work on a republican constitution, which to a great extent relied on the U.S. Constitution. The Americans particularly encouraged efforts to replace the regimes created after the 1815 Congress of Vienna in the 34 German feudal states that existed at that time, with an elected, all-German national government.

American support for the St. Paul's Church assembly was crucial when the feudal German oligarchy struck back against it. In some regions, military force was used to abolish existing regional parliaments and cancel the mandates of deputies to the assembly. To escape prosecution by the feudal regimes, many Germans emigrated. From the autumn of 1848 on, a great number of republicans and other citizens who had lost confidence in the near-term chances of making Germany a republic, went to the United States, the only beacon of freedom at that time.

Among the Germans who chose to emigrate were citizens from the Eisenach region, in the state of Thuringia.

Craftsmen, scientists, journalists, and teachers, they settled mostly in Iowa, where, in the town of Waverly, they established a Lutheran college and named it "Wartburg." This was to commemorate the Wartburg castle in Eisenach, where Martin Luther stayed while in exile during the early 16th century, when he was under the imperial ban of the Hapsburgs.

The Waverly connection, which had its ups and downs with the changing German regimes over the last 150 years, was revitalized after German reunification in 1992, when the citizens of Eisenach established a sister-city tie.

This is just one of many such transatlantic connections which were established as several million Germans emigrated to the United States. But, the Eisenach-Waverly connection has become particularly prominent now. Following Clinton's visit, there is now talk of a project to intensify such contacts, and to utilize the fact that, as Chancellor Helmut Kohl also pointed out in his Berlin speeches during Clinton's visit, 20% of the American population can trace their ancestry back to German origins. For the success of the "next century of U.S.-German friendship," which was proclaimed during the Clinton visit, the strengthening of these kinds of contacts will be important, not least because of the fact that the postwar elites who established the first 50 years of U.S.-German friendship after 1945, are dying out.

It must be said, however, that those 50 years of postwar U.S.-German ties were not without problems, which had

to do with the fact that the republican foundations of that friendship, the spirit of 1848 and 1861, when many emigré Germans joined the Union armies against the Confederacy, no longer played much of a role. The Germanophobe Trumans, Kissingers, and Bushes dominated relations with Germany after 1945, the Presidential terms of Reagan and Kennedy being the exceptions, because they offered aspects of a genuine friendship. Clinton, similarly, has offered friendship, and even a strategic partnership, without the kinds of conditions that Presidents before him have always insisted upon.

For the Germans who want this new friendship, it has been an historical opportunity, not to be missed, that Clinton has been in the White House since 1993. Now that Clinton has reinitiated his offer for a strategic partnership, not quite on the level of his visit in July 1994, but in a similar spirit, the question is posed, how to make it a reality. U.S. Ambassador John Kornblum said something quite important in this respect, in a speech in Leipzig on May 8. He said that Germans should recall that for their ancestors, the United States, from its inception, has always been a "vision of a better society." The Germans who emigrated to the United States during the last century, Kornblum said, not only wanted to leave Europe to become Americans, but were also in the historic tradition of those for whom, for the past 400 years, even before the United States became a nation, the idea of "America" served as a standard for their efforts to improve their own societies. In that context, he said, the United States was "the only state to officially recognize" the St. Paul's Church assembly, and on that historic foundation, future U.S.-German relations, after the end of the Cold War and German and European partition, should develop.