

Report from Germany by Rainer Apel

Great Projects Gain Momentum

While the Tremonti plan gains support in Germany, the European Parliament discovers a new interest in maglev transport.

Belying Summer's apparent slow pace, there is new momentum in political discussions in Germany about major European infrastructure projects. And, not surprising, the ideas of Lyndon LaRouche are in the middle these developments, through his movement's forceful intervention into public debate. In early June, 50 LaRouche Youth Movement activists deployed for a week to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. They held many meetings with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) across the political spectrum, and rallies and information booths focussing on LaRouche's proposal for a grand development alliance, called the Eurasian Land-Bridge.

This left its impact: On June 8, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Green Party MEP, gave a surprising interview to Germany's *Welt am Sonntag*, calling for "infrastructure projects on a European scale." Cohn-Bendit, a very close friend of German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (also a Green), posed a question so far only raised by LaRouche: "Why don't we issue a loan at the European Investment Bank, to pay for the required investments?" Cohn-Bendit then criticized his own Greens for whittling down Germany's use of maglev rail technology—to the role merely of a super-fast local commuter train—and urged, "We have to design something bigger for that. A Paris-Berlin-Warsaw-Moscow line."

Similarly, political debate in Germany has turned to confronting the economic collapse via the recent proposals enunciated by Italian Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti; in turn, Tre-

monti's proposals reflect the strong impact of LaRouche's ideas and, in fact, were made public just after LaRouche's May 5-8 visit there (see *EIR*, May 23). Tremonti's proposal to create a special European Union (EU) lending facility for infrastructure projects, outside the Maastricht budget criteria, drew vehement attacks by neo-liberals in the German press.

But, several Cabinet members were attracted to the Tremonti initiative—including Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Defense Minister Peter Struck, and Transport Minister Manfred Stolpe—forcing Finance Minister Hans Eichel into an ordered retreat. After the June 23 session of the Franco-German Economic Council in Paris, Eichel conceded, that with European governments about to downgrade economic growth expectations, it was justified to come up with "new concepts" for the "stagnating economic situation."

At a June 19 forum by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Magdeburg, Stolpe spoke on the state's role in infrastructure development, stating that even in privately run highways, whose funding comes from tolls (mostly in eastern Germany), the the state has been essential to get these projects realized.

In the extensive discussion period, Stolpe responded to this author's questions, saying that Berlin is aware of the Tremonti initiatives, and that the Cabinet would meet soon for a thorough review of ways to mobilize extra capital outside of the regular budget. One thing is clear, he stressed; that without finding new sources of fund-

ing, major projects could not be built.

Stolpe further pointed out that, after recent meetings in St. Petersburg where Russian Transport Minister Sergei Frank reported on the potentials to upgrade the Trans-Siberian Railroad between Asia and Europe, the European Union Commission (EC) is now looking more intently into the Russian designs, with a new working group under former Commissioner Karel van Miert. Frank had reported that in 2002, some 80 million freight containers were shipped to Europe from Asia, and with an upgraded rail grid—the Trans-Siberian, the Trans-Korean, and also the Trans-Asian routes—many of these containers could be transported by rail, cheaper, faster, and safer than by water.

Stolpe added that most of the EU's European-wide infrastructure designs pre-dated 1989, and an urgently needed update had to account for an enlarged EU, with more territory, more population, and also for modernizing transport infrastructure in Eastern Europe. The Trans-Siberian connection to Europe from Asia via Russia and Poland, should be put on the agenda, he said. Without openly using the term, Stolpe thus depicted a Eurasian transport perspective—a remarkable step forward for a German official.

Responding to ecologists' questions opposing canal projects, Stolpe stressed the Czechs' justified interest in improved water transport on the Elbe River, providing its industry with sea access. The Czech interest is also backed by several treaties, he said, and Germany could not go turn the Elbe into a grand nature park. Stolpe's remarks may not have been politically correct, but, as Cohn-Bendit's interview reflects, the hard economic realities are beginning to drive back the ecologism so prevalent in German politics for 20-odd years.