

BONN MOVES TO EXTEND STATUTE OF LIMITATION FOR NAZI CRIMES

The West German Bundestag is expected to approve an extension of the 20-year statute of limitations for Nazi crimes when it meets to deliberate this issue on 10 March. Officials of both the ruling Christian Democratic Union and the opposition Social Democratic Party have indicated that their Bundestag deputies are inclined to favor a proposal made by ex-Chancellor Adenauer which would extend for four years the period during which indictments can be levied against Nazi criminals. Adenauer argued that liability under the statute should be reckoned not from V-E Day (8 May 1945), but from 1949, when the Federal Republic was founded, since German courts were not really functioning until that time. Following a 24 February cabinet meeting, the Erhard government announced that it would "support the Bundestag in its efforts to provide a means for justice to be done while preserving constitutional principles."

A hue and cry arose in Germany and abroad following the decision of the Bonn cabinet last November not to extend the statute. Since then, Justice Minister Bucher has spearheaded the defense of the decision with the argument that the present limit is the established law and any

abrogation of it would be akin to the legal chicanery of the Nazis themselves.

Political conservatives, such as Free Democratic Party chairman Erich Mende and Christian Social Union chairman Franz Josef Strauss, have backed this view, as have legalists of more liberal leanings. Polls have indicated that older Germans, in particular, would prefer to relegate the era of war crimes trials to the history books.

However, the argument that war criminals should not be given the opportunity to escape has apparently taken hold in official circles, with even Bucher now willing to allow new indictments until the end of the year. The extension move may have received impetus from the substantiation of East German charges that Erwin Schuele, director of the Center for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes at Ludwigsburg, was a one-time Nazi party member. Schuele has maintained that his membership was only nominal, and he has continued--with seeming efficiency, given the limited staff at his disposal--the task of compiling incriminating evidence against others. (~~CONFIDENTIAL~~)

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