



### Berlin's new airport

## It's built, but will they fly?

BERLIN

**A long-delayed airport is finally opening—just as air travel collapses**

CHECK-IN FOR a flight to Antalya was going smoothly until airport staff saw *The Economist's* gun. This correspondent, a volunteer on a recent trial run for Berlin's new airport, had been handed a fake hunting-rifle to test the mettle of security staff. The police summoned to check told him he had "forgotten a crucial bit of documentation". After a fake ticking-off, permission to board was grudgingly granted.

It was a relatively mild slip in the long history of Germany's best-known infrastructure disaster. Ground was broken on Berlin Brandenburg Airport (BER) in 2006. It was supposed to take five years to build. After a second failed opening, in June 2012, a head-spinning catalogue of errors was revealed: fire-doors didn't open; miles of cables were mislaid; and "the Monster", a vast smoke-extraction system, was ineffective.

BER became a standing rebuke to Germany's reputation for get-it-done efficiency. Wags quipped that it would have been cheaper to demolish Berlin and rebuild it next to a functioning airport. Angela Merkel despaired. The failure had many fathers, including hubristic dreams of creating an aviation hub to rival Frankfurt, a complex ownership structure split between the federal government and two states, and politicians who thought they could manage projects better and more cheaply than the private sector.

Now, after six missed openings, countless lawsuits, a handful of corruption scandals and two parliamentary inquiries (one of them still going), and at a cost of around €7bn (\$8.2bn), BER will mark its official opening on October 31st with incoming

Feminism in France

## Like a fish needs a bicyclette

PARIS

Men should have no place in women's lives or minds, says a new book

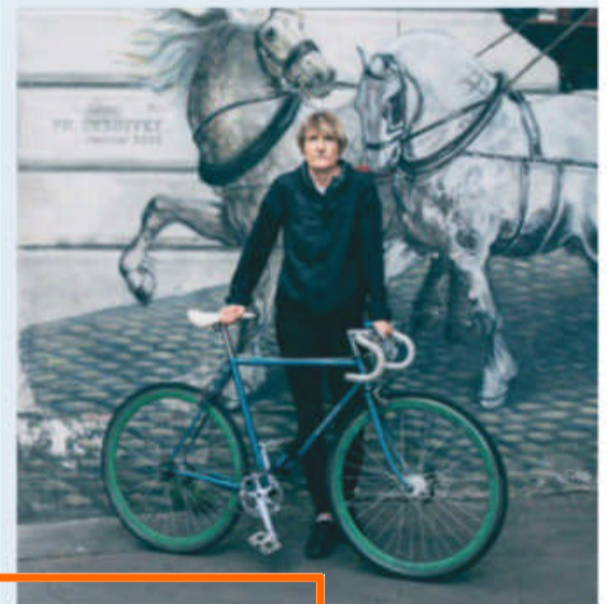
**1** **T**O EMANCIPATE A woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she has to men, not to deny them to her." So wrote Simone de Beauvoir, the god-mother of French feminism, in "The Second Sex" over 70 years ago. Not all French feminists today would agree. A new book, "Lesbian Genius", suggests that women should banish men from their lives. Its author, Alice Coffin, a lesbian activist and Paris city councillor, says she no longer reads books by men, nor watches films made by men, nor listens to music written by men. No more Voltaire, Truffaut or Daft Punk, then. We need, she declares, to "eliminate men from our minds".

**2** The backlash was immediate. Not from men (who needs to hear from them?), but from other French feminists. Marlène Schiappa, formerly President Emmanuel Macron's minister for gender equality, accused Ms Coffin of advocating "a form of apartheid". Sonia Mabrouk, a radio host, asked the author if she was not promoting "obscurantism" and a "form of totalitarianism". The Catholic University of Paris, where Ms Coffin taught, declined to renew her contract.

**3** France gave the world post-war feminist theory. But today unwritten codes about dress, seduction and femininity coexist with a lingering predatory sexual culture. #MeToo struggled to take off in France. The rate of *fémicide*, or murder by a domestic partner, is unusually high. A younger generation is fighting back. Many took to the streets earlier this year, enraged after a César, the French version of an Oscar, was awarded to Roman Polanski, who fled America after plead-

ing guilty to sex with a minor. Mr Macron has put in place measures to combat sexism and violence against women. Yet such efforts to promote mere equality are dismissed by radicals as timid. The veritable "war" waged by men against women, argues Ms Coffin, who honed her views while studying briefly in America, requires more militancy.

**4** In her denunciation of the way power still protects predators, Ms Coffin is spearheading a new French feminism. But de Beauvoir would have found her crusade against men as a whole "ridiculous", says Agnès Poirier, the author of a book about Left Bank intellectuals. De Beauvoir, who was bisexual, lived for decades in an open relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre. She flouted convention and gave French women a voice, but defiantly kept both men and women in her bed—and in the conversation.



Alice in Onesexland

flights on Lufthansa and easyJet. It will incorporate a nearby airport as a low-cost terminal. Tegel, an eccentric airport in northwest Berlin, will close—much to the regret of locals who enjoyed the brisk 70-step journey from kerbside to security.

A year ago the fear was that surging passenger numbers would mean BER would be too small the moment it opened. Its owners had drawn up a "master plan" to expand capacity to 58m passengers by 2040. The pandemic put paid to that; overall numbers for Berlin may fall to 10m this year from 36m in 2019, and it is anyone's guess when—or if—they might approach their previous heights. But by solving (or at least postponing) one problem, covid-19 has created another. FBB, the company which

runs Berlin's airports, is in dire financial straits. Its state backers have promised €300m this year, and may be on the hook for more than half a billion in loans in 2021.

Yet some suspect the heavily indebted FBB is using covid as a smokescreen for deeper financial woes. One report found that a further €1.8bn may be needed by 2023 to avert insolvency. But subsidies must be approved by the EU, which will apply stringent state-aid tests. Private investors are said to be sniffing around, though politicians are wary of selling a stake too cheaply. Sceptics like Christoph Meyer, a Berlin MP, fear a "never-ending story" of taxpayers' money pouring into FBB. BER's opening will finally spare Berliners' blushes. But the headaches it will cause are far from over. ■