

German Citizens Demand Bans on Killer Games

by Alexander Hartmann

The April 26 school massacre in Erfurt, Germany, and the justified rage among the population about the fact that the political class did nothing to prevent such incidents, has sparked a general debate about the causes of the “New Violence.” The participation of 100,000 citizens in a May 3 memorial mass for the victims—one of the biggest assemblies in Germany since reunification—demonstrated that the patience of the population is coming to an end. A poll taken by the Dimap Institute showed that 81% of the population support a ban on violent videos and computer games.

Thus pressured, especially with a national election coming up in September, political leaders have dived helter-skelter into action. At breakneck speed, bills have been introduced to tighten up gun laws and laws for the protection of the youth; Chancellor Gerhard Schröder created a “round table” with media representatives, and experts and politicians of all colors have been issuing a flood of declarations and media interviews.

Current Law Is Not Enforced

Interior Minister Otto Schily, for example, demanded that violence in the media and in computer games must be reined in. The new bill for the protection of the youth, proposed by the federal government on May 7, will allow for banning computer games exalting violence, as now exists with movies and videos. The Social Democrats’ parliamentary faction introduced a bill imposing mandatory age limits for computer games and video games. These games are to be rated, and treated, in sales and rentals, the same as video movies, the *Rheinische Post* reported. These protective clauses are supposed to include the Internet.

But, as Schily himself was forced to acknowledge in an interview with ARD’s TV show “Morgenmagazin,” enforcement of Article 131 of Germany’s criminal code, which even now allows legal action against the depiction of violence, “is presently absolutely insufficient.” Why tighten the laws, if they are not enforced?

In the United States, there is ample experience with a (voluntary) rating system for computer games and video games (see *EIR*, May 17, 2002). A study revealed that the rating labels do not protect youth; rather, they underscore the “bad” games for adolescents who want them, and can

still get them; and purveyors have opened up many more storefronts.

In this context, the U.S. attitude, which considers production of such games—as with the production of neo-Nazi hate literature—to be protected “freedom of expression,” is often criticized as one of the biggest problems. The State Working Group on Protection of Children and Adolescents of Thuringia (where Erfurt is the capital), for example, charged that a comprehensive control of violent videos and computer games is impossible, because most of them are imported into Germany.

On May 7, on ZDF TV’s “Morgenmagazin,” the conservative Christian Democrat (CDU) candidate for Chancellor, Edmund Stoiber, demanded a general ban on violent video rentals and on killer games. Asked what such a ban in Germany will effect—since anyone can get these games from abroad, through the Internet—and whether he supports a general regulation of the Internet, Stoiber said that this must be undertaken internationally. He added that this is seen differently, in the United States. He was echoing a demand raised by the chairwoman of the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity party (BüSo), Helga Zepp-LaRouche, immediately after the Erfurt massacre (see *EIR*, May 17, 2002). As well-intentioned as Stoiber’s proposal may be, it is not clear whether he is really willing to take on his “big brothers” in the U.S. telecom companies and government.

Some Defend the Violence

Some political voices in Germany are defending the culture of violence outright. The legal expert of the Green Party, Volker Beck, said that violence is a “social problem,” which should not be made taboo in movies and media reports: “It cannot be, that there will be only zoological or local-interest films shown on German TV, in the future!” Gerhard Zeiler, executive of the giant TV network, RTL, which is ill-reputed for its violence, horror, and erotic programs, defended himself, saying the media must not be made the “scapegoats.”

Even within the Christian Democrats, there are some who would not learn: On May 10-12, the CDU’s youth section, Junge Union, in Herrstein-Rhaunen sponsored a “LAN party,” in which 200 computer game fanatics are wired together in a Local Area Network, to play computer games against each other. “Only” two of the six or seven tournaments offered included ego-shooter games, claimed the Birkenfeld district head of the Junge Union in defense of the event. In other places, up to 2,500 players convene for a weekend LAN party, where they—for the time being, only virtually—massacre each other.

But the low point was reached, when Germany’s mass tabloid *Bild*, on May 3—the same day that Chancellor Schröder called in the TV bosses for his “anti-violence summit,” offered a lottery giveaway for 15 Nintendo GameCubes, which were introduced to the European market that day. Some



Political leaders in Germany are now under great pressure to move against video and computer “New Violence,” and revive German education. This May 3 memorial for Robert Steinhäuser’s victims in Erfurt gathered over 100,000 Germans. The sign outside Gutenberg high school asks “Warum?”—“Why?”—and many point to the “New Violence” as the key enemy factor.

20,000 were sold that morning, and a total of 50,000 by the weekend. Nintendo intends to sell 1 million of these game consoles in eight weeks; they enable their owners not only to play “E-rated” games (“E” rating is for “Everyone”), but also killer-games of all sorts. Market leader Sony has sold 28.6 million PlayStations, worldwide, while competitor Microsoft sold 70,000 units of its X-Box consoles in Europe since March. In the United States, 1.8 million units were sold, each, of the GameCube and the X-Box. When GameBoy-Advanced was introduced by Nintendo last year, 21.8 million units were sold. The consoles sell for hundreds of dollars each.

These numbers indicate how far the game mania has spread—especially when one factors in the millions of players who, like Erfurt killer Robert Steinhäuser, use their PCs to play such games on-line or off-line.

In a May 7 statement issued through his campaign committee, LaRouche in 2004, Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche pointed to the fact, that video games are being used to mold exactly a gladiator-type of identity, among youth who can be used as mercenaries for the imperial wars of Samuel Huntington et al. “Why would anyone in the U.S.A.’s presently revolting condition of military affairs, have participated in an operation which produced such results as the killers at Columbine? . . . If you wished to recruit an army of such stone killers, who would kill both according to the prescription of Samuel P. Huntington’s text, *The Soldier and the State*, and more, besides—where would you go to find suitable recruits, right out of high schools, today? In Germany, officials estimated there are, presently, approximately 170,000 such potential recruits; how many more than that are there in the U.S.A. today? How many U.S. regiments of an international Waffen-SS-style army of would-be ‘Terminator II’s’ would that number represent today? . . . Don’t call it ‘conspiracy.’ Call it a ‘revolution

in military affairs.’ Or, just call it, ‘playing by the rules of the game.’ ”

A Ban Is Not Enough

In her second declaration on the “New Violence” issued since the Erfurt massacre, Helga Zepp-LaRouche demanded that, in addition to immediate measures against violent videos and killer games—such as a United Nations protocol against media products that exalt violence—there must be a positive approach, to make a fundamental paradigm shift, away from the culture of violence, possible. Most importantly, we must return to an “educational policy, which is based on the Christian-humanist image of man in the tradition of Wilhelm von Humboldt.”

The pre-history of the Erfurt massacre leads back to the 1963 education report of Alexander King, then rapporteur to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which laid the basis for what was called the “Brandt educational reforms” (after then-Chancellor Willy Brandt), introduced in all West German states—including those governed by the Christian Democrats—in the 1970s. Today’s falling performance of German students on such international tests as those of the recent PISA report, shows the resulting damage.

Whether German leaders take this position depends on whether the German people force them to, as in the ouster of the communist regime in East Germany in 1989. It inspires hope, that on May 5, nearly 5,000 Erfurt parents, teachers and pupils rallied to protest against educational policy. Among the speakers was Christine Alt, the Gutenberg Gymnasium principal who had narrowly escaped Steinhäuser’s massacre 11 days earlier. Alt said she hopes that the many promises given by politicians after the Erfurt massacre, to pay more attention to education, will be honored.