

For a New Schiller Era, Not 'A Bit of Schiller'

by Gabriele Liebig

Germany's President Johannes Rau, in an unusual Nov. 12 speech commemorating Friedrich Schiller's birthday, wished for "a little bit of Schiller" to enrich modern German culture. Helga Zepp-LaRouche and the Schiller Institute, who celebrated the event with beautiful celebrations of the poetry and drama of the "Poet of Freedom" throughout Europe, were not at all satisfied with Rau's timid formula. Nonetheless, it was noteworthy that the state President became so engaged in the subject of a *Schillerzeit* (an era of Schiller) through a major speech. A few days later, the president of the Berlin Academy of the Arts, Adolf Muschg, announced in an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung*, a "Schiller Year" for 2005, for which Schiller's *On the Aesthetical Education of Man* is to provide the basis.

With a head full of the ideas of Schiller, only three days after participating in the *Schillerfest* held by Helga Zepp-LaRouche in Wiesbaden on Nov. 11, the author came upon the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* account of the hundredth anniversary of the Schiller Archive in Marbach. State President Rau not only turned the first spade for a new literature museum, but in his Schiller Day speech "recalled the Schiller celebrations of the 19th Century, and the great efforts of the Social Democratic and workers' movements, not to leave the poet of freedom to the less freedom-minded burghers," according to the newspaper's promising report. The speech was in fact a surprising one.

At the outset, President Rau cited a speech given by the Social Democratic State President Carlo Schmid on May 8, 1955 in the Berlin Sports Hall, before several thousand people. In this presentation, called "Schiller and the Indivisible Germany," Schmid said:

History repeatedly gives opportunities to nations, to discover their greatest individuals, and to be able to see themselves in the recognition of these great ones held before them as a mirror, if they themselves—here and now—fill the measure of this greatness. . . . If they seek in themselves for the power of such a transformation, this can be for them the cause of hope, and a source of new existence, a new discovery of what they are themselves.

Rau wanted to underscore with this example, how far we are from this today: "That anyone should propose that

Germany seek to find itself in the mirror of Schiller's life and work, is really not easy to imagine any more."

How We Stand Before Schiller's Measure

Really? The Chairman of the Schiller Institute, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, on just the evening before the President's speech, had led the Schillerfest in Wiesbaden with these words:

You all treasure our great poet of freedom, Friedrich Schiller, whose 244th birthday we celebrate this evening. And therefore it will come readily to you, to see the present through his eyes, and by his glance, to see anew the effect that Classical art perhaps can have today. Therefore, we will proceed in exactly the opposite manner to the representatives of *Regietheater*: We will not "modernize" Schiller's ideas, in order to "pep them up" with a banal relevance to the present day; rather, we will ask ourselves how we, today, really stand before Schiller's measuring rod.

"The first great political honor," Rau reported, "was given to Schiller not in Germany, but in France. Together with 17 other non-Frenchmen including Washington, Pestalozzi, and Klopstock, he was granted honorary citizenship in 1792 by the French National Assembly, in a proclamation signed by Danton." The Schiller Institute's Schiller Day program of 1998 had filled this out: "The French National Assembly chose the poet of *The Robbers* as an honorary citizen. . . . 'Monsieur Giller, the German writer,' on 26 August, 1792 was unanimously elevated to 'Citizen of France.' Schiller learned of this honor from the newspapers, for the attesting document only reached him half a decade later, on March 1, 1798, as though 'out of the empire of death,' as he expressed it; for all the men who had signed the document had long since fallen sacrifice to the guillotine."

Schiller wrote, "The century has given birth to a great epoch, but the great moment has found a small generation." The chance to repeat the successful American Revolution in Europe, was buried in the Jacobin Terror.

And at this year's Wiesbaden Schillerfest, a young woman asked the question, "How can the 'small generation,' the 'little people,' be changed so as not to act small any more?" and received the answer: "Schiller was convinced that from now on, any and every improvement in political life would be possible only through the ennoblement of individuals."

President Rau expressively depicted the Schillerfests of the 19th Century, above all that at Schiller's 100th birthday in 1859:

In nearly 500 cities of the various German-speaking lands, the 10th of November was taken as a kind of national holiday: fireworks, pageants, illuminations, festivities, feasts, stage presentations. It was celebrated



The scene at the Schiller Institute's Wiesbaden celebration of Schiller's birthday organized by Helga Zepp-LaRouche: the Schiller Institute chairwoman (center) with her readers and players at the end of the joyful evening of poetry, drama, and history.

in city councils and schools, in universities and theaters, and also in factories. Also in other countries in which many Germans were living, there were great celebrations; for example, in Paris and in Brussels.

Again, at this year's Wiesbaden Schillerfest, we filled this in:

With his "The Bells" at the latest, Schiller became the "people's poet," as demonstrated by the celebrations of his 100th birthday. The festivities lasted for a week, and were also held in Paris, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Prague, Bucharest, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Smyrna, Constantinople, and Algiers. The Schillerfest of 1859 was the greatest political demonstration since the unsuccessful revolution of 1848. The change was toward a broad movement for a constitutional state. In the young United States, the celebrations expressed a powerful popular movement for the election of Abraham Lincoln as America's President.

'He Is Ours!'

The German President stressed:

The ceremonies often reached far beyond the educated middle class—in many places, workers' choral and musical associations made up a large part of the celebrants. But not until the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Schiller's death in 1905, did the Social Democrats and those from the working class speak decisively and with one voice. Not one of the 91 Social Democratic newspapers and magazines neglected to have a contribution from Schiller. They wished to show that . . . great

culture is not only a matter for the educated class.

But those times, Rau said, are "gone irretrievably." Instead of great exemplary figures, today we have simply "cult figures." One becomes a cult figure not by one's own achievements, but much more often because of some special or conspicuous lack of intelligence, a speech defect, a particularly "edgy" appearance, or shocking fashions or habits. President Rau expressed the distinction between a great exemplary individual and a cult figure thus: "That in the honoring of Schiller, a real ideal was honored, in his person or in his work, . . . something that transcends the person. . . . The situation in which we honor an ideal which rose above his own life, and by which he was guided, constitutes the real and legitimate basis for an honor, which can certainly be found in the honoring of Schiller."

At the end of his speech, the German President asked "if it really is right, that nowadays the epithet 'a people of poets and thinkers' comes from our lips only ironically. Are we ashamed of those flowerings of culture? Do we perhaps sense intuitively that many of the cultural productions of our day can stand only very poorly against the Classics?" No, he concluded, we cannot and should not go back to a "cult of Schiller," but "we would be throwing away a cultural treasure, if our eloquence and our capabilities of expression were not, from time to time, somewhat schooled on the poetry and works of our classic artist. And a little Schiller still, from this standpoint, will not hurt."

Obviously we are not satisfied with that idea, for "a little Schiller" is not enough. We must really come to an understanding of these ideals (not nearly explained by President Rau). How can an individual make fast his or her fleeting existence to the universal history of mankind? What is the "ideal human being" which each one carries inside? What is the "beautiful soul"? What does Schiller mean by freedom and human dignity? If German political leaders and judges still knew that, would they, for example, be so thoughtless about surrendering the mooring in natural law of Article 1, Section 1 of the constitution, as they have lamentably done with the new constitutional commentary?

It has to do with more than a few poems for language training. We need a renaissance of Classical culture, a new "Schiller era." And that is possible if the youth are inspired by these ideals. Rau several times quoted the saying of Goethe about Schiller, "For he was ours!" At the Wiesbaden Schillerfest, a young person on the stage seized up this saying: "Why did Goethe say, just at the time when Schiller had died, 'For he was ours!'" And what shall we say of this to young people today? Schiller's ideas are altogether the best that we can find in German culture and poetry. And therefore we say, 'He is ours!'"