
Erfurt Massacre

Humanity Cannot Tolerate Killer Games

by Rainer Apel

The school massacre in Erfurt, Germany on April 26, has been a brutal wake-up call to Germans about the crisis of education and the loss of human values in today's liberalized society.

That Friday, when students of the Johannes Gutenberg School in Erfurt were studying for their final exams, a former student, 19-year-old Robert Steinhäuser, stormed into classrooms, firing into the heads of teachers, killing 13 of them. He also shot two students, a school secretary, and, after police arrived on the scene, a policeman. Confronted by a courageous teacher at the moment that he had to reload his pistol, Steinhäuser had a psychic collapse, allowing the teacher to push him into a nearby room, and lock him up. Steinhäuser then shot himself.

His weapons were a Glock 17 pistol, which can fire 17 shots from one magazine, and a pump-gun (which he did not use). He fired 40 shots from the pistol, and he had 500 more rounds of ammunition in reserve, which police found in a black bag Steinhäuser had left not far from where he shot himself. He had apparently prepared for a much larger massacre. But already, this one, with 17 victims, was the worst in Germany in the last five decades.

A Killer-Game Obsession

As preliminary police investigations determined already the day after the massacre, it was not a wild, run-amok incident, but had been prepared systematically over nearly a year. Steinhäuser had engaged in intense target practice at an Erfurt gun club, but worse, his mind had been conditioned by his obsession with killer video/computer games, such as "Ninja," "Doom," and "Counterstrike" (produced by the notorious firm, Sierra Entertainment). When he carried out his massacre, he was dressed in black with a black mask, imitating the Ninja warriors found in such killer games. A police raid on Steinhäuser's room found many such killer video games, some downloaded from the Internet, on his personal computer. Steinhäuser also had plenty of hate comics, as well as hate-promoting heavy metal music. One of those heavy metal songs contains a phrase that says, "Kill your teacher with a pump-gun."

Where Steinhäuser had purchased his weapons, and whether the purchase was legal, based on a weapons permit issued by the Erfurt gun club, remained unanswered several days after the massacre.



On April 26, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder gave his first statement to the press following the Erfurt high school mass-murder. The debate in Germany over what to do, has been quite different than in the United States after the 1999 Columbine and other school killings.

The release of these preliminary facts by the Erfurt police, instantly sparked a debate on the need for a total ban of such killer video/computer games. Unlike February 2000—when Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute and chairwoman of the BüSo (Civil Rights Solidarity Movement) party in Germany—first issued a call for such a ban—her re-issuing of that call in the wake of the Erfurt massacre has found the German public more open now to engage in such a debate. Conservative Chancellor candidate Edmund Stoiber has now called for Germany to ban these products.

Zepp-LaRouche put the call for a ban in the broader context of the education issue: She called for a return to an in-depth Classical education system that would educate the youth in a manner appropriate to human beings. Faced with mounting pressure from parents, teachers, youth experts, judges, and politicians from all parties, the government has begun to consider a ban on such killer games. The Chancellor and the governors of the 16 German states were scheduled to meet for a first "summit against violence," in Berlin, on May 2.

Three important points have been addressed in the debate so far, outside of the "task force against youth violence," which Zepp-LaRouche set up in February 2000:

1. In an interview with SFB radio on April 29, Uwe Wetter, vice president of the German Association of Psychologists, pointed out that the killer games are not at all "toys for the youth of today," but were designed to train policemen or military pilots in specific combat methods. This included training a person to overcome the psychological resistance to killing another human being. Whoever plays these games frequently, is exposed to the same effects as the policemen or

soldier who is trained by these games, Wetter said. This implies that a ban on such killer games must hit the designers and producers, to dry out that blood-curdling swamp.

2. In a radio interview with the Berlin Inforadio station on April 29, Elke Monssen-Engberding, director of the Federal Agency for the Protection of the Youth, said the crucial point is that the German Constitution (in its first two articles) recognizes the dignity of human beings and the integrity of the human body. Therefore, society simply cannot allow practices that openly violate those provisions. A ban on killer games is clearly mandated by the Constitution. Her agency banned “Doom” several years ago, and is expected to decide on a full ban of “Counterstrike” by mid-May.

3. Imposing an efficient ban, would have to include action against Internet providers that offer “users” (addicts, one should rather say) the downloading of such killer games, and the formation of virtual “teams” on special websites. German Minister of Family and Youth Affairs Christine Bergmann conceded, in an April 30 interview with the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, that the kind of indexation and ban of killer games that the government is considering would, as far as the Internet is concerned, be “mandatory only for German providers.” Asked about American Internet providers, she said: “This is a problem. What we view as violence-glorifying here, the Americans view as freedom of speech, therefore they see no reason not to place that on the Internet.” If U.S. authorities

are not cooperative, German authorities would have to block U.S. providers from operating on German Internet territory—this is technically possible.

‘Modern Reforms’ of Education

One has to add a fourth point: Measures against youth violence must include longer-term initiatives that improve the moral standards among the population in general, including the parents. The gradual liberalization and degeneration of the German education system over the last 30 years of “modern reforms,” must be reversed. If access to the humanist works of Classical literature is blocked, if video/computer games and television programs continue to construct a virtual reality for the population, the battle for human values, for humanity, cannot be won. You cannot have a dialogue among people if their predominant interaction proceeds via computer-based, brutalized virtual realities.

The numerous teachers, parents, and education experts who have made this latter point in the wake of the Erfurt massacre, have so far not yet called for a return to the Humboldt system of Classical education which prevailed prior to the late 1960s. But the campaign that Zepp-LaRouche initiated for the revitalization of the Humboldt tradition, is certain to find supporters in Germany. This way, the nationwide shock about the Erfurt school massacre can yield something positive.

In the Wake of the Erfurt Tragedy: Return to Classical Education, Now!

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Zepp-LaRouche is Chairman of the Bürgerrechtsbewegung Solidarität (Civil Rights Solidarity Movement), founder of the Schiller Institute, and a Direct Candidate for the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) from the Berlin-Mitte District. She issued the following statement on April 28.

All Germany has been shaken by the gruesome rampage of 19-year-old Robert Steinhäuser on April 26. His cold-blooded murder of 17 people has cast a spotlight on the fact that something in our society is completely out of kilter—indeed, something much more fundamental than this particular criminal act. The fact that Rainer Grube, the chief of police in Erfurt, announced that the police had found computer programs glorifying violence, along with videotapes featuring horror and violence, in the perpetrator’s home, shows what is really at stake here: on the one hand, the general moral state of our

country, and, on the other hand, the general acceptance of violence in our news and entertainment media.

On Feb. 20, 2000, at a conference of the Schiller Institute in Washington, I gave a presentation on the topic of “The New Violence,” in which I pointed out the indisputable connection between violence in the media—particularly in Nintendo video games—and the dramatic increase in violent criminal acts committed by young people. Long before the April 20, 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton [Colorado] was making headlines, the United States had been witnessing literally thousands of cases of violence, and even murder, in schools and in residential neighborhoods, all committed by children and teenagers. And in virtually every single instance, a direct connection was found between this juvenile violence and the repeated consumption of violence-glorifying films, such as “The Basketball Diaries” and “Natural Born