

German authorities, police, organizers deny responsibility for Love Parade disaster

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Last Saturday, the tributes to the 21 victims of the recent Love Parade techno music disaster in Duisburg were removed by the authorities and the tunnel opened once again to traffic.

Several hundred inhabitants of Duisburg and relatives of victims from all over the world used the opportunity to once again pay their respects to the dead. The preceding night a commemorative plaque was placed at the site of the tragedy—a ramp leading to a former railway station.

The tokens of mourning, aside from thousands of candles, were collected and loaded into a container with a glass panel. These included T-shirts, flags, stuffed animals, dolls, angels, crosses, painted pictures, photos, farewell letters and notes filled with accusations against those responsible for the catastrophe, in particular, the Christian Democratic mayor of Duisburg, Adolf Sauerland.

There were many signs and notes asking the simple question: “Why?”

The answer is clear. The state government and city council, together with the commercial sponsors of the event, subordinated the safety and lives of those attending the Love Parade to economic interests.

The major security failures were bound up with the negligence and cronyism of the authorities that characterized the preparation of this major event, and continue up to the present day.

The entire affair reflects the arrogance and contempt of the authorities for the well-being of the population. The Love Parade catastrophe and the reaction of those responsible speak volumes about the real state of German society.

A note which has been published on the web site of the WAZ media group details a telephone call made on October 29, 2009 from the office of Mayor Sauerland to the office of the state prime minister at the time, Jürgen Rüttgers, also of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

The note reads: “It was stressed that the city of Duisburg has the goal of organizing the Love Parade in the coming year in such a way as to avoid a disaster similar to that which took place in Bochum.” To this end, the Duisburg city council appealed for political support from the state chancellery, in particular regarding the financing of the event. The “disaster” mentioned above refers to the fact that the neighboring city of

Bochum called off its own Love Parade in 2009 due to concerns over security issues.

The city Duisburg is broke and is operating on an emergency budget. Its budget for social and cultural events is tight and is strictly enforced. In March, the city council had agreed an austerity budget with the support of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and Left Party.

Mayor Sauerland called upon his party colleague Rüttgers to exert pressure on the local administration to circumvent certain regulations and “considerations regarding budgetary laws” to help in the staging of the Love Parade, a techno music festival that attracts youth from across the country and beyond.

Sauerland assigned his departmental head Wolfgang Rabe the task of ensuring that the Love Parade took place, regardless of any opposition.

The city’s building regulations office had repeatedly refused to give permission for the event. As a result, the head of the office was transferred. Rabe also swept aside concerns regarding security raised by the local police and fire brigade.

Sauerland and the city administration have repeatedly maintained that everything they did was legal, referring to one specific meeting that took place on July 15. At the meeting, Rabe called on those present to speak out “if they still had doubts or proposed amendments.”

Intimidated by the way in which Sauerland and Rabe had dealt with others who raised qualms, it was not surprising that no hands were raised. The minutes record: “Nobody came forward.”

On July 19, just five days before the event, lawyers for the official organizer Rainer Schaller demanded permission to go forward with the festival. Schaller sought to use the Love Parade to promote his fitness chain “McFit,” and threatened the local authorities with huge damages and “immense economic harm” to the city of Duisburg should the event not go ahead.

Two days later, the city administration gave its permission, although the plan for fire prevention had not been presented and was only handed in two days later, in violation of security regulations.

No objections were raised to the security plan, although it envisaged that hundreds of thousands of people would be channeled through a tunnel with just one entrance leading to a

space with room for a maximum of 220,000 people. This entrance was also the main exit.

This did not, however, apply to those responsible for the event. They had their own separate entrance and exit on the other side of the area, which was reserved for so-called VIPs.

One day before the Love Parade, the North Rhine-Westphalia state interior minister, Ralf Jäger (SPD), declared, "Everybody is highly motivated and professionally prepared." On the day of the event, July 24, Jäger left the area around 5 p.m. via the VIP exit.

There are detailed accounts of exactly what took place on the ramp where visitors to the techno festival, herded together like cattle, panicked, with the result that many people were crushed to death. But none of the organizers is prepared to accept responsibility for the deaths of 21 young people.

From day one, all those involved have sought to shift the blame onto other shoulders. On the evening of the catastrophe, Mayor Sauerland even sought to make the victims responsible, citing the "individual weaknesses of a few people," while Interior Minister Jäger immediately defended the role of the police, which he oversees.

In the weeks that followed, organizer Schaller placed video material on the Internet to suggest that the main responsibility for the 21 deaths lay with the police, who had erected barriers on the site. In fact, the video merely demonstrates the criminal nature of the decision to agree to the security plan in the first place. The video makes clear the dangerous overcrowding in the tunnel and at the ramp.

Both the city and state authorities commissioned expensive reports aimed at whitewashing them of any blame. At a meeting of the state parliament Home Affairs Committee on September 2, the city council presented a report by the lawyer Ute Jaspers, who is close to the CDU, which declared that the city administration did not "violate their official responsibilities in the planning and preparation of the Love Parade."

Another report drawn up for the Ministry of the Interior by the expert in administrative law, Thomas Mayen, assigns substantial joint responsibility for the disaster to the Duisburg city council and the organizer.

Love Parade organizer Schaller then sent his lawyer Niko Härting to the Home Affairs Committee to reiterate Schaller's accusations against the police. These claims were once again vehemently rejected by Interior Ministers Jäger.

The lawyer representing the victims' families, former federal interior minister Gerhart Baum, declared that his clients were "repulsed" by the whole charade. He told a German radio station: "They are dumbstruck by the fact that apparently nobody is responsible for the death of 21 people and the injury of many more."

The first meeting of the Duisburg town council since the incident took place last Monday. Sauerland used the opportunity to organize a demonstration of his followers in front of the city hall. At the same time, a similar-sized crowd of

around a hundred persons gathered to demand the immediate resignation of the mayor.

The father of one of the 21 victims was allowed to speak at the start of the council meeting. He read from a resolution drawn up by relatives, which also demanded the immediate resignation of Sauerland. According to one local newspaper, Sauerland "received the parents' letter without saying a word or giving any greeting and then went on to the rest of the agenda."

Representatives of a citizens' initiative, which had collected approximately 10,000 signatures demanding the resignations of Sauerland, Rabes and the building departmental head Jürgen Dressler, were also allowed to speak to the council. Their collection of signatures was coolly received by the city director Peter Greulich (Green Party) with the remark, "Bulky."

It was, however, already clear that the council would reject this motion. Greulich's office issued a statement declaring that the municipal code did not give citizens "the initiative" to demand a resignation process. Only the council itself could make such a decision.

The SPD, the Free Democratic Party and the Left Party have requested such a resignation process and have won the support of a majority of councilors for the presentation of their motion. This means that the resignation motion is on the agenda of the next meeting taking place next Monday.

It appears likely, however, that the council will reject the motion, which requires a two-thirds majority. The CDU has 25 seats on the 74-seat council and is relying on the support of a handful of independents, plus the votes of the six Greens on the council who have expressed their opposition to any resignations. The leading Green representatives on the council, Doris Janicki and Dieter Kantel, refused to support putting forward a resignation motion in the first place.

Every aspect of the Love Parade catastrophe reveals the basic problems confronting the working population: a narrow ramp as the entry and exit point for hundreds of thousands, while a handful of politicians and other VIPs are given their own entrance; the arrogance, contempt and callousness on the part of the authorities and the organizer for the population; the suppression of the truth by all those involved.

Now the entire affair is dominated by an army of lawyers who are paid with taxpayers' funds and seek to shift the blame and demonstrate that ordinary citizens have no right to call their political representatives to account. This is the political balance sheet of the Love Parade disaster.



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