Germany: Three years after the Love Parade disaster

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A recent report dealing with the Love Parade music festival disaster of July 24, 2010 further incriminates the festival organisers and their political backers.

The tragedy in the German city of Duisburg claimed the lives of 21 people who were crushed to death and left hundreds more injured and traumatized. Three years later, none of those responsible have been charged.

Investigations are ongoing against fifteen defendants. One other suspect has died in the meantime. The official inquiries and investigations now seem to be coming to a completion. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, judiciary circles "assume that charges could be laid in the summer [2013]."

In March, G. Keith Still, a professor for Crowd Science at the British-based International Centre for Crowd Management and Security Studies, presented his third report. He presented his first report in 2011, which raised serious allegations against leading political officials in the city of Duisburg and against the festival organiser, the Lopavent company.

In his study, Still made clear that the plans for the festival put forward by the organisers were untenable from the very start. The ramp at the centre of the deadly crush was far too small to deal with the onrush of festival visitors. The dimensions of the ramp were also additionally reduced by extra fencing.

The authorities in the city granted consent to the festival although any basic calculations would have revealed that a disaster was very likely. In his report Still also rejects the assertion that a mass stampede had taken place. People were crushed to death not due to panic, but rather because they had no room to manoeuvre.

In addition, calculations were deliberately forged, with the result that an "early warning system" failed. As the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* points out, the number of participants were counted on the day of the disaster by hand and by helicopter. A mathematical average was assumed in the calculations which included an incredible error: "If a control point failed to report data it was inserted into the table with zero. (...) Ultimately no one knew exactly how many people were on the premises."

Despite this, organisers increased the permissible number of persons per square meter able to enter the festival. According to Still, the number of two persons per square meter should not have been exceeded. At the Duisburg festival, however, up to ten people per square meter crammed into the arena.

In advance of the festival, Lopavent and the company's managing director Rainer Schaller had predicted one million visitors. There was no attempt to make a correct calculation of the number of visitors nor any provisions made to restrict their numbers. Cameras placed above tunnels to control movement were found to be defective on the day of the festival.

In fact, there was a deliberate campaign to prevent the Love Parade from being cancelled for safety reasons, as had been the case in the nearby city of Bochum in 2009, where city officials cancelled the event. The zeal with which the then Mayor of Duisburg Adolf Sauerland (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) sought to promote the Love Parade is well documented. Sauerland was subsequently forced to quit his post after a popular referendum, which resulted in a vote decisively against him.

In order to reduce costs to a minimum, Lopavent refused to install more extensive and costly security measures, including an electronic counter, the installation of loudspeaker systems and a sufficient number of security personnel.

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Schaller has sought to cover his own tracks with the assertion that he was not involved in the preparations for the festival but his own company's employees have testified that he urged savings to be made. Investigators are in possession of an e-mail to this effect.

According to another report dealt with in *Focus* magazine, Lopavent ignored safety precautions by providing just 234 staff to control the crowds, although over 600 would have been necessary to secure the 100,000-square-meter festival grounds.

According to the report, there could be "no talk of experienced staff" being at hand. When the tragedy occurred and thousands of people crammed the entrance to the festival arena, just eight security staff were present in the immediate vicinity. In order to save personnel costs, a fifth emergency exit was ruled out.

According to *Focus*, the prosecutor is in possession of internal e-mails showing that the organisers put huge pressure on city officials to grant a license prior to the event. Schaller instructed a lawyer to advise the Lopavent planners on how to "circumvent legal requirements". Moreover, the e-mails indicate that Schaller had "cheated" when it came to the number of visitors, in order "to soothe urban worries."

When the then chief officer for construction law and building regulations expressed concerns on the feasibility of the festival plans in early 2010, warning it could end in disaster, Councillor Wolfgang Rabe (CDU) and his office manager Hans-Peter Bölling intervened. They permitted a report to be drawn up in order to justify approval of the event. According to *Focus*, traffic researcher Michael Schreckenberg subsequently received €20,000 from the city of Duisburg for his services. Schreckenberg already had a reputation for his readiness to nod through meeting and festivals. Permission was granted to the festival although no proper report had been drawn up.

The tragedy in Duisburg revealed the cynicism of the ruling political elite and their henchmen for the safety and livelihoods of the population. In the pursuit of profit they disregarded basic safety precautions, and twenty-one people paid with their lives.

Those responsible continue to arrogantly defend themselves against the allegations. Schaller, Sauerland and Raven (who is still in office) have sought to "delegate" responsibility to subordinates who can be sacrificed and replaced.

The relatives of victims of the disaster have been treated with contempt. Before official proceedings are due to commence, the insurance company Axa offered miserly compensation payments to relatives of around €2,000 per person.

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