

Schiller birthday celebrations bring joy and music to four continents

by Nancy Spannaus

“Reading the reports coming from all over the world—Mexico, Paris, Stockholm, Rome, Germany, and many cities throughout the United States—you realize that there has never been any event as joyful as these Schiller celebrations were,” said Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche. She was evaluating the impact of the worldwide celebrations of Schiller’s 225th birthday on the weekend of Nov. 9-11.

“It just proves that the population is really sick and tired of all these problems of cultural pessimism and demonstrations against the United States,” Mrs. LaRouche added. “Given a choice of something better, some positive idea, people will, with the exception of a few evil people, take the higher idea.”

Indeed, the gala events which were put together by the Schiller Institute in Europe, Ibero-America, and the United States were unprecedented in scope. Tens of thousands of individuals were reached by parades that moved through the center of all the capitals of Europe (except London), and many of the major cities in the United States. While each country added its own reflection of the republican influence of Schiller and the American Revolution, the common thread through all was a reading of Schiller’s poetry, and the singing of the most popular musical setting of that poetry, Ludwig von Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

Surge of cultural optimism

In calling for the celebrations, Mrs. LaRouche had emphasized the need for a joyful day of celebration of the ideas of freedom and beauty, ideas expressed in a more universal way by Schiller than by any other great poet. Thus, politics as such were not to be found at the events. Aside from a moment of silence to commemorate that great republican Indira Gandhi, the events were completely devoted to poetry, music, drama, pedagogical museums, and short presentations on the significance of Schiller and the American Revolution.

This universal appeal, on the basis of recognizing Schiller’s contribution to culture, evoked an extraordinary reaction in the United States among what could ordinarily be considered the most cynical layers of the population—the politicians. Governors from 12 states signed proclamations designating Nov. 10 Schiller Day, some of them actually composing the text of the proclamations themselves. In addition, the mayors of cities—most of them Democrats of the Mon-

dale persuasion, and therefore politically hostile to the Schiller Institute’s high-profile campaign against Henry Kissinger and the nuclear freeze—in many cases responded to being contacted by a Schiller Institute representative by drafting their own resolutions.

The power of the republican ideas of Schiller to bring together such disparate forces—which also included statements of support from the President of Colombia and the Rabbi of Munich—says a great deal about the potential of the Schiller Institute’s organizing approach. What became evident was the cultural bond which unites citizens from Western Europe, Ibero-America, and the United States against the bestial ideas of colonialism and tyranny—and which can inspire them to fight to preserve the freedoms which their forefathers won for them, and which they have recently let be eroded to the virtual vanishing point.

Clearly cognizant of the threat that this fighting spirit represents was the Soviet leadership, which took to the pages of one of its international journals *New Times* to attack the Schiller Institute in mid-October. Soviet response to the successful weekend celebrations is not yet recorded.

Horses, bands, and wreaths

It was the intent of the Schiller Institute to bring the largest number of people possible into these celebrations, while at the same time not diluting the content of the culture which the Weimar Classic (Schiller’s period in Germany) and the American Revolution represented. This objective was clearly achieved.

Probably the largest parade occurred in Rome, where individuals dressed up as Schiller, Verdi, and Benjamin Franklin led a procession throughout the city. Thousands of tourists stopped to watch, and the parade was featured on Italian television, as well as in several dailies.

But perhaps more people became aware of Schiller’s birthday in Seattle, Washington, Los Angeles, and Houston, Texas, where airplanes and a Goodyear blimp carried the message “Happy Birthday, Schiller” high over the cities.

In Chicago and Baltimore, the parades extended at least four to five blocks. The Chicago parade featured two marching bands, fire engines, horses, police cars, two troops of scouts, and a column of cars. But the prize item was a huge float which contained a statue of Abraham Lincoln, surrounded by an American flag, a German flag, and then smaller flags

from many republics. In front of the statue was a big open book, on which was written in large letters Schiller's statement, "Man must be greater than his own destiny."

The Baltimore parade was led by two Schiller Institute members riding on horseback, carrying American and German flags. Its float featured a scene from Schiller's most famous play of the struggle for republican freedom, *William Tell*—another universally popular aspect of the celebrations. Further back in the procession came a Pershing Rifle unit from Morgan State University, and then an 80-piece Southern High School marching band.

The breadth of participation in the Baltimore-Washington joint festival, held Nov. 9, demonstrated that the Schiller Institute had been particularly effective in bringing black Americans into the celebration of Schiller, the Poet of Freedom. A 60-person Youth Symphony from Washington, D.C., gave a performance that totally moved the audience of over 200.

In cities which have statues of Schiller, ceremonies of wreath-laying were held. This occurred most frequently in

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West Germany, where many cities have Schiller statues, but was also possible in Chicago, Minneapolis, and New York City. In New York, the Schiller statue is located at the end of a long pedestrian boulevard in Central Park near an open amphitheater. The boulevard is a testament to the great culture that flourished in the United States' largest city during the period around the Civil War, as it is lined with statues of Beethoven, Shakespeare, and Dante, among others.

Another feature of the celebrations was the planting of linden trees in Schiller's honor, wherever the towns would permit it. It was amazing how controversial the donation of a tree became in some towns, including Leesburg, Virginia. But trees were successfully planted in Elizabeth, New Jersey; in a couple small cities around Los Angeles; and in Dortmund and Hannover, West Germany.

And in the Third World

It is one thing to evoke the memory of the American Revolution, the Weimar Classics, and collaboration between America and Germany in the so-called industrialized world. It is quite another to generate celebration around these ideas in the Third World.

But it was done. Large celebrations featuring the music of Beethoven and selections from Schiller's plays were held in Mexico City and in the northern Mexican state of Sonora. Alfredo Mendoza, president of the Mexican branch of the Schiller Institute, was also interviewed for one hour on a state-wide television station.

In Mexico City, the Schiller Institute had a ceremony before the Beethoven monument on Sunday morning (the Schiller statue having been "lost," according to the government). Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" was sung, and poems were read. Schiller Institute representative Marivilia Carrasco was interviewed by a reporter from the daily newspaper *Universal* at the site. Carrasco sharply challenged the reporters' assertion that the Mexican people prefer mariachi music to Beethoven, telling him that in the last century the republican circles around Mexican President Benito Juárez were more cultured than Mexico's leaders today. In the journals of Juárez's movement were translations of the poems of Schiller and Poe. If the government were to embrace such universal culture again, she stressed, it would be loved by its people.

This point was demonstrated vividly in the celebrations held in the largely rural areas of the country. In Ciudad Obregon in the state of Sonora, 220 people gathered in the Municipal Library to hear Schiller's poems, watch scenes from Cervantes, and hear a children's chorus singing classical music. In the nearby state of Coahuila, 50-60 farmers also came out for the celebration, expressing their special joy at the classical music. "What beautiful music you have brought us," one farmer exclaimed, contrasting it with the rock and roll and mariachis, brought by political parties.

Joyful celebrations were also held in Lima, Peru; Bogota, Colombia; and Caracas, Venezuela.

Cultural warfare

The friends of Henry Kissinger throughout the governments, newspapers, and institutions of the world, of course, have no shame. They mobilized heavily to prevent the Schiller birthday celebrations, particularly in the Soviet-dominated stronghold of West Germany. Choral societies, civic groups, and just plain citizens were told that their participation in the festivals would brand them as allies of the "right-wing," "neo-Nazi" LaRouches.

In some cases it worked. But in every location where celebrations were planned, they occurred. One can imagine the chagrin of Henry Kissinger and his friends in the Kremlin when they get the full reports on the tens of thousands who smiled and hummed along at the "Ode to Joy." For the barbarians, it is the beginning of the end.