

Public Prosecutors Investigate Rightwing Institute's Suitability for the Net

The crackdown by German authorities on high-tech neo-Nazis continues. Public prosecutors in Mannheim (Baden-Württemberg) announced Friday (February 16) that they are investigating the "Institute for Historical Review" of Newport, California on suspicion of distributing prohibited materials in Germany via the Internet. The institute, the prosecutors' office believes, has made available publications via the Internet that attempt to refute the genocide of the European Jews carried out by the Nazi regime. Denial of the Holocaust is a punishable offense in Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled two years ago (cf. TWIG 4/29/94, p.2). The institute also faces charges of incitement for its Internet activities. A similar investigation of the activities of the Toronto-based Nazi sympathizer Ernst Zündel was launched last month.

In response to the Zündel investigation, the online services provider T-Online, a subsidiary of Germany's national telephone company Telekom, announced it was voluntarily blocking access to Zündel's web site (cf. TWIG 2/2/96, p.6). The Mannheim prosecutors' office is still considering whether to hold providers like T-Online criminally liable as accessories in such cases. In another case that likewise touched on issues of freedom of expression, CompuServe blocked access to pornographic sites on the Internet late last year at the request of prosecutors in Munich, but restored access after developing a program that allows parents to screen the Net for pornographic materials (cf. TWIG 2/16/96, p.4). As the prosecutors stress, the jurisdictional questions linked to the Internet are completely new territory for law enforcement officials. ■

European Television Market Blooms

Fast as the political landscape of Europe has been changing, the continent's media scene has been changing even faster. The Strasbourg-based European Media Information Bureau reported Monday (February 19) that 98 new television channels entered the competition last year for viewers

in the 38 member states of the Council of Europe (Russia was approved as the 39th member in late January; cf. TWIG 2/2/96, p.1). According to the bureau's newest statistical yearbook, there are now some 300 cable and satellite channels in operation in Europe. Those numbers might give, however, a misleading impression of diversity. Fully 70 percent of the films shown on television in the 15 European Union states in 1995, the bureau notes, were produced in the United States. Hoping to reduce the American presence in European broadcasting, the European Parliament recently called for measures to assure European productions a majority of airtime.

Europeans hoping to escape Hollywood's long reach found little solace at the movies. The bureau reports that three-quarters (76 percent) of all movie tickets sold in the EU last year were for U.S.-made movies. In 1985, by contrast, the American share of the European movie market stood at just over half (56 percent). Overall, ticket sales in the EU dropped roughly six percent last year. ■

Attention Web Cruisers

and those who are looking for more information on Germany than our small newsletter can provide. As of last week, the German Information Center has a Web site at:

<http://www.germany-info.org>

For German-language information, visit the Foreign Ministry's site at: <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.government.de> ■

Howard Stern on the Horizon? Talk Radio Comes to Germany

Americans, a new German venture is betting, aren't the only people who would like to tell the world a thing or two. On Monday (February 19), the country's first all-talk radio station, "NewsTalk," went on the air in Berlin. Billing itself as "cutting-edge and analytic," NewsTalk's advertising proclaims "You're the boss here - grab the phone and talk with us."

To keep the conversation moving smoothly, NewsTalk brought in a talk radio veteran from San Francisco to train the moderators in the finer points of the genre. The moderators, according to the weekly *Der Spiegel*, have been instructed in developing distinctive on-air personalities and in positioning themselves as their listeners' "radio friends." Democracy has its limits, however. While striving to be "fair" and "balanced," NewsTalk moderators also subject each caller to a quick "opinion check" in an attempt to prevent crackpots from going live.

Keeping the talk going is only one of the moderators' responsibilities. They also have to work mention of NewsTalk's paying advertisers "harmlessly" into their programs. NewsTalk promises advertisers an innovative approach relying on a more flexible boundary between program content and advertising material than customarily offered on German radio. NewsTalk's moderators, in other words, might just as often find themselves relaying fashion tips from clothing stores or car dealers' advice on which car to buy as reading straightforward ad texts.

The media firms and entrepreneurs who have committed more than DM eight million (U.S. \$5.5 million) for NewsTalk's first year of operations expect this untried format to attract 60,000 listeners by the spring of 1997 and become profitable within four years. Calling Berlin a "national pilot project," they hope soon to offer NewsTalk on license to broadcasters in other major cities around Germany. Skeptics contend that NewsTalk will need either a national audience or local audiences of ardent lunatics to turn a profit. In the absence of either, however, success might well come down to the perpetually fresh appeal of the sound of one's own voice. ■

One in six adult Germans, a study commissioned by the Axel Springer publishing house has found, now have a personal computer at home or have access to one. With sales of DM 11.8 billion last year, "the importance of the individual consumer is growing and with it the intensity of competition among producers," the study found. With 1.2 million subscribers out of a population of about 81 million, the reach of new forms of mass communications such as the T-Online, CompuServe and AOL commercial online services are still limited, however. The study estimated that the Internet is used by about 250,000 Germans.

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