



Fight for rights

The liberalization of customs after the Great War also created a situation in which organizations fighting for LGBT rights could operate. Admittedly, the Scientific- Humanitarian Committee had existed since 1897, and as early as 1903, an organization called the Own Community was established, but they were not universal and their activities were heavily restricted. A change came in 1920, when the German Friendship League was founded, and League for Human Rights in 1923. The latter organization already had 48,000 members in branches scattered throughout Germany a year after its founding.

Back in the Wilhelminian era, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee presented a project to abolish Section 175, but the initiative did not gain wider support. This situation changed after the end of the Great War. Already from the early 1920s, numerous politicians, mainly socialists, declared support for the legalization of homosexuality, although various other issues, such as the economic situation or the frequent political crises and changes of government in Germany meant that all discussion of the subject was pushed to the background. Finally, in 1929, a bill abolishing penalties for sex between men was brought before the Reichstag. The drafting committee approved it and referred it for further work.

Unfortunately, despite going further than ever before, the subsequent economic crisis caused work on the abolition of Section 175 to be pushed back.

Twilight

In November 1929, the crash of the New York Stock Exchange triggered the beginning of the Great Depression. The worsening economic situation caused the fight for LGBT rights to go downhill, giving way to a wave of support for conservative attitudes. Censorship was tightened, restrictions were placed on LGBT venues and Section 175 was enforced. Assaults and beatings escalated on the streets, led by members of the SA - Nazi party militias.

On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. The new government's policies led to the rapid demise of LGBT culture in Berlin. Clubs were abolished and penalties for homosexuality were tightened. The symbol of the final collapse of rainbow Berlin was the attack on the Sexological Institute on May 6, 1933, when SA militias destroyed the institution's headquarters and the collected library was publicly burned four days later.

EQUAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY: BERLIN - THE RAINBOW CAPITAL OF INTER-WAR EUROPE



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Before the cannons sounded

The movement for LGBT rights in Berlin was born at the end of the 19th century. In 1896, the first magazine for homosexual men, 'Der Eigene' came out, while a year later the Scientific- Humanitarian Committee, chaired by Magnus Hirschfeld, began its activities. It was the world's first LGBT organization.

Nonetheless, the specter of Section 175 of the Penal Code loomed over the community, which stipulated imprisonment for men who have sex with men, while transgender people were treated as mentally ill.



Revolution

A great change was brought by the end of the Great War. The revolution that Germany experienced changed the political as well as social and cultural situation. For the first time, LGBT people were able to gain a voice in the public sphere.

One element of this visibility was the production of LGBT-themed films. The first film to feature a homosexual male protagonist was Anders als die Andern made in 1919. Admittedly, it was banned in Germany shortly after its release, but it opened the way for subsequent productions.

A change also took place in the publishing market. Whereas before the war few magazines were distributed only to subscribers, by the mid-1920s in Berlin you could buy LGBT-oriented press at any newsstand, and you could choose from 20 titles.



Nightlife

The real reason Berlin was a mecca for LGBT people was the nightlife. The German capital attracted an exuberant social life and the existence of dozens of establishments that openly targeted 'gay-friendly.' These were clubs and bars that offered both a rich cultural offer and an atmosphere of free love.

The lush nightlife was full of eroticism, which attracted people from all over the world. Among those drawn to Berlin were Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz or W.H. Auden. The latter immortalized the atmosphere of rainbow Berlin in his autobiographical novels, which became the basis for the famous musical Cabaret.

At the same time, it should be noted that for most visitors to Berlin, one thing was most important - sex. In Berlin alone, some 120,000 women and about 20,000 men engaged in prostitution. This, combined with the authorities' decentring of the existence of LGBT establishments, made Berlin the European centre of sextourism.

Sexological Institute

The most important institution of rainbow Berlin, which became its symbol, was the Sexological Institute founded by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1919. This scientific institution dealt with the study of human sexuality in its broadest sense, including homosexuality and transsexuality. It was the first such institute in the world.

The Institute's activities included consulting patients, publishing scientific literature, conducting research, etc. It was here that the world's first gender correction surgery was performed. The scale of the Institute's activities can be evidenced by the number of consultations, of which there were about 20,000 a year. At the same time, the world's largest library on issues of human sexuality was amassed, which numbered more than 20,000 volumes.

