

# The Gay and Lesbian Movement in East Germany

## A Timeline of Selected Laws, Events and Activists

### Background

- 1871 Prussia is incorporated into the united German Empire, and its penal code, including the anti-sodomy law that prohibits sexual acts between men, is transferred into the German Criminal Code and numbered as Paragraph §175.
- 1935 The National Socialist (Nazi) government intensifies §175 to include “any lewd act” between men. By 1937, convictions increase tenfold, to 8,000 per year. By the end of the war in 1945, over 10,000 gay men have been sent to concentration camps, where they are identified by a pink triangle.

### Postwar Debates

- 1946-49 Various conferences and semi-public discussions about legal reform take place in Germany’s Soviet Occupation Zone.
- 2/28/1947 The influential Dresden psychologist, sexologist and gay activist Dr. Rudolf Klimmer (1905-77) begins a series of lectures, including in Leipzig and Dresden, advocating compassionate reform and the elimination of §175.

### East Germany

- 10/7/1949 Founding of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).
- 1950 East Germany abolishes the Nazi amendments to §175, reinstating the narrower, pre-1935 form of the law.
- 1957 In part thanks to Klimmer’s efforts on behalf of homosexuals—including counting them as victims of the Nazis and thus making them eligible for compensation—the East Berlin Court of Appeal modifies §175, waiving prosecution unless an infraction poses a risk to socialist society.
- 1963 The book *Die Homosexualität beim Mann* [*Male Homosexuality*], by Czech doctor Kurt Freund (1914-96), is published in German in the GDR.
- 1964-67 A commission tasked by the GDR’s Volkskammer (legislature) works on a new penal code and suggests removing §175 altogether.
- 1966 West Germany’s Radio Bremen airs the program *Der rosa Winkel* [*The Pink Triangle*], by Wolfgang Harthäuser; it is about the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazi regime. In response, Rudolf Klimmer renews his demand to remove §175 from the GDR’s penal code.
- 1/12-7/1/1968 §175 is removed from the East German criminal code and replaced by §151, which deals with sex with minors. While the age of consent for heterosexual relations is 16, the age of consent for same-sex relations is set at 18. This also represents the first time that lesbianism is addressed under the law.
- 1969 Sexologist and psychologist Siegfried Schnabl (1927-2015) publishes *Mann und Frau intim - Fragen des gesunden und des gestörten Geschlechtslebens* [*Man and Woman, Intimately: Issues of*

## The Gay and Lesbian Movement in East Germany

- Healthy and Unhealthy Sex Life*]. In a chapter on homosexuality, the book contradicts negative attitudes about homosexuality held by the East German public.
- 1971-73 Rosa von Praunheim's feature film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* is produced in West Germany. (It is released in the U.S. in 1977 as *It's Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives*.) The film premieres at the 1971 (West) Berlin International Film Festival, airs on a local TV channel in 1972 and is broadcast on the West German national public television channel ARD on 1/15/1973. It inspires the beginnings of a gay liberation movement in both West and East Germany, where ARD broadcasts can be seen.
- 1972 Release of a short DEFA documentary by Richard Cohn-Vossen in the GDR, *In Sachen H. und acht anderer* [*In the Case of H. and Eight Others*]. The film follows the trial of nine East Germans who committed several crimes, including beating up homosexuals at Käthe Kollwitz Square in East Berlin.
- 1972 East German gay activist Michael Eggert meets the participants of the first West Berlin Whitsun Conference when they visit East Berlin. Eggert is inspired to found an emancipatory group for homosexuals.
- 1/15/1973 Founding of HIB (Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin, or Berlin Homosexual Interest Community) by Eggert, Peter Rausch and Michael Keller. HIB begins meeting, inspired by broadcasts from and interactions with people in the West.
- 1973 Publication of the historical novel *Herr Lucius und sein schwarzer Schwan* [*Mr. Lucius and His Black Swan*], by Waldtraut Lewin. The story revolves around a gay relationship in the Roman Empire and resonates in the East German gay community.
- 6/28-8/5/1973 The 10<sup>th</sup> World Youth Festival takes place in East Berlin. The British gay activist Peter Tatchell gives talks at the festival and smuggles thousands of flyers about the Gay Liberation Front into the GDR. During the closing ceremony, he and other gay activists carry a banner with the slogan "Homosexual liberation. Revolutionary homosexuals support socialism."
- 1976 Rejection of HIB's application to become an officially-approved association in the GDR.
- 1977 The GDR publishing house Volk & Welt Berlin publishes James Baldwin's *Another Country* (*Eine andere Welt*); in the afterword, Norbert Krenzlin compares homosexual and heterosexual relationships in society.
- 4/8/1978 Ursula Sillge organizes a national meeting for lesbians. It is supposed to take place at Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's museum, but officials intervene. Mahlsdorf is banned from hosting any HIB or other meetings in the future.
- 1979 HIB is banned.
- 1982 A conference on homosexuality, hosted by the Evangelische Akademie (Protestant Academy) Berlin-Brandenburg, offers a new start for the gay and lesbian movement in the GDR.
- One result is the founding of the first Arbeitskreis Homosexualität (Homosexual Working Group) by the Evangelische Studentengemeinde (Protestant Student Community) in Leipzig. Eduard Stapel, Christian Pulz and Matthias Kittlitz are very engaged in the movement, and a further twenty Working Groups are founded in East German cities.
- 7/1983 Activists commemorate gay and lesbian victims of the Nazi regime at the Buchenwald concentration camp site.

## The Gay and Lesbian Movement in East Germany

- 1984 Lesbian and gay groups undertake commemorations at former concentration camp sites at Ravensbrück, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen.
- 6/28/1985 A series of three events on “Psychosoziale Aspekte der Homosexualität” [Psychosocial Aspects of Homosexuality] begins with a conference in Leipzig. It will be followed by workshops in 1988 and 1990; proceedings are published by the Friedrich Schiller Universität in Jena.
- 1986 The Berlin-based organization Schwule in der Kirche (Gays in the Church) begins to publish *Info Brief*, the first gay newspaper in East Germany.
- 8/11/1987 The East German Supreme Court dismisses a conviction under §151 on the basis that “homosexuality, just like heterosexuality, represents a variant of sexual behavior.” One year later, the legislature brings the penal code in line with the court ruling.
- 1987 Ursula Sillge founds Sonntags Club (Sunday Club), the only secular gay and lesbian rights organization in East Germany.
- GDR television broadcasts *Gesundheitsratgeber: Visite (Health Advisor: Medical Rounds)*, the first ever East German program on homosexuality.
- 1988 The publishing house Verlag Volk und Gesundheit publishes Reiner Werner’s *Homosexualität (Homosexuality)*, the first East German book devoted to the topic.
- The national FDJ youth organization opens its first gay clubs, including RosaLinde in Leipzig and Gerede in Dresden. It is an official attempt to organize gay men and lesbians under a state umbrella and outside of the church.
- The first GDR radio program on homosexuality, *Mensch, du – ich bin homosexuell [Hey, I’m Gay]*, is broadcast on DT 64 Youth Radio.
- 4/23/1988 The second event in the series that began on 6/28/85, a workshop entitled “Psychosoziale Aspekte der Homosexualität II,” takes place in Karl Marx Stadt (now Chemnitz).
- 11/2/1988 Premiere of *Die andere Liebe (The Other Love)*, by directors Helmut Kissling and Axel Otten, at East Berlin’s Babylon cinema. This East German documentary on homosexuality was commissioned by the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden and made at the DEFA Studio for Documentary Films.
- 5/30/1989 The East German legislature strikes §151 without replacement and removes all specific references to homosexuality from East German criminal law.
- 6/1989 Representatives from 30 East German lesbian and gay groups meet in Karl Marx Stadt (now Chemnitz) and publish a statement entitled “Für Anerkennung und Gleichberechtigung von Lesben und Schwulen. Grundsätze und Maßnahmen” [For Recognition and Equal Rights for Lesbian and Gays. Principles and Measures].
- 1989 Aufbau Verlag publishes *Ganz normal anders: Auskünfte schwuler Männer*, by Jürgen Lemke. (Published in English as *Gay Voices from East Germany*, Indiana Univ. Press, 1991.) The book includes 14 interviews, conducted from 1981 to 1988, with gay men of different generations and walks of life.
- 11/9/1989 The premiere of the DEFA feature film *Coming Out*, directed by Heiner Carow, coincides with the unexpected opening of the Wall between East and West Berlin.

# The Gay and Lesbian Movement in East Germany

- 11/10/1989 The Sonntags Club hosts its first meeting as an approved association in East Berlin.
- 11/17-19/1989 A week after the Wall opens, gay men and lesbians from East and West Germany meet for a long-planned workshop on “Gays and Lesbians in the GDR” at the Waldschlösschen in Göttingen (West Germany).
- 2/3/1990 The third workshop in the series on Psychosocial Aspects of Homosexuality takes place in Jena.
- 2/18/1990 In Leipzig, Eduard Stapel founds the Schwulenverband in der DDR (SVD, Association of Gays and Lesbians in the GDR), which becomes the Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland (LSVD, Association of Gays and Lesbians in Germany) just a few months later.
- 7/1990 SVD makes an appeal to the GDR legislature, demanding protection for the East German gay and lesbian community from the extending of §175—which still exists in West Germany—to the East upon German unification.

## Post-Unification Germany

- 10/1990 The Unification Treaty states that §175 will not apply to the “new states” (i.e., former East German states) in the newly united Federal Republic of Germany.
- 1994 §175 is removed from the German Criminal Code for good.

This Timeline was created by the DEFA Film Library, based on the following sources:

---

Brühl, Olaf. *Chronologisches Archiv. Daten-Pool zum Diskurs männlicher Homosexualität in der DDR, bzw. von 1947 bis 15.5.1997*. <http://www.olafbruehl.de/chronik.htm>. Accessed July 9, 2020.

Könne, Christian. “Homosexualität in Deutschland: eine Spurensuche in Ostdeutschland.” *Projekt Vom Anderen Ufer*. <https://www.vom-anderen-ufer.de/gesellschaft/homosexualitaet-in-der-ddr/>. Accessed July 9, 2020.

Könne, Christian. “Schwule und Lesben in der DDR und der Umgang des SED-Staates mit Homosexualität.” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. 28 Febr. 2018. <https://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/265466/schwule-und-lesben-in-der-ddr>. Accessed July 9, 2020.

Lemke, Jürgen. *Gay Voices from East Germany*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Marti, Madeleine. *Hinterlegte Botschaften: Die Darstellung lesbischer Frauen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945*. Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1991.

McLellan, Josie. “Glad to be Gay Behind the Wall: Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s East Germany.” *History Workshop Journal*. No. 74. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 105–130.

Raunitz. <http://www.raunitz.de/hibchron.html>. Accessed July 9, 2020.

Rausch, Peter. “Interview.” *Third Generation Ost*. <http://thirdgenerationost.com/symposium-30-jahre-mauerfall/peter-rausch/>. Accessed July 9, 2020.

Schmidt, Wolfgang. “Zur weiteren Veranlassung.” *Konkret* 7.94 52 – 54. <https://www.mfs-insider.de/Abhandlungen/Homo004.htm>. Accessed July 9, 2020.

Soukup, Jean Jacques, ed. *Die DDR. Die Schwulen. Der Aufbruch*. Göttingen: Waldschlösschen Verlag, 1990.

Starke, Kurt, Bert Thinius and Eduard Stapel, eds. *Schwuler Osten: Homosexuelle Männer in der DDR*. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1994.

Strafgesetzbuch der DDR vom 12. Januar 1968. <http://www.verfassungen.de/ddr/strafgesetzbuch68.htm>. Accessed July 9, 2020.