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## Political Activism and AIDS Activism Among Gay Men in Berlin\*

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

This is not the sort of article that would be printed in the American Journal of Sociology. Some of the observations are deliberately presented in the form of hypotheses; had I included detailed explanations and irrefutable sociological arguments to support many of the hypotheses that follow, this article would have grown to at least three times its already considerable size. Nevertheless, I maintain that I have not betrayed my roots as a sociologist. Instead, I have simply refused to shrink away from adopting a more subjective style, akin to an essay, in making my case.

### 2. The Pre-War History of Germany's Post-War Gay Movement

The founding of the *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* (WhK: Scientific Humanitarian Committee) by Magnus Hirschfeld and other courageous individuals in Berlin in 1897 is generally viewed as the “acte fondateur” of the homosexual movement in German-speaking countries. It was preceded, however, by several decades of committed efforts by journalists, doctors and psychiatrists in Prussia and other German states, who had sought to improve the lot of those with a “contrary sexual persuasion”. In 1869, the Austro-Hungarian essayist Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the word “homosexual” to define same-sex attraction, an event which marked an early phase in the struggle for homosexuals’ rights (see for example Goodbye to Berlin 1997, Berlin Museum 1984). It was not until the start of the 20th century that the terms “homosexuality” and “homosexual” became more widespread. In the following text the term “homosexual” shall be used with reference to the period before 1950, even though this term was far from common at the time (and especially prior to 1920). After this date, I shall use the word “gay”, although even today there is still no consensus among same-

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sexers about this self-definition; some queer activists strongly reject its use.

The 1890s witnessed the emergence of a movement advocating the social acceptance and equal treatment of homosexuals. Initially concentrated in Berlin but soon spreading throughout Prussia and other German states, by the 1920s this movement was flourishing in Weimar Germany and was one of the most important in Europe and North America. Its efforts were directed primarily toward repealing paragraph 175 (§175) of the German criminal code, which was directed exclusively at homosexual men – one of the reasons why it was predominantly men who were involved in the WhK and its activities. After the establishment of the German Empire in 1871, §175 was taken from the criminal code of the Prussian-dominated North German Federation and incorporated into the criminal code of the new empire. Sexual contact between two men was forbidden and punished by imprisonment. In 1935 the Nazis broadened the scope of §175, which, between 1871 and 1933 had generally only been used to punish “acts akin to sexual intercourse” and had been hampered by the difficulty of proving penetration (at least in the case of consensual acts). The arrival of the National Socialist regime heralded a rupture with the norms of civilisation. To describe its impact, first on Germany then later on the whole of Europe, as “barbaric” risks trivialising what happened. With the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in 1933, all homosexual organisations were smashed and their journals banned, while bars for homosexuals were closed and many of their patrons arrested (and murdered). The Nazis used the “pink lists” maintained by the criminal police since the time of the empire and expanded them with characteristic German thoroughness. The Nazis’ new version of §175 greatly broadened the grounds for prosecution to encompass any sexual act, or any act interpreted as sexual. This step was deemed necessary in order to satisfy the absurd desire of Nazi Germany – a state no longer under the rule of law – to observe legalistic procedures: Owing to the difficulty of proving consensual anal penetration, it was necessary to ease the burden of proof so as to ensure conviction. The scope of §175 was therefore expanded to include actions that involved no bodily contact whatsoever, such as glances (Grau 1990: 109)

### 3. The Dark Years under Adenauer

These Nazi statutes remained on the books in the new Federal Republic of Germany. Cases brought by homosexual men were dismissed by the Federal Constitutional Court in 1957, when it ruled that the more draconian version of §175 introduced by the Nazis merely reflected the Christian morals of German society and was not an example of Nazi tyranny (Wasmuth 2002). And although the years of Allied occupation immediately following the end of the war had ushered in a period of

relative freedom for homosexual men in Germany, the persecution picked up sharply again in the 1950s. Between 1950 and 1969, around 50,000 men (and youths!) were punished for homosexual acts, five times more than the number convicted during the Weimar Republic (Wasmuth 2002: 175). Systematic raids, house searches, questionable interrogation methods and denunciations by those already arrested and other "witnesses" were the means by which homosexuals were turned into criminals in such numbers. In Adenauer's Germany, homosexual men were the victims of blackmail and were barred from certain professions. Previous convictions for homosexuality under the Nazi regime were used to discredit people and, after 1948, the lawyers and police officers who persecuted homosexual men were in most cases the same ones who had done so under the Third Reich. Whereas a large section of the administrative elite and the public servants who had been tainted by their involvement in the Third Reich received full pensions upon retirement in West Germany, homosexual men were not entitled to compensation for the years spent in concentration camps or prison. In fact, this time was actually deducted from their pension entitlement. What's more, if a man was found guilty under §175, a previous conviction under the Nazis could serve to aggravate his penalty. Living in such a climate of constant persecution was a traumatizing experience, with the result that homosexuals were one of the population groups most likely to commit suicide (Wasmuth 2002: 176). The efforts of Adenauer's government to criminalize homosexuals meant that no national organisation representing gay interests was able to survive for long, while magazines aimed at a gay readership were regularly confiscated and banned from circulation (Dobler/Rimmeli 2005). Gay men in West Germany who wanted to experience the solidarity and seek the assistance of relatively open gay networks were forced to travel to Switzerland or the Netherlands.

Credit for the 1969 reform of §175 belongs in particular to the Social Democratic justice minister and subsequent Federal President, Gustav Heinemann. The reform decriminalised consensual sexual contact between men aged over 21, while in 1973 the age of consent was lowered to 18 (the following sections provide an outline of certain social changes that formed the backdrop to these developments). In contrast to what was happening in West Germany, in 1948 a court of appeal in what was still the Soviet occupied zone had struck down the draconian version of §175 introduced by the Nazis in 1935. Shortly afterwards, this ruling was endorsed by the Supreme Court of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was founded in 1949. From about 1950 - and despite the existence of prohibitive legislation - consensual sexual acts between adult men were rarely punished in the GDR. And in 1968 - a year before West Germany - consensual sexual acts between adults were decriminalised across the board and the age of consent was set at 18 (Wasmuth 2002).

#### 4. The Upheaval of 1968/1971

The after-effects of the seemingly never-ending dark years under Adenauer provide part of the explanation for the intensity of the student movement that emerged in 1967, primarily in the large urban centres of West Berlin, Frankfurt and Hamburg. Furthermore, the background to Germany's student movement set it apart from the rest of Europe. It was not just a rejection of the rigid, narrow-minded attitudes and morality of an extremely conservative society that saw itself as a Christian bastion against the threat "from the East". The student movement in West Germany was also driven by a desire to call a whole generation of parents and grandparents to account. Even if the older generations had not all openly embraced the Nazis in the 1930s, they had still been very willing to submit to authority and were strongly anti-semitic. The majority of the population was also extremely homophobic, although this was not initially a significant item on the students' agenda. Due to the Cold War, the denazification of Germany's western zones had had to be abandoned prematurely. It is no exaggeration to say that most of the judges, public prosecutors and police officers had been directly involved in the National Socialist terror regime, which had also benefited from the (at least) indirect participation of most leaders of industry and university professors. Indeed, these people had, to a great extent, actively supported the Nazis. Tens of thousands who had served the Third Reich as senior administrators and who were heavily implicated in the events of that period turned up in similar senior positions in post-war West Germany, without ever having to answer for their earlier actions (West German historians and political scientists were relatively slow to address this topic; today, however, there is a large body of writing on the subject, see for example the articles in Jellonnek/Lautmann 2002). The outrage of younger generations was increasingly directed at judges, for almost all the judges who had applied National Socialist "law" without mercy remained on the bench. Another feature unique to West Germany was the dominance of the Springer group, a press trust that enjoyed a virtual monopoly in West Berlin and Hamburg. Gripped by an anti-communist and anti-socialist mania, its tabloids even denounced long hair and ragged jeans as signs of communist infiltration. It must be very hard for a non-German audience to understand how, in the 1950s and 60s, the Springer publications (and others) were able to discredit large parts of the anti-fascist resistance by claiming that they were infiltrated by communists. A liberal insurgency in the second half of the 1960s, riding in part on the growing wave of success enjoyed by the Social Democrats under the charismatic leadership of Willy Brandt, laid the groundwork for the tremendous response the student movement met in 1970s West German society. In West Germany – as in France and Britain – it was the post-1967 student and women's movements that created the conditions for the tentative emergence of a gay rights movement in the 1970s. Both the student and the women's movements attacked the

authoritarian relationships and repressive structures of patriarchal societies; the (limited) success of both movements greatly benefited gay men and lesbian women. The above summary offers a highly abridged outline of events and, to some extent, reflects the mainstream consensus among liberals in (western) Germany.

## 5. West German Society Becoming Less Homophobic

In West Berlin and West Germany it was a provocative film by Rosa von Praunheim – “It’s not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Situation in Which He Lives” – that triggered the formation of gay student groups, which in the 1970s and 1980s were at the forefront of gay activism in West Germany. The campaign group Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin (HAW) was founded in 1971, yet, like the student groups, quickly imploded into “revolutionary”, “anarchist” and “emancipatory” fractions (as they described themselves), or “revisionist”, “reformist” and even “bourgeois” fractions (as they were derided by others). In West Berlin and West Germany, the student movement increasingly fragmented into sectarian groups that each ran themselves as separate embryo communist parties and, notwithstanding their different “Soviet Russian”, Maoist, Castroist, anarchist or Trotskyist leanings, were all striving for nothing less than world revolution. The HAW crumbled swiftly after 1974 and, summoning up all the pragmatism they could muster, its remaining members founded in Berlin the Schwulenzentrum (Gay Centre) – or SchwuZ for short - in 1977. The centre has undergone several metamorphoses, yet has been able to survive to the present day. It now offers a wide range of very popular events, aimed primarily at a younger audience and widely acclaimed even beyond Berlin.

The reform of §175, which I mentioned earlier, was no isolated event and was followed in 1973 by a loosening of the ban on pornography (Dobler/Rimmele 2005). Both developments were part of the Social Democrats’ program of legal reform, which also greatly helped to improve the legal standing of women (by relaxing the ban on abortion and establishing legal equality in marriage). Indeed, under the Adenauer government it was not only homosexual men who could be sent to prison if they were caught engaging in same-sex acts: Extramarital sex was also a criminal offence. Under a special provision of the West German criminal code, spouses could be punished for adultery, while landlords could be prosecuted for providing rooms in which unmarried heterosexual couples had sex. It is impossible to understand fully the reforms that took place without recalling the intention of the Social Democrats to modernise West German society (thus representing the interest of their constituency of skilled workers, the new middle classes and some liberal elements of the bourgeoisie). This means that the various student groupings who advocated a sexual

or even a socialist world revolution, actually contributed to a cultural modernisation of affluent West German society. This was not what they had planned and – as awful as it is to say – it took place within the boundaries of the existing system. What's more, Germany's bourgeoisie remained stubbornly ungrateful ...

## 6. The Beginnings of the "AIDS-Hilfe"

Together with the women and the student movement the gay movement helped shape the "Zeitgeist" and has had a long-term effect on lifestyles, persons and institutions. The first gay bookshop in Germany, the "Prinz Eisenherz", opened in 1978 and one of the most important gay (free of charge) periodicals, the "Siegessäule" ("Victory Column", this title alludes to one of the most frequented cruising grounds in Berlin's central park, the "Tiergarten"), was founded in Berlin in 1984. By the end of the 1970s West Berlin's flourishing commercial gay scene was unrivalled by any other in the German speaking world. Two gay publishing houses were established in the beginning of the 1980s. Despite its marginal geographical position, off the beaten track for most of West Germany and Western Europe (600km east of Cologne, 800km east of Brussels) many gays still found it well worth the journey. At the time, Germany consisted of the Federal Republic and the GDR, and anyone wishing to travel to West Berlin had to fly or take one of the overland routes across GDR territory.

When the first three cases of AIDS were diagnosed among West Berlin gay men in 1983, the gay community disposed of a wide and rich variety of informal and formal networks of groups, projects and initiatives. During 1983 and well into 1984, gay men in Germany (and in France) considered AIDS primarily as an American problem – so far as they considered it at all. Thus it is all the more remarkable that in the summer of 1983 a group of gay men was meeting regularly with Nurse Sabine Lange of the Institute for Tropical Medicine (at this time engaged in a Hepatitis-B project for gay men in the leather scene) to discuss the extremely disturbing reports coming from the United States. In September 1983 this group founded the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe (the National German AIDS Organisation) as a non-profit organisation. It is also remarkable that with few exceptions the members of this group did not belong to politically active groups within the gay movement and in some cases were not even connected with other gay initiatives and projects. Although influenced in no small measure during their professional training or university studies by ideological spin-offs from the student and gay movement, they were nevertheless more representative of a certain hedonistic middle class; they were much more "yuppies" avant la lettre (young urban professionals) than left-wing radicals. For many of them the yearly trip to New York or California was a matter of course. In common with other gay men, their

lifestyle was the result of a long and often laborious process of self-emancipation; and AIDS in their eyes posed a global threat to everything achieved up to 1982.

Thus although the reaction to AIDS was not primarily politically motivated it was quite the reverse of "unpolitical". It's one of the ironies of history that the first AIDS activists were viewed with mistrust and suspicion by fellow gay political activists. In Germany they viewed AIDS as a dangerous instrument in the hands of conservative governments and the anti-gay media, wielded to annul the first tentative advances made by the gay liberation movement. And, specific to Germany, was the underlying memory of the appalling brutality of the treatment of homosexuals under fascism and in the long post-war period dominated by the extremely conservative Christian Democrats under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Consequently, politicised German gays showed much greater distrust of the state and all its activities than their counterparts in the US or France.

In 1985 the "Berliner AIDS-Hilfe" was founded as an offspring of the "Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe". By the end of the 1980s the "Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe" (DAH) had become the umbrella organisation of more than 80 regional AIDS-Hilfen. Although founded as a gay self-help group the DAH soon became a self-help organisation for all people in Germany who were primarily at risk from AIDS, i.e. gay and bisexual men, intravenous drug users and male and female prostitutes. In the 1980s a division of tasks had been established between the Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (Federal Center for Health Education) in Cologne and the DAH in Berlin, with the federal agency addressing mainly the general population with its AIDS prevention campaigns and the DAH being responsible for the groups most at risk in Germany. At the end of the 1980s government funding for AIDS self-help groups in West Germany and West Berlin was remarkably high in comparison to that of Paris or London.

## 7. The Astonishingly Liberal AIDS Policy of Germany's Conservative Government

Government funding was made possible in large part by Rita Süßmuth who was Minister of Health under chancellor Helmut Kohl. Süßmuth's unusually liberal and innovative views were not always shared by the rest of her Christian Democratic party (CDU), but fortunately were supported by the West Berlin Health Senator (i.e. minister) of this period, also a liberal Christian Democrat. Indeed, the founding years of the German and Berlin AIDS-Hilfen are unthinkable without the (sometimes contentious) co-operation of Senator Ulf Fink in Berlin and Minister Rita Suessmuth in Bonn (consequently nicknamed "lovely Rita" by many gays). They both displayed great political acumen in dealing with the material and personal requirements of the two AIDS-Hilfen.

The fact that both were able to prevail over their Bavarian sister party, the CSU, and in particular over the reactionary hardliner Peter Gauweiler from Munich (who favoured a highly repressive policy of control and containment) was not just a reflection of their political skills, ambition or personal integrity. Rita Suessmuth and Ulf Fink were ideal representatives of the CDU's liberal wing and, thanks to them, the party was able to demonstrate how open-minded and innovative it had become. In fact, the modernisation process underway within the CDU was so striking that, when the great German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas was asked by a conservative journalist (who wanted to force an admission of the left's ineffectiveness) to name the lasting achievements of the generation of student activists from the 1960s, it is rumoured that he answered "Rita Suessmuth" and smiled (in his 2003 work, Wiessner offers a very instructive overview of the debates in the media about AIDS in 1980s West Germany). The upheaval of 1968/69 had a major impact, both on Germany's political parties and on the mindset of the middle classes, who set the cultural tone.

The SPD absorbed a large number of former 1968 activists, who became functionaries in the party organisation, while the CDU learnt that points of view based on norms other than those espoused by Christian conservatives are also valid. The left-wing, liberal elements of the Free Democratic party received a crucial boost, while the Greens emerged as an unanticipated side-effect of the period. Furthermore, it would be extremely simplistic to attribute the liberal AIDS policy pursued by West Germany and, later, the reunited Germany solely to liberal health ministers. The AIDS-Hilfen also benefited from the fact that, by the 1980s, the medical profession and governmental authorities were comprised by large numbers of professionals who had been influenced by the events of 1968 during their time at university. The mainstream views among doctors, psychologists, social workers and even lawyers were no longer of the conservative hue that had predominated until the end of the 1960s. In the (West) German academic professions, there were now many people for whom homosexual men were not repulsive, disgusting and horrifying. In addition, the advent of AIDS prompted members of the helping professions to learn how to deal appropriately with drug-users. Rolf Rosenbrock, a Berlin-based social scientist who was actively involved in the (West) German AIDS debate from a very early stage (Rosenbrock 1986, Rosenbrock et al. 2000), has often asked rhetorically, "What would have happened if AIDS had become a health problem in 1950s Germany, under the Adenauer government?" Thankfully, gays and other at-risk groups have been spared such a nightmare scenario. By the end of the 1980s it was already becoming increasingly clear that the strategy adopted by officials of delegating prevention to self-help organisations, which at the time were still dominated by gay men, was proving successful. After 1986 the rate of new infections among gay men dropped sharply (Marcus 1990, Marcus 2000, Rosenbrock/Wright 2000).

## 8. Gay Life and AIDS in East Berlin, the Capital of the GDR

Given the permeability of the Wall the vast divide between East and West was by no means self-explanatory. A possible answer might be that gay tourism in East Berlin was more of the sightseeing kind, conducive to social rather than sexual contact. Although East Berlin could offer flourishing cruising areas and restrooms, it was an ill-advised Western visitor who sought "quick sex" there, the opportunities for such activity being rarer in East Berlin than in West Berlin. The GDR's state planned economy with all its concomitant restrictions on public amenities and the private service sector ensured that a commercial gay scene in the Western sense could hardly take root. Up to 1989 there were two cafés in East Berlin and two bars mainly frequented by gay men (for a population of 1.3 million); the city had no bathhouse nor was there a bar with a backroom. Due to the lack of suitable facilities promising a high turnover in sexual partners, the quota of "promiscuous" gay men in the East was considerably lower than in West Berlin. Thus the low prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the GDR is much less the result of particularly successful campaigns for primary prevention, as the GDR government claimed (cf. Grau and Herrn 1989), and more a direct consequence of the specific economic and social structure of GDR society.

## 9. The AIDS-Hilfe GDR and its Predecessor

The AIDS policy measures of the GDR government were based on a rigid traditionalist approach for the control of sexually transmitted diseases and comprised interventions for the detection of "infectious sources" together with mandatory registration of the infected and a relentlessly pursued programme of contact tracing (ironically very similar measures to those advocated by the conservative Bavarian state government). The HIV-antibody test was considered an integral part of the prevention agenda, and homosexuals in general were called to take it. Despite the fact that the majority of HIV infections and AIDS cases were to be found among gay men, the information campaigns of the GDR Health Ministry were kept deliberately non-specific, making no effort to address homogeneous target groups. Such a rigid and narrow-minded policy soon aroused strong criticism from East Berlin gays; nevertheless under the old autocratic regime it could be articulated only with the utmost prudence. Early in the 1980s "autonomous" gay groups had formed under the auspices of liberal protestant parishes (for example in East Berlin, Leipzig, Halle and Magdeburg). This did not make them "ecclesiastical", it merely reflected the fact that the protestant church was the only democratic forum available in the GDR. Under the draconian surveillance of the communist regime those gays wishing to formulate a gay response to the threats posed by AIDS also had little alternative but to organise under the Church's patronage. In December

1987 the Zentrale AIDS-Arbeitsgruppe der Kirchlichen Arbeitskreise in der DDR was formed (Central Working Party on AIDS of the Church Working Committees in the GDR). The first "official" pamphlet of the Central Working Party on AIDS was brought out in the weeks following the collapse of the Berlin Wall: A "memorandum" containing a critical assessment of the AIDS agenda of the outgoing GDR government, published in December 1989. A month later, in January 1990, the AIDS-Hilfe DDR (GDR) was founded; in July 1990 the newly elected GDR government granted them premises in East Berlin and in September of the same year funding for a staff of five employees. The GDR formally acceded to the German Federal Republic on 3 October 1990. In January 1991 the AIDS-Hilfe GDR merged with the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, which thus also became the umbrella organisation for 16 local AIDS-Hilfe groups that by then had formed in East Germany (for example in Leipzig, Dresden, Erfurt, Magdeburg, and Rostock).

## 10. The AIDS-Hilfe Organisations as a Surrogate for Gay Groups, or How the AIDS Self-Help Movement Thrust Aside the Gay Movement

Through AIDS, gays who became involved in the AIDS-Hilfen attained a level of public attention and importance of which pre-1984 gay groups could only have dreamed. Many well-meaning heterosexual journalists and even a few Christian Democrats and otherwise uptight Social Democrats suddenly made a concerted effort to speak casually of gay anal sex and the motley cavorting underway in gay bathhouses and back rooms. As far as AIDS prevention was concerned, a grand coalition of common sense began to emerge between the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (with the inclusion of the Liberal Democrats,<sup>2</sup> FDP, and the Green Party). Opting for principles of personal responsibility, individual autonomy and the social learning processes prompted by public campaigns, the coalition rejected a traditional and repressive, plague-like approach to combating of AIDS, which included such practices as contact tracing, obligatory registers for persons infected with HIV and confinement of the "intransigent". The fact that Switzerland, a relatively conservative country, had vigorously practised such a liberal AIDS policy from the beginning made it easier to reach this consensus (during this early phase, certain aspects of the Dutch AIDS policy also served as models). Germans are often prepared to accept Switzerland as a model (in contrast to other neighbours to the south and east). Until the early 1990s the AIDS-Hilfen were the only AIDS organisations run predominately by gays that had comparably large sums of money at their disposal. The result was that many gay activists (for whom the AIDS-Hilfen had at first represented little more than an extended arm of the state apparatus and as such were there to be fought) came to the conclusion that perhaps it might prove lucrative to apply for one of the advertised openings at one of the over 100

regional AIDS-Hilfen. Gay groups often resembled student organisations and were dominated by social scientists and scholars of the humanities (psychologists, teachers, philosophers, theologians, sociologists, social workers etc.) – disciplines for which the job market in Germany during the early 1990s was not exactly bountiful. The AIDS-Hilfen constituted the only national network offering “gay” career posts in any considerable numbers. That is by no means to say that it was only the job market that made the AIDS-Hilfen appealing; many became involved in the work of the AIDS-Hilfen with great dedication, idealism and with uncertain carrier opportunities. With the increasing professionalisation of the work at the AIDS-Hilfen during the first ten years of their existence, such a line of work became more appealing for men who wanted to fuse their professional and gay activities. Here it should be emphasised that both the full-time and volunteer work at the AIDS-Hilfen was dominated by gay men and heterosexual women from the very start. Heterosexual men – even psychologists and doctors who would otherwise be interested in the topic – continue to sidestep this line of work to this day. All things considered, the increasing growth of the regional AIDS-Hilfen, which formed a network of over 120 organisations in the early 1990s, presumably did not hinder the activities of a single gay group. Yet the AIDS-Hilfen did provoke a brain drain, drawing talent away from other gay groups (with the exception of the gay sections of student organisations).

## 11. Gay Organisations in the 1980s and 1990s

The fact that the AIDS-Hilfen had significant staff and materials at their disposal, two resources that other gay groups were lacking, was not the only reason for the relative ineffectiveness of the gay movement. In the face of the feared social repression of gays in connection with the fight against AIDS, the Bundesverband Homosexualität (BVH: Federal Association for Homosexuality) was founded in 1986 and represented most political orientations. Despite existing relations with lesbian groups, the BVH remained an umbrella organisation for gay men, a circumstance also stemming from its central demands, namely the repeal of §175 and the advocacy of a non-repressive AIDS prevention policy, two goals on which it felt it could achieve a consensus. The BVH, however, played no role in discussing and developing AIDS prevention policies, which was also symptomatic of an approach that could be sectarian at times. Thanks to their relatively generous funding, the AIDS-Hilfen took over more and more of the duties previously performed by other gay groups, including coming-out counselling and seminars on such topics as anti-gay violence and the situation of gay immigrants. For many years, psychosocial services for gay men were financed as part of AIDS health policy. Yet this did not mean that AIDS policy had been hijacked by gay activists to suit their own interests, but was an

expression of the target group oriented approach to AIDS prevention and care.

In contrast, the BHV became increasingly paralysed by internal strife between its reformist wing and its “autonomous”, anti-integrationist thinkers. Ultimately, large fractions of the reformist wing joined the Schwulenverband in Deutschland (SVD: Gay Federation of Germany), which was founded in 1990 as the Schwulenverband in der DDR (Gay Association in the GDR). The SVD distinguished itself early on with its demands for gay marriage.

A factor that is underestimated is the long-term influence the US civil rights movements had on West Germany. The US approaches had tremendous symbolic importance for the West German student movement, perhaps less in ideological terms than in terms of the methods employed to provoke the Establishment, such as sit-ins, disruption of lectures, demonstrations and the self-expressive antics of “flower power” groups.

The SVD campaign demanding gay marriage rights even drew the attention of the mass media. Launched by the SVD in 1992, Aktion Standesamt (Operation Civil Registry) proved a great and ingenious mass-media success. Around 250 gay and lesbian couples from many cities turned up at civil registries throughout Germany to (unavailingly) announce their intended marriages. “The campaign spawned such great media interest that in some cities there were more journalists than actual couples intending to marry; at more than a few locations journalists and civil servants were graced only with each others’ company.” (Dobler/Rimmele, in publication: 5) The most influential SVD functionaries were successful in establishing a base in the Green Party and strong contacts with the SPD. As a representative in parliament and speaker on legal affairs policy since 1994, Volker Beck became a central figure among gay members of the Green Party and was later promoted to manager of the Green Party’s parliamentary caucus. The competing wing of the BVH was not able to survive the bloodletting of its reformist wing for long. Due to a lack of interest on the part of members, the group dissolved in 1996, and in 1999 the SVD changed its name to the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (German: LSVD). It remains to be seen whether the LSVD will truly achieve the status of Germany’s pre-eminent lesbian and gay organisation or whether the inclusion of a few “token lesbians” will remain an act of opportunism. On the national level, the LSVD remains a lobby group that has no competition to date, even though it only has 3,000 members (this also includes 70 associations that together form a considerable network).

## 12. Success despite the difficulty of mobilising gay groups

In 1989, the first red-green (SPD & Green Party) state government in West Berlin established a dedicated office for gay men in the State Ministry for Education, Youth and Athletics. This first “gay office” paved the way for other Social Democratic or red-green state governments to take similar steps. These gay offices assumed the task of monitoring discrimination against gays and lesbians in state legislations and policies. However, the conservative southern states of Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Saxony have yet to see the need to found such administrative bodies. All German universities have self-governing student bodies, many of which (the Berlin and Hamburg universities, among others) now have their own gay sections (some also have separate lesbian representatives who work together with the women's sections). Social Democratic or red-green governed cities such as Munich in the conservative state of Bavaria have also appointed persons to represent gay and lesbian interests, as have the police departments in Berlin, Cologne, and Frankfurt. The police appointees responsible for gay and lesbian matters (who have so far generally been heterosexual) are there to ensure, among other things, that the various city police departments are able to deal with violence against gays and lesbians. And they are increasingly taking on the duty of preventing discrimination against gays and lesbians within the police. West Berlin has also shown the way in another field: In the 1980s the first gay switchboard was set up in the hope that it might make an additional contribution to AIDS prevention work. Moreover, for more than 20 years there have been places in Berlin providing psychosocial support for gays and lesbians. Although it still remains to be seen whether this system of designating representatives within German administrative bodies to handle gay and lesbian interests will be successful in the long run, it has nevertheless attained a great symbolic significance. Jens Dobler and Harald Rimmele see an institutionalisation of the gay movement taking place within Germany's administrative apparatus (Dobler/Rimmele, in publication).

Regardless of the fact that the provision of support and service facilities by official bodies represents historical progress, the question remains whether this institutionalisation has also had the undesired side effect of weakening gay groups and robbing them of importance.

## 13. Emergence of Diverse Gay Networks

The decision of the Berlin police to establish the position of a representative for gay and lesbian interests provided an impetus for gay and lesbian police officers to set up their own organisation, first at state and later at national level. The network of gay and lesbian police officers now comprises several hundred persons. The organisation of gay and lesbian police is a latecomer to the ranks of professional organisations

for gays and lesbians. Since the 1970s there has been a group of gay doctors, and since the 1980s a nation-wide network of gay men active in the field of medicine, gay lawyers, a nation-wide group of gay teachers and a national federation of gay and lesbian psychologists. Groups whose organisations are not based on their profession yet who nevertheless strive for self-edification include Germany's gay choirs as well as gay sporting groups, which together with ecumenical Christian groups such as Homosexuelle und Kirche (HUK: Homosexuals and the Church) probably reach the largest number of gays within a particular field of interest. All of these groups with their various professional or recreational purposes have now taken on the duties (be it organically, haphazardly or otherwise) previously performed by gay groups in the 1970s. Gays (and to a lesser extent lesbians) are now so present and active in German cities that they are even taken into consideration by political parties, lobbies and voter groups. In this respect, the Green Party has been a leader thanks to their electoral successes in West German cities (in some urban districts such as Kreuzberg and Schöneberg in Berlin they are just as strong as the SPD). Thus, it did not take long for the Social Democrats – at least in cities with considerable gay communities such as Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Cologne and Frankfurt – to find a place in their hearts for gay and lesbian interests. Over the past few years gays and lesbians have clearly benefited from the competition between parties, especially the smaller parties, with respect to their policies towards minorities. The left of the spectrum is occupied by the Green Party and the PDS (as of summer 2005, the Left Party) while on the right, the Liberal Democrats (FDP) aim to serve as a liberal counterweight to the CDU. Since 2001 the law for registered partnerships has allowed gays and lesbians to enter into state-recognised partnerships. In contrast to the French PACS, the law only applies to same-sex couples and, although it is by no means equivalent to marriage, it does give couples more rights than the PACS. During the parliamentary elections in the summer of 2005, the CDU made it clear that these new legal provisions, against which they had fought so bitterly, would not be rolled back in the event of their victory. However, thanks to its influence in the Bundesrat (Germany's upper house of parliament), for some time now the CDU has been blocking an improvement of the state rules governing such issues as taxation, retirement and inheritance rights for same-sex couples.

#### 14. Changes in the AIDS Agenda during the 1990s

The traumatizing effect of AIDS on gay men combined with the moral panic promulgated by the crusaders of the moral right since the mid-1980s resulted in considerable anxiety and insecurity within the gay community. Under these circumstances the condom became the anti-anxiety agent of choice. By promoting condom use, gay AIDS activists sought to channel their own fears and the fears of those close to them.

Thus the condom became both an adequate means of reducing the risk of new infections as well as a symbol for “responsible” behaviour on the part of gay men in response to the AIDS crisis. “Safer sex compliance” was a kind of moral investment whose expected return was a supportive reaction from state institutions as well as the assistance of the health care system. Such hopes were more or less fulfilled in Germany, and among others in France, Switzerland and the Netherlands. It was not long before the first transgressions against the highest commandment “use a condom at all times” were committed. In contrast to the long list of practices that were forbidden within the canon of safer sex as preached in the US, the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe (followed by the local Aids-Hilfen) decided in 1986 to simplify their recommendations to two main prevention messages: 1. Use a condom for anal sex 2. Avoid cumming in your partner’s mouth.

By reducing safer sex recommendations to the bare minimum, the DAH hoped to make it easier for gay men to integrate prevention into their sexual lifestyles. The use of condoms for fellation was not part of the recommendations because this practice did not seem realistic for most men. The decision of the DAH to simplify safer sex recommendations can be seen in retrospect as the first step away from a total “condomisation”. This represented a shift from risk elimination to a strategy of risk or harm reduction, the latter having been used only to describe approaches for drug users up to that point in time. The paradigm shift from risk elimination to harm reduction, which occurred at an early stage not just in Germany, but also in Britain and Australia, was less a product of prevention strategists than a reflection of the trends in gay men’s sexual behaviour that were happening anyway. Long before combination therapies became available in 1996, it could be observed that gay men were developing routines for dealing with HIV and AIDS much more quickly than many health experts thought possible. The result was a renewed rise in the number of partners and an increase in the frequency of anal-genital contact, which was at first noted predominantly in stable relationships. Research conducted from the late 1980s into the early 1990s documented a growing disparity in protective behaviour on the part of gay men within their steady partnerships as compared to their casual contacts. Whereas an increasing number of men had anal intercourse without a condom in their steady relationships (even where the serostatus of one or both partners was unknown) condom use with other sexual partners had become a habitualised practice. As a reaction to this trend, the concept of negotiated safety was developed in Australia and the UK. Gay men were thus advised to use a condom at all times unless the negative serostatus of both partners had been verified through an HIV test. The negotiated safety approach was a further step toward developing a harm reduction strategy for gay men, providing a further challenge to the concept of risk elimination. The German AIDS-Hilfen adopted the concept of negotiated safety in their support activities, if not

programmatically at least implicitly. The priority had shifted to minimizing the risk being taken during sexual contacts

## 15. The Lifestyle Concept of the WHO, the Ottawa Charter and the Concept of Structural Prevention

This risk management response was the product of a collective learning process within the gay community, expressing a level of self-confidence and a personal sense of security that stood in contrast to the anxiety-ridden approaches in the 1980s. In light of this background, the lifestyle concept of the WHO and the health-promoting principles described in the Ottawa Charter of November 1986 were concepts firmly embraced by the German AIDS-Hilfen in developing their own approach to structural prevention. In addition, they signified an offensive against conservative, plague-like approaches to AIDS prevention policy that were still vigorously advocated by many in Germany. The lifestyle concept of the WHO was based on the understanding that health, to a great extent, depends on political, social, cultural and material factors. The Ottawa Charter of 1986 marked a turning point in the understanding of public health and individual health. Prevention was divorced from biology and medicine, and a socio-ecological rather than individual point of view became widely accepted (Heinemann 1988:166). This new public health concept contained elements from the old social worker's axiom: "You have to go out and pick people up right where they are standing (or lying ... M.B.)," and was likewise influenced by the cultural transformation that followed the 1968 upheavals in North America, Western Europe and Australia. A more open, dynamic and socio-ecologically informed understanding of public health was also favoured by the developing countries taking part in the WHO discussions. As a result of the lifestyle concept of the WHO, the particular norms, cultural traditions, class situations, social networks and means of interaction among different population groups, who are the beneficiaries of public health policies, must be respected in order to organise successful (public) health campaigns. This approach was an ideal starting point for developing a concept of structural prevention, such as that devised by the German AIDS-Hilfen in the 1990s. The concept distinguishes between behavioural and context-specific prevention, whereby the former seeks to change individual conduct (in the sense of risk reduction), whereas the latter takes into account the social situations in which the beneficiary lives. For gay men as a group, this meant that the decades of stigmatisation and criminalisation experienced in Germany had to be taken into consideration – decades which had relegated gays to a particularly marginalised minority. And at the same time, it also meant that prevention campaigns had to take account of their particular social and sexual lifestyles. A non-German public must keep in mind that in Germany, social actors are regularly confronted with the requirement to justify a given social practice. The

left-wing intellectual tradition to which many AIDS activists belonged following the 1968 student movement was associated with a long-standing German tradition whereby each and every act must be systematically justified ("deep German thinking"). The result was that German AIDS activists were not simply able to start work on pragmatic solutions, as could their English and Dutch colleagues. Instead, any approach had to be based on systematic principles, and the result was the very German concept of structural prevention. It is a concept that covers both situational and behavioural prevention as well as the combined levels of primary (avoiding infection), secondary (avoiding the outbreak of illness) and tertiary (avoiding death as a result of illness) prevention. The concept can be understood as a holistic approach, which succeeds only if its individual parts are correctly "mediated" (to borrow this charming term from Hegel). It is certainly no coincidence that the German AIDS-Hilfe is the only large umbrella organisation in Europe dealing with AIDS that publishes a series which has already surpassed 50 volumes. And we all know that the German tradition of discourse demands great volumes of printed paper. In this case, however, the paper has been printed in a very good cause.

The concept of structural prevention has not been adopted by other key AIDS prevention organisations in Germany. It is, however, recognised by DAH donors (more than 80% of contributions come from the Federal Centre for Health Education in Cologne) as a concept used by the German AIDS-Hilfe.

## 16. The New AIDS

The availability of combination therapies since 1996 has changed the prevailing conditions for prevention and AIDS policy. Whereas an AIDS diagnosis in the 1980s meant in most cases imminent death within several months, people with HIV in the late 1990s could realistically hope for many more years of life, in spite of the disease. The combination therapies made AIDS a chronic illness that was treatable, even though the treatment itself continues to present serious problems. The development represents the medical aspect of the normalization of AIDS. The renowned German sexologist Martin Dannecker (University of Frankfurt a.M.) has coined the terms "old" and "new" AIDS to describe this development (Dannecker 2000, 2002). Gay men with Kaposi's lesions – tragic figures of the 1980s – are rarely seen any more in the 1990s; AIDS has lost its visibility in the gay community. The proportion of gay men who indicate in the German surveys that they have no friends or acquaintances with HIV or AIDS significantly increased between 1991 and 2003 (Bochow/Wright/Lange 2004). As long as PWA are stigmatised in the general population as they still are and as long as they are marginalized in the gay community, then I hesitate to describe the development as a "normalisation" of AIDS; perhaps the term

“banalization” would be more appropriate. Although AIDS has by no means become a “normal” chronic illness, certain societal and political reactions to the epidemic have become “normalised”.

As far as this anomalous normalisation of the German situation is concerned, one must bear in mind that there is still a great disparity between the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the former East and West German states. Even if the cities with over a million inhabitants are excluded, all of which, except for Berlin, are in the “old” German states (Hamburg, Munich, Cologne/Dusseldorf, the Ruhr district, Frankfurt region), the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the former West German states is several times that found in the new German states or former GDR (Epidem. Bulletin 2005). The main reason for this continuing incongruity is that the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the former West Germany at the time the Wall came down in 1989 was several times what it was in the GDR; thankfully, the East Germans have never caught up. The West German successes in prevention had already resulted in a significant decrease in new infections among gay and bisexual men since 1986. A large proportion of East Germans also viewed West German TV in the 1980s as a source of news that was otherwise withheld from them. Many East German gay men were informed about the debate in West Germany by this means, which included more information on AIDS, aimed at specific target groups, than the television broadcasts of the GDR. After 1989, a high level of compliance with the prevention messages of the AIDS-Hilfen was apparent. Since 1996, combination therapies have reduced the virus load in infected or ill persons, thereby reducing their ability to infect others. While this cannot be attributed to the success of AIDS prevention, it is nevertheless a welcome side effect of combination therapy. The consequences of two opposing processes are another factor: On the one hand, there is the professional mobility of younger, qualified East Germans who move to the western and southern parts of Germany due to high unemployment in the former East Germany (over 20%). New infections among this group of former East Germans therefore crop up in the West German statistics. On the other hand, the remaining East German population still constitutes a relatively closed society, despite the west-to-east migration. To this day, the prevalence of AIDS in East Berlin is five times less than in West Berlin.

## 17. Towards the Social Normalisation of AIDS

Rosenbrock et al. (2000) concluded that the initial reactions to the AIDS epidemic in Western Europe took on forms that make it justifiable to speak of a certain “AIDS exceptionalism” during the 1980s – exceptionalism insofar as AIDS led to exceptional innovations in prevention, patient care, health policy and civil rights. Despite national differences, relatively unusual alliances were forged between health

professionals, social movements and the affected groups. The non-occurrence of the much-feared catastrophe has, since the early/mid-1990s heralded a growing “AIDS fatigue” within these newly formed alliances, while the increasing ability to treat AIDS symptoms has strengthened the tendencies toward normalisation. It has become apparent not only in Germany but in most other Western European countries that the normalisation process has, at the very least, had ramifications in terms of funding. If we factor in all spending at national, state and community level (an exact breakdown does not exist), we can assume that the resources available for AIDS prevention in the year 2005 comprise, at most, a third of what they did during the 1990s. And there are those who question the sustainability of a “parallel” system of AIDS-Hilfen for the groups mainly affected by the disease and if it makes sense on top of the present German system of local public health authorities. So far, this cautious challenging of the AIDS-Hilfen has been parried with the argument that cutbacks would be occurring at a time when risk-taking behaviour is again on the rise among the chief group affected by the disease, namely gay men, and that the consequences for epidemiological progress would be grave. To this observation by Rosenbrock et al. should be added the plea that we must battle against AIDS fatigue not only among our traditional allies in the fight against AIDS, but also among gay men – above all those aged 29 and over (Bochow/Wright/Lange 2004). Because Germany continues to show a low prevalence and incidence of HIV and AIDS in comparison to France, Switzerland and the UK, there are grounds to fear that, in the coming years, AIDS will not be given the same prominence in public health policy. From this perspective, the irrefutable successes in AIDS prevention to date would lead to a weakening of the AIDS-Hilfen, perhaps even their dissolution in the long run. Even those who might dismiss this point of view as pessimistic must confront the problem that the continuing existence of the AIDS-Hilfen can no longer be taken for granted. Much will depend on how well the AIDS-Hilfen are able to justify their existence, both in terms of the subject matter and their preventive work.

My strict reviewer, Michael Wright, has reproachfully pointed out that this is not really a conclusion. He may be right. However, dear colleagues, it is as far as I have got.

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