

Josef Meisinger on “Combating Homosexuality as a Political Task” (April 5–6, 1937)

Abstract

The criminal prosecution of homosexuals dated back to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. During the Weimar Republic, it had declined considerably, however. In fact, on October 16, 1929, a Reichstag committee had even voted to repeal Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, the German statute that prohibited sexual relations between men. But the rise of the Nazi regime prevented the implementation of the repeal. Additionally, the criminalization of homosexuality became an ideological imperative under National Socialism. According to Nazi ideology, homosexuality was “unnatural,” and homosexuals were shirking their national duty to establish families. The National Socialists argued that homosexuality was fast becoming a national epidemic and that it was leading to the loss of urgently needed offspring. Thus, sex between men was no longer a private matter but rather an act of treason.

On June 28, 1935, the Ministry of Justice revised Paragraph 175. (The statute dated back to 1871, but its enforcement prior to Hitler’s seizure of power had been sporadic and uneven.) The amended version of Paragraph 175 extended the persecution of homosexuals by broadening the definition of “criminally indecent activities between men” and stipulating harsher sentences for so-called offenders. Heinrich Himmler regarded the persecution of homosexuals as so crucial that he established the Reich Central Office for Combating Abortion and Homosexuality in 1936. Under the leadership of the criminal police inspector and SS-member Josef Meisinger (1899–1947), this office collected data on men convicted—or suspected—of homosexuality and then used it to prosecute them. The tightening of Paragraph 175 led to the sentencing of more than 50,000 men. After the start of the war, convicted homosexuals were increasingly likely to be sent to concentration camps, where, identified by pink triangles, they occupied the lower rungs of the prisoner hierarchy. In the following speech, Meisinger explains that the harsher prosecution of homosexuals was necessary on racial grounds. He made distinctions, however, between the treatment of male and female homosexuals, as lesbianism was regarded as much less dangerous.

In 1940, Meisinger was transferred to Poland, where, first as deputy of the so-called Operations Group IV (*Einsatzgruppe IV*) and then as commander of the security police and SD in Warsaw, he was responsible for murdering thousands of Poles. He was tried in Poland in 1947 and sentenced to death.

Source

Combating Abortion and Homosexuality as a Political Task: Speech by Criminal Police Inspector Josef Meisinger at a Meeting of Ministerial Civil Servants in Charge of Health Matters on April 5-6, 1937, in Berlin [excerpts]

[...] Since experience has shown that homosexuals are useless for normal sexual intercourse, homosexuality also has an effect on offspring and will inevitably lead to a decline in births. The result is a weakening of the general strength of the people; this threatens, not least, the military interests of a nation. In the end, however, homosexuality represents a permanent threat to order in the life of the state. Apart from the fact that homosexuality itself is a punishable act and a violation of this order, it is to be regarded as especially dangerous because it is often the starting point for numerous other criminal acts. Just as it often appears as a precursor to treason, it also forms the basis for extortion in numerous cases. [...]

If one wants to correctly assess the danger that homosexuality presents, one can no longer look at it solely from the narrow criminal point of view, as was done in the past. Because it is now so widespread, it has developed into a phenomenon of the most far-reaching importance for the existence of the people and the state. Thus, homosexuality has gone beyond the limits of a purely criminalistic approach and has become a problem of political importance. Under these circumstances, it cannot be the task of the police to investigate homosexuality scientifically. At most, they can take account of scientific findings in their work as far as possible. Their task is to uncover the trend toward homosexuality and its harmful effects in order to protect the people and the state from the danger threatened by this phenomenon. No one says to the police: you must not arrest this thief because he may have acquired kleptomania. Likewise, now that we have recognized the homosexual as an enemy of the state, we will not ask the police—and certainly not the political police—whether the homosexual has acquired his vice or whether it is innate to him. I should say here that past experience has shown beyond doubt that only a vanishingly small number of homosexuals have a truly homosexual disposition, and that by far the greater part have at one time or another been very normally active and have then merely turned to this arena out of oversaturation with the pleasures of life or for various other reasons—fear of venereal disease and the like. I may also mention that by means of strict discipline and order and regulated methods of work, a large proportion of the homosexuals who had already come to the attention of the authorities could be educated to become useful members of the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*].

In connection with combatting homosexuality, I would like to briefly address an issue that has come up frequently recently, namely the battle against lesbianism. In our opinion, lesbians pose much less of an existential threat to the nation than male homosexuals. Completely different conditions apply here. First, we must not forget that in Germany we have always had more females than males; second, that we lost 2 million men in the war; and third, that of the remaining men, several million do not count because they are homosexuals. The fact that a considerable portion of the female sex is in a certain state of sexual distress is undeniable. However, at least according to our experience, the majority of lesbian girls—to the extent that investigations could be carried out in a discrete and tactful manner—are far from abnormally inclined. If these girls are given the opportunity to fulfill the task determined for them by nature, they will certainly not decline. There are many other factors involved in lesbian activity, such as lack of male acquaintances, strict upbringing, and the like. In order to be able to really speak of lesbian activity, it is of crucial importance to know what the intention was during the performance of the sexual act. There is reason to believe that in the majority of cases the intention was directed towards normal intercourse. Evidence for this are the onanistic apparatuses found on many women and not least the always popular candle.

Source: “Bekämpfung der Abtreibung und der Homosexualität als politische Aufgabe,” in Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, 5.12-7/1 Ministerium für Unterricht, Kunst, geistliche und Medizinalangelegenheiten, No. 9674, fol. 34 and fol. 35–37; reprinted in Günter Grau, ed., *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit: Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993, pp. 151–53.

Translation: GHDI staff

Recommended Citation: Josef Meisinger on “Combating Homosexuality as a Political Task” (April 5–6, 1937), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-1558>> [March 16, 2026].