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

During the Weimar Republic, the criminal prosecution of homosexuals (which dated as far back as the Holy Roman Empire) had declined considerably. 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.

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