

own sex, in the wake of trials such as those of Oscar Wilde and Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg, came to regard themselves as part of an oppressed minority cherishing a grievance against late Victorian society and its norms of sexual morality, and demanding their own "place in the sun." This trend was for a long time characteristic of northern Europe (where generally homosexual conduct was criminalized) and was foreign to the dwellers of Mediterranean lands. Since the 1960s, the "gay" identity has had an undeniable component of political activism; it was the badge of the individual who proclaimed his sexual nature openly and campaigned for the liberation of himself and others like him from the unjust prohibitions and discriminations of "straight" society. One can readily grant that in ancient Greece and Rome no one was "gay" in this sense. Such a political stance arose only in dialectical opposition to the Judeo-Christian attitude toward homosexual behavior and those who engaged in it. Even today many of those who participate in homosexual activity far from the mass meetings and rallies of the "gay ghettos" are heedless of this political aspect of homosexuality, which they perceive as irrelevant to their desires for erotic gratification.

*Conclusions.* As has been noted, social construction theory has made a contribution in warning against anachronism, the tendency to project back into the past one's own familiar experiences and life ways. Yet the idea that cultural climates shift, changing the expression of sexuality with them, is scarcely a new discovery. What is disappointing about social construction is that it offers no explanation of the "grounding" of such change. What mechanisms—economic, political, intellectual—cause a society to move from one dominant cultural climate to another? Moreover, social construction has gone too far in seeking to discourage transhistorical and cross-cultural investigations of homosexual desire. Implied roadblocks of this kind must not stymie the investiga-

tor, for comparative studies across time and across social systems are a vital prerequisite to the emergence of a satisfactory concept of human homosexual behavior in all its fullness and complexity.

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## SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

This term has acquired various meanings in the course of the past century and a half. Late nineteenth-century Europe saw the formation of Marxian working-class parties that called themselves Social Democrats. These gained in numbers and influence, but were beset by the unresolved problem of whether to limit themselves to parliamentary maneuvering, or else to resort to such extra-parliamentary means as general strikes and working-class violence to achieve power.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 triggered a major crisis within the left, in which the parliamentary and reformist elements sided with Social Democracy, while those committed to violent revolution joined Communist Parties organized on the Leninist model. This splitting of the left provoked internecine struggles that weakened it in the face of the emerging fascist and National Socialist movements in the years of the Great Depression. Social Democracy tended to become the party of the petty bourgeoisie and the intellectuals, while the working class proper rallied to its Communist rivals.

*Germany.* The first party to welcome the new homosexual emancipation movement was German Social Democracy. In January 1898 August Bebel, the leader of the party in the Reichstag, took the floor in defense of the first petition submitted by the newly founded **Scientific-Humanitarian Committee**, while—with the exception of a single National Liberal—the representatives of the other parties expressed outrage and disgust at the subject of the petition. In the wake of this intervention, Magnus **Hirschfeld** was personally received by Secretary Nieberding, the head of the Imperial Office of Justice, who cautioned him that the government could do nothing until the public had been reeducated as to the justice of abolishing the antihomosexual **Paragraph 175**. The Social Democrats—with a few exceptions in their own ranks—continued to be the only party that supported the demands of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, while the opposition was spearheaded by the Catholic Centrist Party. At first the whole issue was limited to Germany, as the Social Democratic parties in other nations, for a variety of reasons, had no “homosexual question” to debate.

As happened elsewhere, German progressives took notice—often uncritically—of Soviet **Russia**. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 not only swept away the old order in a cataclysm of blood and violence, it gave the appearance of turning the new Soviet Russia into a huge experimental laboratory in which official support was accorded all kinds of pioneering social innovations. The penal codes of the RSFSR in 1922 and 1926 omitted all reference to voluntary homosexual acts committed in private, and among reformers in the West the myth arose that the Soviet Union was the “country of the future” in which the injustices and inequalities of the past were being overcome. This stance naturally affected the leftist parties abroad.

In 1922 a highly progressive penal code was drafted by the German Minister

of Justice, Gustav Radbruch, who had been the teacher of Kurt **Hiller** at the University of Heidelberg, but Radbruch did not succeed in bringing his draft before the Reichstag. The Communist Party, with its principle of strict intraparty discipline, made support for law reform part of its platform. The Communist lawyer Felix Halle formulated its approach to the issue by writing: “The class-conscious proletariat, uninfluenced by the ideology of property and freed from the ideology of the churches, approaches the question of sexual life and also the problem of homosexuality with a lack of prejudice afforded by an understanding of the overall structure of society.”

On October 16, 1929, decriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults was voted by a committee of the Reichstag 15 to 13, with the Communists, Social Democrats, and German People’s Party (classical liberal) supporting the change. However, the American stock market crash a week later—heralding a world-wide depression—provoked a crisis in which law reform was shelved as the Reichstag struggled with the deteriorating economic situation and the mounting polarization of political forces within the country.

The Social Democratic Party supported the demands of the homosexual organizations less out of any principled commitment than because of its devotion to the principle of individual liberty which it had taken over from the classical liberal parties of the nineteenth century, but for just this reason it countenanced defection within its own ranks.

*Other Countries.* In countries other than Germany the Social Democratic parties and their equivalents often had no clearly defined “sexual politics,” suffered embarrassment by the issues which sexual reform raised, and were intimidated by the negative response of the uneducated and religious strata of the population. The only country where law reform was realized under Social Demo-

cratic leadership in this period was **Denmark**, which repealed its sodomy law in 1930 (followed by **Sweden** in 1944 and **Norway** in 1948).

In the Soviet Union, Stalin set about repudiating all concessions to liberalism as he consolidated his power in a one-party state. A law dated March 7, 1934—a year after the National Socialist seizure of power—restored criminal sanctions against male but not female homosexuality. Various contradictory pretexts were offered for the change, but in practice it meant that—even as the myth of the “humanist Stalin” was propagated abroad in the interest of the Popular Front formed to halt the rising tide of reaction in Central and Western Europe—the Communist parties lost all interest in sexual reform, and Social Democracy had to carry the ball alone.

The World League for Sexual Reform on a Scientific Basis itself collapsed after Hirschfeld’s death on May 14, 1935, as the two wings—one desiring a centrist approach with the cooperation of the bourgeois parties and the other seeking an open alliance with the Communist Party, even at that late date—could not work together. The movement of the preceding twenty-five years had pursued a number of different goals which now proved ideologically incompatible. The sexual reform aspect tended to become the province of the left, while the birth control movement and sex education were anchored in the center and the eugenics movement became identified with the right, particularly after the Nazi accession to power in Germany, where Hitler forced upon his cabinet a series of negative eugenic measures, including compulsory sterilization. The Soviet Union relentlessly dismantled progressive social laws, prohibited homosexuality, forbade abortion and the sale of birth control materials, and conformed to the model of the clerical-fascist states with their pronatalist policies. Some leftist scholars have argued that such retrograde policies were a tem-

porary aberration under Stalin. Yet long after his death, the Communist regimes of **China**, **Cuba**, and **Vietnam**—not to mention that of the Soviet Union itself—have continued to adhere rigidly to these policies, with antihomosexuality prominent among them.

In Western Europe after 1945 the Social Democratic parties sympathized with the homosexual liberation movement but were often timid in defending it, while the conservative parties were solid in their opposition to law reform and quite willing to use homosexuals as scapegoats in the anti-Communist furor of the 1950s. It was only in 1969 that Paragraph 175 was finally repealed under a Social Democratic government in Bonn.

In Britain a special situation prevailed. Much of the Labour Party’s rank and file persisted in regarding homosexuality as a product of the elite **public schools**, as (in effect) an **aristocratic vice**. Initially it was easier to obtain support for the work of the **Wolfenden Committee** from Liberals and even Conservatives than from Labour stalwarts. When George Brinham, who had been chairman of the Labour Party from 1959 to 1960, was murdered by a hustler in 1962, the party offered no sympathy, only silence.

Nonetheless, in Parliament the chief support for the Abse Bill (1967), which decriminalized homosexual conduct among consenting adults in England and Wales, came from Labour Party members. Yet this step was taken in the form of a private member’s bill not officially supported by the Labour government of Harold Wilson.

Subsequently, homosexuality emerged as an issue in dispute between the “modern” sector of the party, consisting of intellectuals and elements of the upper middle class, as against the old-line trade unionists. The latter remained deeply suspicious of the championing of gay rights and other progressive social issues by the modern faction. In the 1980s Thatcherite electoral successes caused frustration that

heightened cleavages over social questions. In the Bermondsey by-election of February 1983, when openly gay Peter Tatchell sought to be returned to Parliament as the official Labour candidate, his campaign suffered to systematic vilification at the hands of party stalwarts. In 1988 many Labour M.P.s voted for Clause 28, the notorious measure banning "promotion" of homosexuality.

Despite the checkered record in some countries, on the whole the growth of Social Democracy promoted a climate of liberalism in which, other factors permitting, a visible gay movement could flourish. In the early 1980s the French Socialist Party of François Mitterand proved receptive to a number of requests from the homosexual movement, eliminating the last vestiges of the Vichy restrictions on homosexual conduct. The Spanish Socialists under Felipe González enormously increased the whole sphere of sexual freedom. In Greece, however, the Socialist regime of Andreas Papandreou continued to repress homosexuality.

*Conclusion.* On the whole, the ideology of Social Democratic parties has been eclectic rather than doctrinaire, absorbing traits of nineteenth-century liberalism repudiated by the conservatives. At the same time they have been gingerly about offending lower middle-class deference to sexual "respectability," and they loathe to engage in a vigorous defense of gay rights in crucial electoral contests where the right (and sometimes the left) openly appeals to anti-homosexual prejudice. Despite these reservations, the progress achieved by the gay movement in Western and Central Europe would have been unimaginable without the intervention and support of the Social Democracy, however qualified in particular situations it may have been.

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## SOCIAL WORK

This umbrella term comprises a range of professional services, activities, and methods concretely addressing the investigation, treatment, and material assistance of those perceived to be economically disadvantaged and socially maladjusted. Social work began in late Victorian England as a volunteer response to the wide disparity between the "two nations"—the comfortable class and the poor—and spread quickly to America and northern Europe. In the course of the twentieth century the field became professionalized, and today most social workers are state employees. Large claims have sometimes been made for social work: that it can cure society of its ills, and that it represents the conscience of a people, but these assertions are usually rejected as grandiose. Lacking a methodology of its own, social work has sometimes seemed a prisoner of the varying mixtures of economics, sociology, and psychoanalysis that have been imported to sustain its practice. Social work should probably be viewed not as a science but as a humanistic endeavor, though one in which the imperatives of bureaucracy loom large. At its best, however, social work avoids ascriptions of pathology, seeking to build on the strengths of clients so that they may take an active part in reclaiming their own lives.

*Social Work and Homosexuality.* The rise of the modern gay and lesbian movement after World War II has exposed the inadequacy of the publicly supported