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Gay activism in *Modell Deutschland*

Craig Griffiths*

School of History, Queen Mary, University of London

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Biographical Note

Craig Griffiths is a doctoral candidate in History at Queen Mary, University of London. His research focuses on gay liberation in West Germany and in particular on the transition from “homophile” to “gay” politics and the activist significance of the National Socialist past.

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* Email: c.griffiths@qmul.ac.uk

Gay activism in *Modell Deutschland*

Craig Griffiths

The SPD's 1976 election slogan, *Modell Deutschland* (“the German model”) became a catch-all term for all that the New Left rejected about the Federal Republic. This article will focus on how gay activists attempted to situate cases of gay oppression as part and parcel of wider political oppression against the New Left, and how the invocation of the National Socialist past was crucial to this aim. Gay activists' efforts culminated in the gay movement's interaction with the Third International Russell Tribunal, held in West Germany in 1978 and 1979 to consider alleged human rights abuses. Analysing gay activism around the Tribunal reveals underlying tensions in gay liberation, with activists facing competing demands, the need to address contrasting constituencies, and caught between public and counterpublic.

Keywords: gay liberation; New Left; Russell Tribunal; West Germany; pink triangle

Introduction

The hindrance of the political work of gay action groups by State and authorities is no isolated instance in the political scene of the Federal Republic of Germany. Rather, anti-gay repression ranks among the general increasing oppression and persecution of all progressive forces in “*Modell Deutschland*.”

Gays against Oppression and Fascism, 1977.¹

A construction worker bends down to lift steel girders with the foundations of a building rising in the background. Set under the black, red and gold of the (West) German flag, the image precedes the caption “Our strong economy / remains in front. / Through social stability”. Entitled *Modell Deutschland* (“The German Model”), this was one of the SPD's posters for the 1976 federal elections, which saw the social-liberal coalition (comprising the SPD, the Social Democrats, and the FDP, the Free Democrats) remain

in power under the chancellorship of Helmut Schmidt.² The poster, together with its accompanying slogan, was presumably supposed to emphasise continuing economic growth, achieved despite the oil price shock, and the role therein of harmonious industrial relations and the safe pair of hands represented in the poster by the construction worker but symbolically embodied by Helmut Schmidt. Moreover, the poster conveyed a sense of (patriotic) pride in West Germany's enduring economic success-story.

To New Left activists, however, the term *Modell Deutschland* was a shorthand for all that was wrong with the Federal Republic. *Modell Deutschland* conjured up images of undemocratic technocratism, the pursuit of economic growth despite all human and environmental costs, clampdown on dissent by an increasingly authoritarian state, and most significantly, a potential backwards slide into fascism.³ For gay activists, it would also come to signify the oppression of homosexuality. By situating their own oppression within the nexus of issues making up the New Left understanding of the term, gay activists sought to draw links between their own situation and that of other oppressed groups, and between the West German present and the National Socialist past. These efforts would culminate in the gay movement's engagement with the Russell Tribunal (1978-79), which shall be the focus of this article.

Modell Deutschland

In the mid-to-late 1970s, a radical rejection of *Modell Deutschland* lent some measure of unity to the New Left; networks of counter-cultural groups, cadre parties, loose collectives and social movements that could agree on precious little else. “New Left” is an imprecise term, but captures a deep-seated hostility to the parliamentary and

established Left, especially the SPD and the DGB (Trade Unions' Confederation). Some groups were characterised predominantly by their anti-authoritarian vibe, others by their thematisation of gender and sexuality, or sensibilised by a developing environmental consciousness, while yet others remained stubbornly wedded to an orthodox class analysis. However, as Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried argue, the constituent parts of what they term the “alternative milieu” – despite their manifold ideological differences – all took part in a common search for “concrete [...] and autonomous forms of existence,” beyond the state and society which they experienced as fundamentally alienating.⁴ *Modell Deutschland* functioned as the ideological glue holding together this “negative alliance.”⁵

In 1978 and 1979 the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation held its third International Russell Tribunal in West Germany.⁶ The Tribunal's main focus was the *Extremistenbeschluss*, the “Extremists' Resolution”. More commonly referred to as the *Radikalenerlass* (radicals' decree) and dubbed the *Berufsverbot* (“ban on careers”) by its opponents, the measure was introduced in 1972 and permitted the screening of current and prospective civil service employees along the lines of current or past membership of radical groups, usually communist. Were sufficient evidence of a lack of support for the constitutional order to be found, individuals could have their applications rejected or contracts terminated. Suggestions of how many people were affected have varied greatly, but it is clear that there were hundreds of thousands of screenings and several hundred rejections and dismissals.⁷

At a congress in Göttingen convened by the myriad groups making up the Tribunal's supporters' movement, a resolution was passed calling on the Tribunal's “jurors” not to restrict their investigation of alleged human rights abuses in the Federal

Republic to censorship and the *Extremistenbeschluss* alone. By excluding other oppressive measures the will of the majority of those supporting the Tribunal would be ignored and this would trivialise the “range and depth of political oppression in the sense of *Modell Deutschland*.”⁸ The measures cited included the worsening of prison conditions, the security services' undermining of grass-roots campaigns, the criminalisation of women protesting against paragraph 218 (regulating abortion) and the increasing pressure on trade unions.

But for the focus of this article the most significant inclusion was that of gay oppression: “Discrimination and agitation against gays in the direct tradition of fascist methods, through reference to the 'healthy sensibility of the people'” (*gesundes Volksempfinden*).⁹ It is telling that this wording suggested that it was not discrimination against gays in itself that was worthy of denunciation, but that this discrimination bore fascist hallmarks. Reference to National Socialism and in particular to the persecution of male homosexuals, incarcerated in the concentration camps and classified through the pink triangle, became a prevailing feature of gay activism in the 1970s.¹⁰ This indicates the continuing potency of National Socialism as a benchmark against which the contemporary Federal Republic was judged, and as a framework through which it was viewed and understood. Yet this tendency also highlights gay activists' struggles to gain support from other parts of the New Left. Reference to oppression (especially oppression that could be framed as having a fascist legacy or exhibiting fascist qualities) would prove to be activists' most reliable means through which to appeal to their heterosexual New Left interlocutors (rather than, for example, by appealing to any spirit of anti-authoritarianism or sexual liberation).

The changing face of homosexual politics

In September 1969, a liberalisation of paragraph 175 finally came into effect, putting an end to the continuing application of the National Socialist version of the law criminalising male homosexuality. Writing six months later, Konstantin Ortloff lamented that homosexuals had not yet taken advantage of their new-found (albeit limited) freedom, and asked “Great challenges await us in the 1970s. [...] Who will make a start?”¹¹ It was not to be *Der Weg*, the homophile journal in which Ortloff made his call: this proved to be the very last issue. The usage “homophile” was designed to downplay the role of the *sexual* in homosexuality; *Der Weg*, the last surviving journal of the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s, could not compete with the arrival of new glossy homosexual monthlies onto the market, replete with scantily clad models on their covers. Unlike *Der Weg* or *Der Kreis* (which ceased publication in 1967), magazines such as *du & ich*, *him* and *Don* were freely available at news-stands and kiosks around the country, a development facilitated by the liberalisation of paragraph 175. This reform was not an achievement of the gay movement, but a precondition for its subsequent emergence: not only because of the reduced fear of prosecution¹² but also because of the arrival of gay publications in the public sphere, which carved out a certain visibility *before* the advent of gay liberation, which arrived on the scene in 1971-72.

The chief editor of *him*, Udo Erlenhardt, anticipated the arrival of the gay movement in an August 1970 editorial, in which he called for “public actions” by homophiles: “The next step leads to communication, in the streets, in parliament. The public must be confronted with realities.”¹³ Overwhelmingly, this confrontation was not undertaken by those who used the self-designation “homophile,” but by those who

identified as *schwul* (gay).¹⁴ The first gay action groups were formed at the universities of Bochum and Münster, in December 1970 and April 1971 respectively.¹⁵ Others in Frankfurt, West Berlin, Hamburg and across the Federal Republic soon followed, many founded directly after screenings of Rosa von Praunheim's provocative film *Not the Homosexual is perverse, but the society in which he lives*. Offering an unabashed portrayal of various aspects of gay life, the film took aim at those homosexuals leading hidden lives, in thrall to conventional morality, culture, and masculinity, engaging in anonymous sex and prostitution.¹⁶ The film ends with a short clip of a commune of naked gay men, discussing how to go about seeking political change – the concluding parole reads “out of the toilets, into the streets!”.

None of the many gay action groups that arrived on the scene in the early 1970s were particularly large. The Hamburg-based IHWO (International Homophile World Organisation) was in fact the country's largest homosexual organisation until its demise in 1974, but unlike gay action groups the IHWO eschewed public actions in favour of engaging with political, medical and academic figures and concentrating on offering its members social and therapeutic activities.¹⁷ Indeed, the IHWO executive was so concerned by the prospect of *Not the Homosexual* cementing prevailing stereotypes of homosexuals that it went to the lengths of attempting to have the film's nationwide broadcast blocked.¹⁸ Rather than the professionals and white-collar workers who made up the membership of the IHWO, self-styled action groups consisted overwhelmingly of students or recent graduates, a context vital to comprehending gay liberation in its West German context.¹⁹ While gay activism was not a factor in 1968 itself, the New Left circles that expanded and diversified after the disintegration of the student movement provided the context that enabled homosexual mobilisation. Unlike the IHWO, gay

action groups sought to theorise the connection between the specific situation of homosexuals and the wider socio-economic order. These groups did agitate for specific and immediate policy changes (for example a further liberalisation of paragraph 175). However, gay liberation was not beholden to a civil rights model; instead, gay activists sought a radical or revolutionary transformation of society, however that was understood.

The platform of the Homosexual Action West Berlin (HAW), agreed in November 1971, clearly articulates the group's anti-capitalist stance: "The social discrimination of homosexuals in our society cannot be separated from the conditions of the emergence and development of capitalism".²⁰ Similarly, the Würzburg Homosexual Action Group (WüHSt), founded in 1972, saw its task not in seeking the integration of homosexuals into existing (oppressive) society but in challenging the social conditions that gave rise to gay oppression in the first place.²¹ Some of these groups saw some initial co-operation between gay men and lesbians, but lesbian activists increasingly tended to organise separately, in and with the women's movement. If at the start of the decade female homosexual activists had often referred to themselves as *schwule Frauen* (gay women), the adoption of the term *lesbisch* (lesbian) from 1973 signified the development of a consciousness independent of the gay (male) movement.²²

Public and counterpublic

Gay activists were caught in a web of competing demands, needing to address contrasting constituencies and operated in clashing discursive spheres. They aimed of course to gain enough publicity to be in with a chance of influencing public opinion, in order to challenge popular public (mis)conceptions about homosexuality, to seek to

change policy. At the same time, gay activists desperately needed “recruits”: addressing other, non-organised, homosexuals was a necessity. Yet as will be shown through the example of the Russell Tribunal, the gay movement dedicated much of its energy to addressing neither the wider public nor homosexuals in particular but sought-after partners on the New Left.

In 1967 the SDS (Socialist German Students' Federation) passed a resolution calling for the creation of an “enlightening counterpublic” (*aufklärende Gegenöffentlichkeit*) to break the “dictatorship of the manipulators”.²³ Inspired particularly by Herbert Marcuse's work on manipulation, this was seen as necessary to challenge the monopoly on information held by the capitalist mass media, especially Axel Springer and his BILD tabloid.²⁴ To this end, the mid-1960s onwards saw an extraordinary proliferation of independently-produced magazines, newsletters, leaflets and posters as well as the constitution of publishing, artistic, film and theatre collectives. Most of the magazines were small and irregular enterprises, although some were much larger and had some limited mass market success, such as *Konkret*. Of course, articles printed in leftist journals were not just read by heterosexuals. Articles in the leftist journals *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, *Kursbuch* and *Das Argument* were central in launching the *Tuntentstreit*, loosely translating as “Queens' Dispute”.²⁵ While this debate over gender presentation and how to appeal to the working class and socialist organisations was internal to the gay movement, it was facilitated by the New Left counterpublic (only later were the texts collated and reprinted, aimed this time at a more specifically gay audience).

However, gay activists were also aware of the limitations of this discursive sphere. They could hope to reach only a limited number of homosexuals through this

avenue, and activists knew they could never take the support of the New Left for granted. The editors of *Schwuchtel*, the movement's first national journal, cited their frustration with heterosexual (male) leftists as one of the reasons behind their desire to launch an independent publication: "whoever is made an outsider by this society remains an outsider amongst leftists too."²⁶ Gay activists were equally dissatisfied with the commercial gay press. To a certain extent magazines helped incubate the gay movement by reporting on the founding of action groups and giving these groups a limited amount of space in which to set out their positions. Yet gay magazines were first and foremost commercial enterprises and satisfying their readers' wishes for erotic photography took precedence over reporting on the activities of action groups. While *him* (owned by *St Pauli Verlag*, based in Hamburg's *Reeperbahn*) was the magazine most supportive of the movement it nevertheless carried the occasional article mocking gay student radicals and their ideological excesses (for example under the title "On trotskyist cock-suckers, Mao fags and anal revisionists").²⁷ Most gay action groups produced their own newsletters but these were not systematically distributed nationally and thus could not reach a wider audience. To rectify this situation, 1975 saw the founding of the gay movement's first two journals, *Schwuchtel* and *Emanzipation*, as well as its first publishing house, *Verlag Rosa Winkel* (Pink Triangle Press). An article in the first issue of *Schwuchtel* expressed the journal's rationale: "Us gays continue to occupy the lowest rung of the human value ladder in the Federal Republic. Therefore no-one will champion our cause if we *fail to create a public ourselves*".²⁸

The Pink Triangle

In *Sex after Fascism*, Dagmar Herzog has argued that by the 1970s “the Third Reich was no longer needed by liberals or leftists as a reference point in order morally to justify” sexual liberalization.²⁹ National Socialism did not disappear as a reference point for other political issues but the New Left “no longer required the use of references to Nazism as a kind of moral battering ram to advance sexual liberation.”³⁰ This may well have been the case with debates over sex education, which is the case specifically cited by Herzog in the following passage. It does not, however, apply to gay liberation. The inclusion of gay oppression in the aforementioned Göttingen resolution, with its reference to fascist methods and “*gesundes Volksempfinden*,” is but one example of how gay activists routinely relied on “references to Nazism as a kind of moral battering ram” to advance their cause.

The precondition for this dynamic was the “rediscovery” of the pink triangle and the National Socialist persecution of homosexuals, made possible by the 1972 publication of Heinz Heger's *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, the first published autobiographical text by a former concentration camp prisoner incarcerated on account of his homosexuality.³¹ In the context of the aforementioned *Tuntenstreit*, it was originally envisaged that the pink triangle might function in a similar way to drag – by wearing the pink triangle, activists who did not wear drag could increase the visibility of homosexuality and in so doing show solidarity with more effeminate homosexuals (*Tunten*), whose sexuality was not so easily hidden.³² Yet the symbol was also intended to refer to Nazi persecution and to demonstrate the conviction that this persecution was continuing in one form or another in the Federal Republic. For activists from Heidelberg the symbol was supposed to illustrate that the oppression of homosexual desire “exists

today just as it did then,”³³ while their counterparts from the Homosexual Action Munich (HAM) declared “Today we wear the Pink Triangle again in order to show that we perceive this society as a new concentration camp.”³⁴

In 1976, *Schwuchtel* carried full-page adverts advertising pink triangle badges. The advert briefly set out the history of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals – including the contention that tens of thousands of those who had to wear the pink triangle were murdered in the gas chambers – and concluded with this warning:

the pink triangle has become an international symbol of the gay movement. A symbol of the history that others have tried to obliterate and which gays must discover. And a reminder of where gay oppression can lead if gay people do not actively struggle for their rights.³⁵

For an indication of the international links that existed within gay liberation, consider the fact that the Canadian gay journal *Body Politic* carried an virtually identical quote advertising the launch of *Pink Triangle Press* in 1976.³⁶ In cases such as this, reference to the pink triangle was used as a mobilising device, in the effort to exhort other gays to become involved in the movement. Similarly, an activist from the Homosexual Action Nuremberg (HAN) argued in *Emanzipation* that “us gays must learn to become more conscious of history, not to forget and repress our specific history but to embrace it and to learn from it.”³⁷ However, gay activists soon discovered that they actually needed to make this history of persecution somewhat *less* specific, in order to appeal to sought-after partners on the New Left. In these cases the pink triangle referred to *shared* persecution, with the symbol portrayed as just another version of the red triangle, under which leftist radicals were imprisoned in the concentration camps. This is a significant difference to the history of the pink triangle in the United States, where the Nazi

persecution of homosexuals was compared to anti-Semitism and the pink triangle was equated with the yellow star.³⁸

This understanding of simultaneous and shared oppression was not only read back into the past but also operated in the present, as can be seen by interpretations of the aforementioned *Extremistenbeschluss* (“extremists' resolution”). In 1974, the teacher Reiner Koepp and the Church youth worker Klaus Kindel both lost their jobs on account of their open homosexuality (the justification in Koepp's case being the “role as a feminine homosexual” he had adopted at school and in Kindel's that he had collected signatures calling for the repeal of paragraph 175).³⁹ Although the relevant authorities did not draw on the *Extremistenbeschluss* in either case, gay activists immediately presented these cases as *Berufsverbote*, “bans on careers”, part of the pattern of targeting political radicals. At a New Left congress against the *Berufsverbot*, the HAW called on the audience to demonstrate solidarity with Koepp and Kindel and supported this call by reference to history: “For it is really nothing new that communists and homosexuals in Germany are deprived of their citizenship.”⁴⁰

In 1976, Joachim Hohmann, a regular columnist in *him*, published *Homosexuality and Subculture*, which he dedicated to “the men with the pink triangle”: not only to the ostensible 80,000 who had perished in the concentration camps but explicitly also to those who wore the symbol in the present. One of his chapters pertained to the *Berufsverbot*, in which Hohmann compared the process of screening civil service personnel to the inquisition. He argued that the “modern inquisitors” do not discriminate when choosing whom or what to persecute: “One had sold a copy of the *Rote Fahne* [Red Flag; a communist newspaper]. Another had read it. The third had marched against the war in Vietnam. The fourth is a member of the wrong party. The

fifth kissed another man in open public.”⁴¹ Activism against the *Berufsverbot* set the paradigm in efforts to link gay oppression with the oppression of others on the New Left; as a means of demonstrating the seriousness of gay oppression and the fundamentally political nature of the gay movement. At the same time, it encouraged those gays who did not appreciate or agree with this connection to draw wider conclusions about the extent of political repression in the Federal Republic. Both aspects were crucial in laying the foundations for the gay movement's subsequent engagement with the Russell Tribunal.

The Russell Tribunal

The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation's Third International Russell Tribunal was split into two hearings: the first took place in Frankfurt in April 1978 and was dedicated to the *Berufsverbot*, while the second considered alleged censorship and rights abuses in the legal process, taking place in Cologne in January 1979. The tribunal was conceptualised as a “non-institutionalised expression of world opinion”; although devoid of judicial power, evidence was put forward, international “jurors” selected and state authorities invited to state the case for the defence.⁴² The Tribunal is primarily of interest here because it opens a fascinating window into how gay activists attempted to address their New Left interlocutors.⁴³ Activism around the Russell Tribunal was not an isolated instance from which it would be difficult to draw conclusions, but encompasses a significant period in the 1970s, since over two years had passed from the first plans by the time the Tribunal met for the second and final time in 1979. Adopting the Tribunal as a case study also enables tensions between public and counterpublic to be seen in microcosm. While the gay movement's engagement around the Tribunal was primarily

on the plane of the New Left counterpublic – persuading activists that gay oppression was connected to the other cases of oppression that would be presented before the Tribunal – the Tribunal itself aimed to address the general public. The “Action Committee against the *Berufsverbot*” was not the only group supporting the Tribunal which understood it as a chance to escape the “leftist ghetto,” to put an end to left-wing navel-gazing.⁴⁴ Indeed, the addressee in mind was the *Weltöffentlichkeit*, the “world public”.⁴⁵

These lofty ambitions were never fulfilled; the Tribunal was beset with problems from the very start. While some liberal and church groups were won to the cause, other organisations gave the Tribunal a wide berth. The DGB (Trade Unions' Confederation) opposed the Tribunal and thus stymied the ability of trade unionists to take part.⁴⁶ The SPD reacted with outrage, arguing that the Tribunal was placing the Federal Republic on a par with Vietnam or Chile; the party executive passed a resolution instructing its members to not support the Tribunal in any way.⁴⁷ Under this pressure, the SPD's youth wing, the Young Socialists, reluctantly withdrew their support, following their FDP counterpart organisation.⁴⁸ Even such prominent leftists within the SPD as Erhard Eppler condemned the Tribunal as cynical and malicious, noting that East Germany was not under investigation.⁴⁹ He suggested that this was because the DKP (German Communist Party – financed by the East German regime) would refuse to take part were the GDR to be included. As it turned out, despite its sole focus on West Germany, the DKP boycotted the Tribunal anyway, citing the presence of the KB (Communist League).⁵⁰ Given that the majority of those who had been affected by the *Extremistenbeschluss* were members of the DKP, this seriously impaired the Tribunal's ability to consider these cases. Ultimately, more than half of the Tribunal's international

jury members, chosen for their supposed democratic and popular appeal, failed to even make it to West Germany for the second hearing.⁵¹

During the opening of the Tribunal's first hearing, activists occupied the stage in protest at the decision to focus solely on the *Berufsverbot*, arguing instead that the prison conditions of those suspected of terrorism must be given priority.⁵² This only reinforced the attempts previously made to link the Tribunal with terrorism: in November 1977 the Federal Minister of the Interior, Werner Maihofer (FDP), had warned that the Tribunal was not only slanderous but was constituted by groups responsible for an “intellectual-moral climate” that aided and abetted terrorist violence.⁵³ Vociferously denying any link to terrorism, the Tribunal's Advisory Committee denounced increasing demands for “distancing” from terrorism, and especially the use of the term “sympathiser,” which was held responsible for engendering an environment akin to McCarthyism.⁵⁴

Concerns were heightened after a confidential interior ministry document was leaked to *The Guardian* in January 1978.⁵⁵ Describing the aims, make-up and chronology of the Tribunal in some detail, the paper noted the possibility of the Tribunal galvanising opposition to the government, just as the first Tribunal on Vietnam (in 1967) had had significant domestic repercussions in the United States.⁵⁶ A raft of suggestions were therefore put forward to undermine the initiative. These included dissuading democratic personalities from taking part, attempting to block the rental of any publicly-owned venue for the Tribunal's use, denying entry to foreign jurors, and even seeking to disperse participants or ban the Tribunal in advance if enough evidence could be solicited that it would provide a platform for statements regarding criminal acts.⁵⁷ Confirming the existence of the leaked paper, a spokesperson maintained that these

were only “abstract and theoretical” suggestions.⁵⁸ Theoretical or otherwise, the fact that these measures were being discussed at all served only to further convince Tribunal supporters of the righteousness of their cause, particularly as one of the very legal instruments under investigation – paragraph 90a, criminalising “denigration of the State” – could now potentially be used against them.⁵⁹

Gay activists were not slow to recognise the potential opportunity presented by the Russell Tribunal. In May 1977 the National Working Group Repression Against Gays (NARGS) was formed, to coordinate the gay movement's interaction with the Tribunal. The initiative dates back to a resolution by the Homosexual Action Hamburg (HAH) but soon attracted the support of groups from across the country.⁶⁰ Throughout 1977, press releases and articles were published widely in both the activist and commercial gay press, urging homosexuals to collect evidence on discrimination and oppression and to forward this to NARGS, so that this could be later submitted to the Tribunal.⁶¹ The resulting cases were then featured in the brochure *Gays against Oppression and Fascism*, published in October 1977 in the aim of raising awareness of these cases among both gay and heterosexual New Left constituencies.⁶² To this end, the brochure was sold in the gay scene but also in university canteens, at information stalls and through leftist bookshops.⁶³

Oppression and Fascism, alongside other written materials by NARGS and its constituent groups, presented a rather formulaic “list” of the various forms of oppression faced by gays. These included the *Berufsverbot*, the banning of an information stall in Aachen, experimental brain surgery aiming to change sexual behaviour, denigration of gays in the press, police raids in the gay scene, discrimination in the rental market, and anti-gay attitudes from academics, politicians and therapists.

NARGS emphasised that the cases included in the brochure represented only the “tip of the iceberg,” as they set about illustrating the pervasive nature of contemporary oppression.⁶⁴ The relative lack of clear and tangible instances of oppression was explained away as but further proof of the perniciousness of that oppression:

“Internalised oppression helps the system in making oppression rarely openly visible.”⁶⁵

NARGS sought at every opportunity to link the oppression faced by gays with the contemporary political situation, arguing in *Oppression and Fascism* that “anti-gay repression ranks among the general increasing oppression and persecution of all progressive forces in 'Modell Deutschland'.”⁶⁶ The prime means of convincing others of this claim was by linking this (shared) oppression to the National Socialist past. Indeed, the very title of their 1977 brochure (*Oppression and Fascism*) and its front cover (emblazoned by an enormous image of the pink triangle) foregrounded these attempts. One of the forms of discrimination set out by NARGS was the role of the mass media in instilling anti-gay attitudes amongst the general public. Unsurprisingly, NARGS focused on BILD and its proprietor, Axel Springer, of whose nefariousness New Left activists would need little convincing. Homophobic headlines in BILD were presented as part of the attempt to undermine the gay movement and in so doing engender divisions amongst ordinary citizens: this line of argumentation was accompanied by the now compulsory reference to the Nazi past by means of the article's title, “‘Gesundes Volksempfinden' wird geBILDet”, with the tabloid's name and logo superimposed in the centre of the last verb (translating as “‘Healthy sensibility of the people' under construction”).⁶⁷

The theme of medical repression was similarly framed through the lens provided by the National Socialist past. Gay activists were in little doubt as to the violence of

medical interventions: the front page of a special edition of *Rosa* displayed a graphic image of a knife and syringe being plunged into a man's brain, under the title “How gays are being 'cured'.”⁶⁸ These interventions included stereotactic brain surgery, behavioural therapy, electric shock therapy and the use of the drug “Androcur”. This was the brand name for cyproterone acetate, which can reduce testosterone levels in men; in 1977 the SPD parliamentary representative Adolf Müller-Emmert was quoted as having suggested that it could be used to treat those with “abnormal sexual tendencies.”⁶⁹ Terminology indelibly associated with the Holocaust was invoked to characterise the significance of this measure: “are we standing before the final solution of the gay question?”⁷⁰ This vocabulary not only linked contemporary repression to the Nazi past, but lent an universalizing dynamic to medical procedures being carried out on a limited number of individuals; potentially, all gays were at risk. In its article about stereotactic surgery, NARGS made sure both to point out Nazi abuses of similar neurosurgical procedures and to ominously warn that such technologies could be used in the future as a disciplinary measure against political dissidents: “Statements whereby leftists are said to be 'wrong in the head' are not exactly rare in the press.”⁷¹

Unlike the *Berufsverbot*, NARGS struggled to secure any tangible evidence of medication or surgery affecting a particular individual who would be willing to forward the case and to testify before the Tribunal. The Tribunal would only deal with specific cases rather than general themes, which seriously impeded NARGS' chances of success. Ultimately, only one of the various cases dealt with by NARGS was considered by the Tribunal. This was the decision by the city of Aachen in 1973 to refuse permission for an information stall by the GSR (*Society for Sexual Reform*), of the West Germany's most discreetly named gay action groups. The GSR challenged the decision, and in

1975 were successful in having the ruling overturned by the Aachen Administrative Court, but in 1976 the Supreme Administrative Court in Münster upheld the original decision, and also rejected an appeal.⁷²

Information stalls were a common campaigning tactic within the gay movement and by far the most common way of appealing to the wider public as opposed to specifically gay or New Left audiences. It was precisely the aim to reach a wider public that the authorities dealing with the Aachen case took issue to. Defending the decision, the *Regierungspräsident* of Cologne argued that the event would have breached public order since passers-by would have been confronted by allusions to homosexual activity and lifestyle in an *aufdringlich* manner; “intrusive” because the organisers wished to refer to their own homosexuality in public (*in der Öffentlichkeit*).⁷³ In its subsequent verdict, the Münster court decreed that no citizen has the right to “impose their intimate matters” onto others, and upheld the legitimate right of the state to banish matters of the “intimate sphere” from the public arena.⁷⁴ The judgement went on to read that “especially behaviours that do not conform to the norm and opinions expressed about these harm the interests of the general public,” in particular interfering with the undisturbed sexual development of youth.⁷⁵

This case was not treated by the Tribunal as a case of specifically gay oppression, but of censorship in a more general sense. Because of rumours that the Münster verdict set a legal precedent, activists immediately presented the judgement as having wider implications than the banning of a single information stall. Initially, this interpretation was addressed to other gay groups, part of the tactic by Aachen activists to gain support for their struggle. Later, NARGS took this universalising dynamic a step further by arguing before the Tribunal that as the verdict was phrased in such vague

terms it could also be applied to other groups and political issues, not just the gay movement. In an English-language press release announcing the submission of the case NARGS stated that “other groups could be barred from the public” as a consequence.⁷⁶ “Barred from the public,” their translation of *Öffentlichkeitsverbot*, demonstrates that for gay activists what was of importance in this instance was neither their efforts to reach other homosexuals or the New Left counterpublic (unaffected by the court judgement) but the prevention of efforts to escape the confines of these spaces. Not without some justification, NARGS' interpretation of the logic behind the court's ruling was that “only an invisible homosexual is a good homosexual.”⁷⁷

The various themes presented by NARGS were mutually reinforcing. *BILD* spread invective about homosexuals, whereas the clinicians who some homosexuals might go to see were attempting to “cure” homosexuality through medication or surgery. Those who were open about their sexuality at work ran the risk of becoming victims of the *Berufsverbot*, while attempts by the gay movement to publicise these issues, such as in Aachen, could be banned by the courts. Even international examples of oppression were incorporated into this narrative: insinuations surrounding the Aachen case that homosexuality was youth-endangering were denounced as preparing the ground for a domestic counterpart to Anita Bryant's “Save our Children” campaign, currently calling for a “fascist [and] murderous baiting of gays” in the United States.⁷⁸

Oppression and Fascism could also add examples of police raids on gay bars – rhetorically amounting to a “ban on assembly” – and the police's allegedly continuing practice of registering homosexuals.⁷⁹ By arguing that their own oppression was part and parcel of a wider authoritarian crackdown, gay activists aimed to win support for their cause. However, to revise Joachim Hohmann's aforementioned example, a man

kissing another man in public was hardly incommensurate with that same man marching against the war in Vietnam or buying a copy of a communist newspaper. Various forms of discrimination need not have been experienced as discrete, but as interwoven. It is important, therefore, to place the “positioning” of the gay movement in the context of the activist lives of its participants.

Liberalisation and the Nazi past

Referring to so-called “pink files,” NARGS would ask “What could the registration of homosexuals be in aid of? That depends on the future of our state and society. In Hitler-Fascism gays were plunged from the files into the camps and died a wretched death.”⁸⁰

Unquestionably, gay activists were aware of the tactical advantages to be drawn from invoking the shadow of National Socialism, of using this as a “moral battering ram.”

The wording of the resolution cited at the beginning of this article – “Discrimination and agitation against gays *in the direct tradition of fascist methods*” – illustrates not just the suggestiveness of associations to the Nazi past but can also be taken as evidence of the *difficulty* that the gay movement knew it had in gaining New Left support.⁸¹

Nevertheless, the extent and nature of contemporary discrimination should not be trivialised. The 1976 court verdict did not in fact set a legal precedent,⁸² but that such a verdict was possible in the first place, seven years after the decriminalisation of male homosexuality, says much about the limits of liberalisation. Suspicions that the practice of registering homosexuals continued proved to be well founded, at least in Hamburg, where the local police were forced to admit to the practice in 1980.⁸³ Paragraph 175, the legal instrument that had facilitated the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, may have been reformed, but it had taken the Federal Republic two decades to do so. More

important than the “objective” extent and nature of contemporary oppression, however, was how this was experienced at the time and what conclusions were drawn. The Nazi past did not just offer the rhetorical opportunity to castigate the contemporary Federal Republic in the strongest possible terms, but also provided the prism through which earnest and deep-seated concerns about the West German State were amplified and given expression.

Conclusion

Writing in *Emanzipation*, one activist argued that the Russell Tribunal would

offer the chance to bring the struggle against the repression and discrimination of gays out of the largely isolated and not even united West German gay movement and into an international movement fighting for a society free from fear and oppression.⁸⁴

These ambitions were not realised. Only one case could be presented before the Tribunal and even this did not guarantee news of the case reaching a wider public. The mainstream media gave very little coverage the Tribunal's second hearing; the Tribunal's organisers interpreted this as a manifestation of the attempt to cast a veil of silence over the initiative (*totschweigen*; literally, to silence to death), since previous attempts to stop it taking place at all had failed.⁸⁵ Yet even when the Tribunal's thematisation of censorship was reported, the Aachen example was not included. According to NARGS, their example of the censorship facing gays had in turn fallen “victim to the internal censorship of straight editors.”⁸⁶

In the midst of the Russell Tribunal, activists began exploring other ways of ending the perceived isolation of the gay movement. In May 1978, Wolfgang Krömer became the first openly gay candidate to stand for public office in German history. He

represented the Homosexual Action Hamburg (HAH), which alongside environmental, feminist and migrant rights groups was one of almost 200 independent organisations participating in the alternative *Bunte Liste* (“multicoloured list”, a precursor to the Greens). According to the HAH's manifesto, the “situation of homosexuals in *Modell Deutschland*” was characterised by “criminalisation, discrimination and social exclusion” and electoral participation was one way of challenging this.⁸⁷ In a letter to other gay groups, the HAH justified its participation in the electoral campaign by arguing that it would enable a more intensive engagement with the gay scene and help to politicise more gays; create new partners on the Left through dialogue in the communal list (*ein Stück Gegenöffentlichkeit*, “an exemplar of counterpublic”); and help the gay movement enter the wider public sphere (*in die breite Öffentlichkeit gehen*).⁸⁸

The HAH campaign was the latest means of simultaneously addressing different constituencies and operating in different publics, a balancing act that characterises the gay movement throughout the 1970s. However, the campaign also illustrates the nascent supplanting of a revolutionary by a rights-based discourse, alongside an intensification of pre-existing concerns over autonomy. The HAH described their electoral participation as a first step in the direction of gays themselves representing their demands for “equal rights and human rights.”⁸⁹ Activists were increasingly confronted by the question of how to counter the various forms of oppression they routinely thematised, since it was abundantly clear that the New Left counterpublic could not provide the means to do so. If the need to formulate discrete, concrete responses to oppression had previously been ameliorated by an all-embracing anti-capitalism, a turn to an activism more approximating a civil rights model was well under way by the end of the 1970s.

The clearest example of this transition came with the notion of campaigning for an Anti-Discrimination Bill, first proposed by the Berlin-based AHA (General Homosexual Action Alliance) in 1977. The centrepiece of this proposed package of legislative changes was an amendment to the Basic Law to make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or family status unconstitutional.⁹⁰ The AHA's rights-based stance was clear from their support for the Russell Tribunal, which was explicitly predicated on the understanding that the task for gay activists was to have existing constitutional rights fulfilled and extended, rather than challenging the socio-economic basis on which those rights were constructed.⁹¹ NARGS, by contrast, was far more suspicious of human rights discourse, at least according to a 1979 press release, published after the Russell Tribunal had closed its second hearing; human rights were reliant on the prevailing morality and therefore “by their very nature repress gays”.⁹²

Nevertheless, it was in fact the Russell Tribunal that had provided a platform for the dissemination of rights-based rhetoric. Identifying and challenging rights violations did not necessitate the adoption of revolutionary politics. In his analysis of changes to the ideological nature of the French New Left after 1968, Julian Bourg has shown how preoccupation with oppression and with justice facilitated a move away from antinomianism towards an engagement with the law: “a new leftist emphasis on rights was born within the framework of revolutionary militancy”⁹³ This context was facilitated by the contemporary prominence of human rights vocabulary, especially since the 1975 Helsinki Accords.⁹⁴ While some opposed this development, others in the New Left sought to integrate the framework of human rights into their ideological perspective and tactical approach, experiencing the Russell Tribunal as a “human rights learning curve.”⁹⁵ Nonetheless, this “language of human rights” (Wildenthal) provided

the structure and the vocabulary which would see the New Left lose its emblematic hold over gay activism by the end of the decade.⁹⁶ Human rights offered a language which could accommodate at least some of the idealism and hopes for fundamental social change that had previously been couched in the language of socialism; at the same time, an increased focus on the concrete defence of civil and human rights came to supplant the adherence to revolutionary projects.⁹⁷ The SPD's *Modell Deutschland* was soon to be supplanted by Helmut Kohl's conservative “intellectual-moral turn” (*geistig-moralische Wende*); a few years later, the HIV/AIDS crisis arrived in West Germany. Confronted by this changed socio-political context and facing new and deadly challenges, gay activism was to take a different course.

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- 1 NARGS, *Schwule gegen Unterdrückung und Faschismus*, 17.
- 2 The poster can be viewed online at http://archiv2.fes.de/objekt_start.fau?prj=fes&dm=Plakate&ref=15913#1 [accessed 15 October 2014].
- 3 Cf. “Modell Deutschland’ – vom Slogan zum Unwort.” März, *Linker Protest*, 88-120.
- 4 Reichardt and Siegfried, *Das alternative Milieu*, 22. Cf. Baumann, Gehrig and Büchse, *Linksalternative Milieus*.
- 5 “Negative alliance” is borrowed from Markovits and Gorski, *The German Left*, 47. Markovits and Gorski use the term in reference to the student movement in the late 1960s.
- 6 Based in Nottingham, UK, but endeavouring to build an international movement, the Foundation conducted its first Tribunal in 1967 to consider alleged war crimes in Vietnam. After Bertrand Russell's death, the Foundation organised its second Tribunal in 1973 to investigate human rights abuses in Latin America.
- 7 Braunthal, *Political Loyalty and Public Service*, 47.
- 8 “Protokoll der 2. Arbeitskonferenz.”
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Prisoners wearing the pink triangle were incarcerated in concentration camps, as opposed to extermination camps. The number of prisoners lay in the region of 5000 to 15000. Cf. Lautmann, Grikshat and Schmidt, 'Der Rosa Winkel'.
- 11 Konstantin Ortloff, “‘Kleine Freiheit’. Oder: Warum so wenig Aktivität unserer Freunde?” *Der Weg zu Freundschaft und Toleranz* (May 1970), 54.
- 12 Male homosexual activity remained illegal for those between the age of 18 and 21; male prostitution was not legalised until a further reform in 1973 (which also reduced the age of consent to 18). Paragraph 175 would not be completely repealed – thus bringing about an equal age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual activity – until 1994.
- 13 Udo Erlenhardt, “Freiheit für Homos erst ab 21?”. *him: das Magazin mit dem Mann* (August 1970), 14-21 (17).
- 14 This points to a significant difference between the situation in West Germany and in the United States. There was no West German counterpart to the “militant homophiles” who adopted a more confrontational logic *before* the arrival of gay liberation, which included picketing the White House in 1965. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 149-175.
- 15 “Homosexuelle Aktionsgruppe Bochum.” *WIR: Info der HSM* 1 (1971), 12.
- 16 *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt*. Dir. Rosa von Praunheim. Germany: Bavaria Atelier, 1971.

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- 18 See the exchange of letters between the IHWO and the WDR, the broadcaster producing the film. WDR *Historisches Archiv*, folder 12285. A federal broadcast (with the exception of Bavaria) of *Not the Homosexual* went ahead in January 1973, a year later than planned.
- 19 Action groups rarely tended to collect data on their members (indeed, many did not have a formalised membership structure). Barbara Wackernagel's 1974 study on the Frankfurt-based *Rote Zelle Schwul* was based on 17 key activists: 13 of them were students and their average age was 26. "Die Gruppe Rotzschwul", 58-60.
- 20 "Vorläufige Grundsatzklärung." *HAW-INFO* 1 (1972), 1-4 (1). This anti-capitalism did not however facilitate any meaningful co-operation with East German homosexuals, even in Berlin. On East German gay activism cf. McLellan, "Glad to be Gay".
- 21 "Die Aktiven profitieren". *Emanzipation* 1 (1975), 3-4 (3).
- 22 Dennert et al, *In Bewegung bleiben*, 35. Additionally, the pink triangle, so important to the trajectory of gay male activism in the 1970s, was of far lesser significance for lesbian activists, since only male homosexuals had been incarcerated in the concentration camps under the symbol. For these reasons, my research project (and this article) focuses on the gay movement, rather than offering a more equal analysis of lesbian and gay movements.
- 23 Leaflet "SDS schreibt an BILD", July 1967.
- 24 Especially Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, first published 1964.
- 25 Griffiths, "Konkurrierende Pfade der Emanzipation".
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- 27 "Von trotzkistischen Bläsern, Mao-Schwuchteln und Anal-Revisionisten". *him* (August 1972), 18-19.
- 28 *Schwuchtel* 1 (1975), 17. My emphasis. On publics, cf. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.
- 29 Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 228.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 229.
- 31 Heger, *Die Männer mit dem Rosa Winkel*. On the gay movement and the pink triangle cf. Holy, "Der entliehene Rosa Winkel".
- 32 Cf. HAW Feministengruppe, *Feministenpapier*.
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- 34 Cited from HAW, *Der Rosa Winkel*, 16.
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- 42 *3. Internationales Russell-Tribunal*, 11.
- 43 On the Tribunal more generally see März, *Linker Protest*, 245-317.
- 44 Aktionskomitee gegen Berufsverbote FU, "Russell-Tribunal".
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Narr, "Zur Auswahl der Fälle," 13.
- 47 *Rundbrief 9: Russell Tribunal zur Situation der Menschenrechte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 21.
- 48 Braunthal, *Democratic Loyalty*, 77.
- 49 Erhard Eppler, "Unerträgliche Zumutung," *Berliner Stimme*, 22 October 1977.
- 50 Narr, "Zur Auswahl der Fälle," 19.
- 51 Calculated from the list of jurors included in *3. Internationales Russell-Tribunal*, 8-9.
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- 53 "Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage." *Rundbrief*, 22-27 (25).
- 54 Press release 1.10.1977. *Rundbrief*, 9. Cf. Balz, "Der 'Sympathisanten'-Diskurs".
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- 56 Paper included in full in *Rundbrief*, 28-31. Here, 30.
- 57 Ibid, 30-31.
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- 59 One of the laws explicitly cited in the leaked paper as potentially providing an opportunity to ban the Tribunal. Cf. *Rundbrief*, 28.
- 60 Dated 11 March 1977. *Rosa: Eine Zeitung der Schwulenbewegung* 8 (1977), 48.
- 61 For example in *Rosa* 11 (1977), 39; *him* (August 1977), 6.
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- 64 NARGS, *Schwule*, 3.
- 65 Ibid., 23.
- 66 Ibid., 17. Cf. note 1.
- 67 Ibid., 18-20 (18).
- 68 *Rosa* 15 (1978). Originally the newsletter for the HAH, *Rosa* expanded its coverage from Hamburg and became the movement's third national journal in 1977.
- 69 *Rosa* 10 (1977), 37.
- 70 *Rosa* 15 (1978), 6.
- 71 NARGS, *Schwule*, 20-22 (22).
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- 73 *Regierungspräsident to GSR*.
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