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GAY IDENTITY IN THE GDR: THE *HOMOSEXUELLE*  
*INTERESSENGEMEINSCHAFT BERLIN* BETWEEN SELF-EXPRESSION AND  
STATE CONTROL

by

Susanna L. Cassisa

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion  
of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies  
Croft Institute for International Studies  
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College  
The University of Mississippi

University of Mississippi  
May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the *Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin* (HIB), the first gay liberation group in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Specifically, it analyzes the demands and tactics of the HIB alongside London Gay Liberation Front activist Peter Tatchell at the tenth World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS) in 1973. This study analyzes four primary sources: 1) the HIB's banner from the WFYS, 2) the leaflet Tatchell distributed at the WFYS, 3) Tatchell's placard from the WFYS, and 4) a 1978 letter from the HIB to the People's Chamber arguing for a socialist information center geared toward a homosexual patronage. I build on theory outlined by Jeremy Straughn to illustrate the "consentfully contentious" nature of the HIB's engagement with the East German state, as the group appealed to the state's own ideology to advocate for homosexual liberation within the socialist regime. I argue that the HIB's pattern of consentful contention began at the WFYS but continued until the group's dissolution in 1979. I further contend that the HIB employed methods of activism that were uniquely East German in nature, given the state's sensitivity to behavior it perceived as threatening to its hegemony. Although the HIB ultimately failed in its goals, it set the stage for successful East German gay liberation groups in the 1980s and paved the way for reunified Germany's abolition of Paragraph 175 in 1994.

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## **List of Terms and Abbreviations**

Comintern: Communist International (Third International)

FDJ: *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth)

FRG: Federal Republic of Germany

GDR: German Democratic Republic

GLF: Gay Liberation Front

HIB: *Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin* (Homosexual Interest Community of Berlin)

IUS: International Union of Students

Nazi Party: *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party)

SA: *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Division of the National Socialist German Workers' Party)

SED: *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)

Stasi: *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Ministry for State Security of the GDR)

WFDY: World Federation of Democratic Youth

WFYS: World Festival of Youth and Students

## Introduction

In 1968, the regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) removed Paragraphs 175 and 175a, which categorized sex between men alongside bestiality as “unnatural indecency,” replacing them with Paragraph 151, which permitted homosexual acts among consenting adults (Evans 560). Although homosexuality was decriminalized, this legislation did little to combat the stigma associated with GDR citizens who deviated from heteronormativity. Party members of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) often viewed homosexuals as predators against juveniles, who directly undermined the regime’s goal to raise a generation of pure, socialist youths (562). De facto oppression of nonconforming citizens led to the rise of the gay liberation movement in the early 1970s. The first gay emancipation group in the GDR was the *Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin* (Homosexual Interest Community of Berlin, HIB). This thesis examines the demands and tactics of the HIB as a voice of the East German gay liberation movement, focusing particularly on the onset of the HIB’s engagement with the socialist state in 1973 at the tenth World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS). Chapter 1 gives a historical overview of gay rights in East Germany, ending with a description of the HIB’s advocacy efforts. Chapter 2 details the history and significance of the WFYS, and Chapter 3 describes the HIB’s activism at the 1973 WFYS.

East Berlin hosted the 1973 festival two years after Erich Honecker had assumed the position of First Secretary of the SED. His approach to social policy was far more

flexible than that of his predecessor, Walter Ulbricht. The tenth WFYS was the ideal opportunity for Honecker to test his less conspicuous yet highly effective system of oppression on the global stage. During the festival, there was very little visible regulation regarding youth behavior by typical SED standards. The state security apparatus “cleansed” the city of “undesirables” prior to the festival and maintained a strong presence throughout the entire event, but to outsiders (particularly West Germans,) there appeared to be very little control (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 214-217). The SED-regime’s allowance for open discussion and lively debate amongst the youth at the festival created an environment that empowered HIB members to engage in open gay activism for the first time, alongside Peter Tatchell, a British delegate and member of the London Gay Liberation Front. I draw on sociologist Jeremy Straughn’s theory of nonradical resistance to argue that the 1973 WFYS was the beginning of the HIB’s usage of “consentful contention” as a method to engage with the GDR state. Straughn describes consentful contention as political interaction in which the “actor or actors contest a state of affairs or a government policy or decision by performing the role of a dutiful citizen seeking to redeem usually explicit state commitments which the state of affairs, policy, or decision at issue are argued to contradict” (1603-1604). To argue my viewpoint, I analyze a banner that HIB members allegedly carried at the festival’s closing ceremony, along with a placard and excerpts from a leaflet Tatchell distributed at the festival. I supplement Tatchell’s published account of his experiences at the festival with information from a personal email exchange with Tatchell. Finally, I analyze a 1978 letter from the HIB to the People’s Chamber to demonstrate that the HIB employed consentful contention throughout its existence. Ultimately, this thesis aims to highlight how the tenth WFYS

became a turning point in the East German gay liberation movement. HIB members drew inspiration from Tatchell's western style of activism but adopted distinctly East German methods of dealing with the state to give voice to their concerns and demands, recognizing the SED's low tolerance for overt contentious behavior.

**A Note on Terminology**

For the purposes of this thesis, I use the words “homosexual” and “gay” rather than “LGBT” and its variants. Although “LGBT” is more inclusive, it is also relatively new, and I aim to avoid projecting contemporary conceptions of sexuality onto members of the HIB and other subjects I discuss. When discussing the HIB, I employ its members’ own terms: privately, they typically referred to themselves as “gay,” which expressed confidence and pride in their identity, yet when engaging with state authorities they opted for the term “homosexual,” which was typical in state discourse. When expanding on the topic of same-sex relations in general in German history, I use “gay” and “homosexual” interchangeably.

## Chapter 1: A History of Gay Rights in the German Democratic Republic

Germany's long history of gay rights activism is complicated and fraught with periods of stagnation and regression. German legislation included hostility towards homosexuals since the very formation of a German nation-state under Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1871. The state adopted a criminal code based on the Prussian model, which prohibited male homosexuality, categorizing it alongside bestiality as "unnatural indecency" (Moeller 521). Paragraph 175 stated the following: "An unnatural sex act committed between persons of the male sex or by humans with animals is punishable by imprisonment; the loss of civil rights might also be imposed" (qtd. in Kaczorowski 1).

The rise of sexual science in the mid to late nineteenth century influenced this legislation, as the dominant discourses on homosexuality began to shift. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault outlines this transition, claiming:

As defined by ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (43)

In other words, sex acts between males had formerly been punished solely as unnatural acts, but sexology of the nineteenth century introduced the homosexual

as a unique personality defined by his sexuality. By the time the young German nation-state implemented Paragraph 175, the purpose of the law went beyond banning sodomy; it aimed to punish homosexuals for their so-called perverse nature.

Challenges to this legislation emerged, pioneered by Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), who co-founded the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee) in 1897. This group's primary goal was the outright abolition of Paragraph 175. Throughout his life, Hirschfeld maintained that homosexuality was a congenital phenomenon and, thus, could not be eradicated through punitive measures (Moeller 522). While Hirschfeld and his collaborators failed in their goal of homosexual legal reform, they published scientific literature, organized conferences, and launched campaigns in support of homosexual freedom (Djajic-Horváth).

World War I marked a decline in reform advocacy as the nation's attention turned to war efforts, but the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) offered a more liberal space for advocates to speak out against the de jure oppression of homosexuals and to express themselves openly (Moeller 522). During the Weimar years, Berlin housed almost 100 gay bars where homosexuals met to drink, dance, and meet potential partners. This burgeoning gay subculture also led to films, plays, and print literature portraying gay characters in a positive or neutral light (Broich).

The tolerance of homosexuality in the Weimar Republic was far from reversing Imperial Germany's history of intolerance, but for the first time, homosexuals made major strides in social acceptance. However, it should be noted that both supporters and

opponents of Paragraph 175 subscribed to the idea that a law should protect adolescents, who are by nature individuals in search of their identity and thus prone to various influences (Evans 553). Hirschfeld's research and advocacy ultimately led to a recommendation for the repeal of Paragraph 175 in 1929, which members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, Nazi Party) vetoed (Auerbach 39). Indeed, just as Hirschfeld's work was gaining traction, Hitler and the Nazi Party spearheaded the establishment of the Third Reich (1933-1945), effectively halting reform efforts.

The Nazi period caused major setbacks for gay emancipation in Germany. Although National Socialism spurred a new wave of sexual liberalism, this was limited to heterosexual relations (Herzog 18). The Nazis did not oppose premarital sex, as long as it led to procreation, which the regime condoned as a means to produce the "master race." Same-sex relationships threatened to undermine this social ambition; consequently, the regime's more tolerant stance on sexuality did not extend to homosexuals. In May 1933, the paramilitary division of the Nazi Party, the Storm Division (*Sturmabteilung*, SA) breached the Institute for Sexual Science (Institut für Sexualwissenschaft), the first sexology institute in the world, established by Hirschfeld in 1919. The Nazis destroyed some 12,000 books and 35,000 photos that the Party deemed degenerate. This destruction initiated the Nazis' campaign against homosexuals that continued through the end of World War II. The regime banned gay publications and instructed the secret police to keep records of all suspected homosexual men (USHMM). In June 1934, Hitler made a decisive move against homosexuals when he had Ernst Röhm assassinated. Röhm was

not only one of the founders of the Nazi Party and the head of the SA, but also an openly gay man, with an entourage among his SA troupers (Editors EB, “Ernst Röhm”).

On June 28, 1935, the Ministry of Justice revised and expanded Paragraph 175, offering legal justification for the ongoing mistreatment of homosexuals (USHMM). The new legislation had three sections:

175. A male who commits lewd and lascivious acts with another male or permits himself to be so abused for lewd and lascivious acts, shall be punished by imprisonment. In a case of a participant under 21 years of age at the time of the commission of the act, the court may, in especially slight cases, refrain from punishment.

175a. Confinement in a penitentiary not to exceed ten years and, under extenuating circumstances, imprisonment for not less than three months shall be imposed:

1. Upon a male who, with force or with threat of imminent danger to life and limb, compels another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or compels the other party to submit to abuse for lewd and lascivious acts;
2. Upon a male who, by abuse of a relationship of dependence upon him, in consequence of service, employment, or subordination, induces another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;
3. Upon a male who being over 21 years of age induces another male under 21 years of age to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;
4. Upon a male who professionally engages in lewd and lascivious acts with other men, or

submits to such abuse by other men, or offers himself for lewd and lascivious acts with other men.

175b. Lewd and lascivious acts contrary to nature between human beings and animals shall be punished by imprisonment; loss of civil rights may also be imposed. (qtd. in Kaczorowski 2)

Several aspects of the revised law are noteworthy. First, it upheld the theory that minors were especially at risk of being seduced by homosexuals. Second, homosexuality was still only prohibited for men, citing that lesbians were less likely to seduce minors (Moeller 524).<sup>1</sup> Finally, the expanded version criminalized all “lewd and lascivious acts” rather than only “sex acts” as had been the case prior to this revision, when the law had explicitly considered only male homosexual penetration criminal (Moeller 524). During the Third Reich, law enforcement arrested approximately 100,000 men for engaging in illegal homosexual acts and committed between 5,000 and 15,000 of them to concentration camps, which had an estimated 65% overall mortality rate (USHMM).

The division into East and West Germany following World War II created a split in the German gay liberation movement, although the Eastern gay liberation movement and its Western counterpart are inherently intertwined. It is virtually impossible to effectively examine the legislative and societal history of homosexuality in the GDR without comparison to that of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In the immediate aftermath of the war and throughout the transition from Nazism to democracy, (hetero)sexuality was a prevalent topic in the West (Herzog 64). The postwar chaos led to

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<sup>1</sup> While this is an important difference between the original and the revised law, my research does not focus on the experiences of lesbians. My observations pertain only to male same-sex relations (Cassisa).

a brief window of sexual liberation during which many engaged in “indiscriminate sexual intercourse” (66). West Germans frequently engaged in premarital sex, female pleasure became a focus in sexual literature, and society began to place less value upon female virginity (69). In 1953, however, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer appointed Franz Josef Wuermeling as Minister of Family Affairs, which ended this era of sexual freedom. Wuermeling was a traditional Catholic, and he used his influence to promote conservative Christian values regarding gender roles, sex, and the family (73).

In the GDR, rather than justifying conservative attitudes toward sex through religion, the self-proclaimed secular SED-state used socialist values and the “socialist personality” as the basis for sexual regulation (Herzog 185). The state did not originally attempt to reform Nazi sex policy, as the SED felt that its strong anti-capitalist rhetoric ensured its status as an anti-fascist state, without further need for a formal disavowal of National Socialist rules. The Nazi Party had promoted premarital sex to produce the master race, but the SED did not deem its sexual policy to be a remnant of the Nazi past. Instead, the state promoted the idea that socialism provided the foundation for the healthiest and most satisfying relationships, with the goal of regaining sexual order in the tumultuous postwar period. The SED’s early attitudes toward sex aimed to create the ideal socialist citizen rather than demarcate itself from Nazism. The Party was ambivalent toward Nazi developments in sexual policy, adhering to Nazi norms but reframing them within the socialist discourse. The Soviet Union’s influence over the GDR also played a role in the SED’s sexual policy. Homosexuals had endured discrimination in the Soviet Union since 1934, further justifying the GDR’s lack of tolerance for homosexuality (Auerbach 42).

In contrast to the West, sex in the East counted, as historian Dagmar Herzog has pointed out, “not so much as a means for mastering the past but rather as a means for orienting people towards the future” (194). The SED encouraged heterosexual acts to “help channel pleasure-seeking impulses for the collective struggle” (Evans 555). The regime attempted to breach every aspect of its citizens’ lives in order to assert control and instate socialist values. This included sexual behavior, meaning citizens’ sexual acts had to fit into the constraints of the socialist ideal. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, gynecologist Wolfgang Bretschneider recommended that socialist youths avoid premarital sex, arguing that it could lead to sexual dysfunction due to improper practices, disrupt the emotional and mental growth of adolescents, or lead to female infertility as a result of continuous contraceptive usage. Bretschneider further warned both girls and boys about the potential consequences of frequent masturbation, including reduced sensation and marital dissatisfaction (Herzog 198-199). Although this sexual conservatism was framed within the confines of socialism, the resulting regulations were quite similar to the Christian sexual morals in the West (199).

The SED treated homosexuality with ambivalence for the majority of the GDR’s existence. In 1950, the country’s Court of Appeals ruled to replace the 1935 version of Paragraph 175 with the 1871 one but preserve the addition of Paragraph 175a. The state justified this by claiming that “§175(a) implements an idea in the advancing line of legal development toward a necessary protection of society against socially damaging homosexual acts of the qualified kind and thus has no typical Nazi content” (qtd. in Frackman 680). Although lustful glances between men no longer warranted jail time, the regime was far from sympathetic to homosexuals. In the 1950s, homosexuals began to

make claims for government reparations for the physical and emotional abuse they had suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime. The SED refused to recognize the status of homosexuals as victims of the Nazis, citing that their plight could not be compared to the persecution of Jews under fascism. The hypocrisy behind this attitude is glaring, as in the GDR Jews themselves could not claim victim status as Jews, but only as anti-fascist fighters (*Schalom, neues Deutschland*).

Nazi homophobia further persisted in the official discourse of the GDR through the state's adherence to Nazi-era understandings of homosexuality, which postulated that homosexuals targeted sexually undeveloped, vulnerable adolescents to turn them homosexual (Herzog 197). In 1955, Rudolf Neubert insisted in his popular book *Die Geschlechterfrage* (The Question of the Sexes) that while there was a small number of "true" homosexuals (for whom he recommended a number of conversion therapy options), most non-heterosexual men were the victims of homosexual seduction during their childhood or adolescence. He also noted that the majority of youths seduced into homosexuality came from privileged bourgeois families, insisting that seduction was far less frequent in socialist societies than under capitalism (in Herzog 197). This view promoted the idea that homosexuals were bourgeois and anti-socialist, causing the SED to perceive them as threats to its hegemony. The SED anticipated that its propaganda campaigns would be successful in permeating every aspect of citizens lives, including their sexual behavior. Through the 1960s, the SED believed that the nation would embrace socialism so fully that homosexuality would gradually be abandoned and become a remnant of the capitalist past (Lemke 32).

While legislation and society as a whole were unaccepting of homosexuality, East German homosexuals fought against the SED's prejudices from the birth of the GDR. Psychiatrist Rudolf Klimmer dedicated his life to advancing the rights of homosexuals.<sup>2</sup> Sharing Hirschfeld's belief that homosexuality was a product of nature rather than nurture, Klimmer cited the universalism of homosexuality as proof of its biological rather than social origins. Klimmer himself was homosexual and had served five months in jail in 1938 and an additional year in prison from 1940-1941 due to his violations of Paragraph 175 under the Nazi regime. He formulated his homosexual advocacy within the confines of socialism, using the SED's staunch antifascist stance to justify his call to establish a sexual research institution in 1949. Appealing to the SED's will to address Nazi injustices, in response to the authorities' requests for more information regarding the institute, Klimmer wrote:

The importance of founding an Institute for Sexual Research can be summed up succinctly in one sentence. The hardness of a people manifests itself above all in its sexuality. The great political importance of this institute arises from the fact that when the Nazis came to power, they utterly destroyed the institute that had existed in Berlin. Sexuality is a particularly prominent and socially important drive. Above all the social, and not just an individual, sense of personhood is produced in the sexual domain. Sexuality has thus from time immemorial been inescapable and of particular importance. (qtd. in Huneke 70-71)

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<sup>2</sup> I draw my information on Klimmer from Huneke pp. 70-114.

Klimmer argued that homosexual men who were denied the ability to express their sexuality freely were more likely to underperform in the workplace, which would negatively impact the state. He voiced his controversial opinions in his book *Die homosexuelle Liebe* (Homosexual Love), yet East German censors repeatedly prohibited its publication in 1950, 1951, and again in 1957, which led Klimmer to publish it in the FRG in 1958. Klimmer's hope for re-establishing the sex institute originally founded by Hirschfeld ultimately died, leading him to observe that "[i]n a society with no need for sexology ... there was little room for the 'homosexual'" (qtd. in Huneke 72).

Throughout the 1950s, the SED continually blocked de facto efforts towards homosexual emancipation, while making every effort discursively to differentiate the GDR's stance on homosexuality from that of its western counterpart. According to SED propaganda, the FRG was the site of National Socialist ideals and former Nazis, whereas the GDR housed former victims of fascism and pushed for progressive ideals such as peace, progress, and justice (Wolle, *Große Plan* 44-45). Yet, only laggardly did the SED accept more lenient legislation pertaining to homosexuality. By 1957, court cases regarding consensual homosexual acts between adults were rare, unless the state deemed them threatening to the socialist order (Evans 556). Meanwhile, the FRG continued to enforce criminalization through prison sentences and police raids (Herzog 197). The SED's gradual liberalization of homosexual policy played into the state's propaganda that claimed equality for all under socialism. This policy was thus less a product of a genuine aim for equity under socialism, and more an attempt to yield better public perception from inside and outside the GDR.

The 1960s ushered in a new scientific and educational interest in sexuality in the GDR, but homosexuality remained a taboo topic. Society viewed gay men as effeminate and narcissistic, and the narrative of homosexuality as immoral and anti-socialist prevailed. Scientists and doctors explored methods to “cure” men of their homosexuality, including psychotherapy, hormone administration, castration, and electro-shock therapy (Auerbach 42). Literature in the 1960s often analyzed homosexuality through a pseudo-medical lens. The *Wörterbuch der Sexologie* (Dictionary of Sexology, 1964) and the popular advice book *Du und Ich* (You and I, 1965) both characterized same-sex intimacy as a “perversion” (Auerbach 44; Herzog 198). This terminology functioned to degrade homosexuals and warn youths against potential seduction. Discourse with regard to overall sexuality in the late 1950s and early 1960s was defined by conventionality and morality (Herzog 199).

The prevalence of homophobic rhetoric in the media informed the state’s usage of homophobia as a political tool. On August 24, 1961, thirteen days after the construction of the Berlin Wall had begun, 24 year-old Günter Litfin attempted to swim across the Spree to enter West Berlin and was shot dead.<sup>3</sup> On the morning of August 27, outraged West Berlin citizens hung a banner near the site of Litfin’s death that read, “As Ulbricht continues raging, Berlin remains free and will never go red” (Und wenn der Ulbricht noch so tobt/ Berlin bleibt frei, wird niemals rot; qtd. in Brecht). On September 1, the official newspaper of the SED, *Neues Deutschland* (New Germany), published an article in response to the banner, painting Litfin as a homosexual with a criminal past

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<sup>3</sup> Litfin lived in East Berlin but worked in West Berlin. On August 12, 1961, he found himself trapped in East Berlin as GDR authorities shut down the borders. As he attempted to cross, border security guards ordered him to halt and fired warning shots. When he jumped into the Humboldt Harbor, they fatally shot him in the head (Brecht).

rather than a trapped citizen fleeing the regime (“Ein Denkmal für Puppe?”). The article, published anonymously, claimed that Litfin had been caught engaging in criminal acts near the Friedrichstrasse train station, a location notorious for male prostitution, thus linking his alleged homosexuality with criminality.<sup>4</sup> The author further referenced his homosexuality by derogatorily referring to him as “Puppe” (doll). In critique of the memorial in West Berlin, the article suggested that the FRG celebrated “thugs and homosexuals.”

The following day, *Neues Deutschland* published another article regarding Litfin, stating that his attempt to escape the border police by swimming was a sign of a “guilty conscience,” claiming that citizens who were not criminals tended to obey set laws and use designated checkpoints to cross the border (“Mordhetze aus der Frontstadt”). In addition, the article compared the FRG’s tribute to Litfin to Nazi Germany’s cult of Horst Wessel. Wessel had been a member of the SA and had died in 1930 after an altercation with two communists in Berlin’s district of Friedrichshain. Following his death, Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels had stylized him into a martyr for the Nazi Party (Editors EB, “Horst Wessel”). The article in *Neues Deutschland* employed this comparison between Litfin and Wessel in an effort to demonize the regime in the FRG as manipulative and inimical to the Left. Notably, while the SED used the comparison between Litfin and Wessel to discredit the actions of the FRG, its own reliance on homophobic propaganda demonstrated how strongly National Socialist sentiments informed its own policy.

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<sup>4</sup> It was common for newspaper articles to be published anonymously in the GDR, as the articles represented the views of the state rather than the views of individual authors.

The SED's conservatism gave way to more liberal legislation in the late 1960s. In 1968, the GDR abolished Paragraph 175 entirely from its Criminal Code, thereby decriminalizing homosexuality de jure. Paragraph 151 replaced Paragraph 175 only stating that adults who engaged in sexual acts with a minor of the same sex would be punished with up to three years in prison (in Auerbach 41). For the first time in German history, legislation did not exclude women from punishment for homosexual acts of misconduct. The SED's desire to eliminate any reminders of Nazi ideology from its own contributed to the decision to decriminalize consensual homosexual acts. However, perhaps what truly pushed the state to make legislative change was its growing competition with the FRG. By ending de jure discrimination of gays and lesbians in the GDR, the SED sought to demonstrate sexual liberalism under a socialist regime and present itself as more detached from the Nazi past. However, even Paragraph 151 included remnants of Nazi sentiments toward homosexuals, as it retained wording suggestive of homosexuals seducing youths into homosexuality (41).

Although gays and lesbians no longer faced the obstacle of illegality, under the new law their struggles did not come to an end but simply transitioned to invisibility and isolation (Tammer 137). While homosexuality was formally decriminalized, this legislation did very little to combat the stigma around homosexuality, so Paragraph 151 had little bearing on the daily lives of homosexuals in the GDR. The continued propagation of the idea that homosexuality was a perverse illness in the scientific discourse of the 1970s further hampered the lives of homosexuals under socialism. Hormone researcher Günter Dörner, for example, believing he could cure or prevent homosexuality, conducted research on rats to determine whether hormonal levels affected

sexual orientation (in Steakley 18). By injecting pregnant rats with hormones, he yielded what he described as litters of “homosexual” rats. He executed these experiments in conjunction with a wider public health initiative to eradicate homosexuality through measurements of the hormone levels in the amniotic fluid of pregnant women. According to Dörner, his treatment could resolve hormone imbalances in pregnant women and virtually eliminate the possibility of homosexuality before birth (in Steakley 18). In his book, *Hormone und differenzierung des gehirns* (Hormones and Brain Differentiation) published in 1976, Dörner argued in favor of eliminating homosexuality and cited the high rate of suicide attempts (“25%”) and actual suicides (“3%”) among homosexuals due to “psychosexual pressure” as the rationale behind his opinion (in LeVay 118-120).

Dörner’s research is edifying in two ways. First, it illustrates once more the duplicitous attitude of the SED-state vis-a-vis homosexuality: while passing a law that was lenient on homosexuals, the same state also endorsed research that furthered the narrative of homosexuality as an undesirable condition that should be eliminated. Second, although Dörner’s research may not have endorsed the systematic murder of homosexuals as Nazi-era eugenics had done, it is clear that he embraced eugenics in his work, albeit in a manner that was socially acceptable in a socialist state. This hypocrisy within state discourse on homosexuality persisted through the fall of the GDR, making citizens’ attempts to reform the state’s stance on homosexuality difficult.

On May 3, 1971, the Central Committee of the SED voted unanimously to remove Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary of the SED and replace him with Erich Honecker, former leader of the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, FDJ). According to historian Stefan Wolle, the population hated Ulbricht, viewing him as the

puppet of the Soviet government (*Heile Welt* 40). Honecker, on the other hand, was quite popular immediately following his rise to power because of his readiness to implement social policy changes that would appease the populous, while not endangering the status quo (41). For the first time in the GDR's history, the state permitted coveted Levis jeans and western music, and access to western television was neither directly prohibited nor permitted.<sup>5</sup> Honecker's early years in power saw a "mini liberalization" of GDR society, during which better living standards and more social openness satisfied some citizens' desires and helped the SED-regime regain some support for the Party that Ulbricht had lost. Therefore, Wollé describes Honecker as "the man of small compromises" (*der Mann der kleinen Kompromisse*, 43). Simultaneously, though, Honecker also expanded the state security apparatus, implemented militarization within society, and tightened socialism by eliminating the private sector of the economy completely in 1972 (43-44).

Honecker's social-economical policy reform set the stage for the emergence of gay activist groups whose members interpreted the regime's new openness as a hopeful indication that gay citizens could achieve recognition from the state and acceptance from the population. Complementarily, the sexual liberation in the FRG and the rise of activism amidst the gay scene in West Berlin heavily influenced the first gay liberation group in the GDR, the *Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin* (Homosexual Interest Community of Berlin, HIB) (McLellan 105). Its founders, Michael Eggert and Peter Rausch, then eighteen and twenty-one respectively, had friends in West Berlin, who crossed over into East Berlin and supplied them with copies of Western gay materials. Rausch and Eggert spent a year discussing whether a gay emancipation movement comparable to that in the FRG was possible in the GDR (Rausch 2). A film by West

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<sup>5</sup> See Dittmar, especially 330-336, for more on access to West German television in the early 1970s.

German gay rights activist Rosa von Praunheim, *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt* (It is Not the Homosexual Who is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives, 1971), sparked the HIB's formation, but not until two years after its release in the FRG. While at an East German gay bar, Eggert met West German activists who informed him that the film was to air on West German national television in January 1973. Although illicitly, the majority of East Germans could receive the station on their TV-sets, so Rausch and Eggert coordinated a small circle of friends to watch the late night screening together (McLellan 109). Rausch has since credited von Praunheim's film for galvanizing the friends to engage in gay activism previously nonexistent in the GDR, and in 2019 he described its effect on them as "electrif[ying]" (qtd. in Kühlberg).

As Honecker offered material concessions to the citizens of the GDR to maintain support for the state, the HIB's members, who were unsatisfied with the situation of homosexuals in general, organized to achieve official recognition from the state. The HIB's goals centered around postmaterialist values, as its members strove for social acceptance outside of their gay subculture and within the realm of socialism (McLellan 107). In contrast to gay liberation groups in the FRG, where many members were students, the HIB was comprised largely of working class citizens (Steakley 18). According to an account by Rausch from 1990, the HIB organized with three primary goals in mind: to establish a familial environment for members, to promote public educational outreach on issues regarding homosexuality, and to engage with the socialist state (Rausch 2).

Although the HIB hosted some large parties of around 200 people, its activist core consisted of about 30 members, and they predominantly held small social gatherings.

These meetings allowed the members to socialize in intimate settings with others who felt compelled to educate the public on the issues homosexuals faced in the GDR. While West German gay activists largely rejected traditional constructs such as the nuclear family, the HIB embraced its amicable gatherings that fostered an environment of warmth and community bonding as taking the place of traditional family units (McLellan 113). The HIB's educational goals were an effort to make up for the lack of publicity that homosexuals received in the GDR (113). With homosexuality decriminalized, the state turned a blind eye to the grievances of the homosexual community. For example, the HIB faced difficulties in acquiring public meeting spaces. In 1973, the HIB contacted the Ministry of Health in hopes of obtaining such a space, but (much to HIB members' outrage) were instead offered weekly group therapy sessions. HIB members also contacted the Free German Trade Union Federation (Freier Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund) which was unable to provide a meeting place but recognized the importance of addressing the issues homosexuals faced in the GDR and implored the group to continue their search (Steakley 18).

In 1976 the GDR authorities implemented a new civil code, which allowed the HIB to apply for official state recognition. This status would have enabled the group to print publications, have media access and representation, and rent a venue for public meetings with the goal of offering counseling and of broadening its education efforts (Steakley 18). While the HIB ultimately aimed to achieve the status of an association (Verein), they first applied to be an interest group (Interessengemeinschaft) (Rausch 4-5). Yet the state even rejected HIB's primordial request, as the SED feared that the HIB

would mobilize politically, which disappointed HIB members but did not prevent them from meeting regularly (Kühlberg).

Without access to a public space for meetings, the group used the basement of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf's private museum on the outskirts of Berlin to socialize and further strategize (McLellan 113). Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, born Lothar Berfelde, was a transvestite who in 1960 had converted a nineteenth century mansion into a museum to hold her vast collection of antiques, particularly music machines. In 1974, the state announced that it intended to seize the museum, and von Mahlsdorf began giving away artifacts to visitors. Actress Annekathrin Bürger and attorney Friedrich Karl Kaul, committed to preserving the antiques, advocated for von Mahldorf's right to continue curating the museum. Most likely also in an effort to retain her collection, von Mahlsdorf enlisted as an unofficial informant for the East German Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, Stasi) ("Charlotte von Mahlsdorf"). Von Mahlsdorf's simultaneous involvement with the HIB and the Stasi demonstrates the ubiquitous presence of the state in people's lives through the Stasi's vast network of informants set to infiltrate groups deemed subversive.

One of the HIB's most successful events was a discussion forum sponsored by the Urania Society, a scientific education organization. Dr. Peter G. Klemm, a sex counselor and psychologist, lectured on "Sex Roles in Socialist Society" (*Geschlechterrollen in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft*) to a crowd of approximately five hundred (Steakley 18). Klemm criticized the work of Günter Dörner, to whom the HIB jokingly referred as "Rat Man" and claimed that Dörner's usage of animal testing discounted the psychological complexities of human sexuality, as well as called to question the ethicality of preventing

same-sex desire (in Steakley 18). His criticism was harsh and demonstrated that although homophobia was dominant in society and in the medical sciences in the GDR, a progressive movement around homosexuality was also gaining traction by the mid-1970s.

On April 8, 1978, the state banned von Mahlsdorf from hosting gatherings at her museum after HIB member Ursula Sillge attempted to organize a nationwide event for lesbians (McLellan 123). This was a major setback for the HIB, whose members were left once again without a venue for their events. Committed to achieving their goal of publicity, the organization regrouped with intent of establishing an information center for homosexuals (McLellan 124). They wrote letters outlining the HIB's demands to those in power, arguing their case for a public information center with strong socialist rhetoric. In a 1979 meeting between the HIB and state officials, the state once more proved dismissive of the HIB's requests and concerns. This was the breaking point for the HIB, resulting in its dissolution. It became clear that the state had no intentions to provide the HIB with the support net it desired. Furthermore, many members of the HIB partook in its social events but were disinterested in the group's attempts to gain recognition and publicity, obstructing it from reaching its full potential through strength in numbers. This left the HIB's leadership feeling that despite its efforts, it had failed in inspiring nationwide activism in the gay community and that there was simply no need for homosexual self-help groups in the GDR (Rausch 8). The HIB disbanded in 1979 after the SED-regime's continued denial of any of its demands had succeeded in exhausting its core members.

Although the state denied the HIB the status of an official association and the desired information center, its core members continued to push for publicity within the

socialist public sphere after the HIB disbanded. With hindsight, it is clear that the HIB's efforts paved the way for the more widespread gay liberation movement of the 1980s, much of which was led by former HIB members. They organized within alternative groups to further the gay agenda. Michael Eggert arranged courses on gay identity and participated in events sponsored by the Protestant Church (McLellan 124-125). The Church, despite its long history of vilifying homosexuals, used its position outside the realm of the state to offer outreach programs for homosexuals in the 1980s (Hillhouse 590).

The Protestant Church and the SED-regime had been at odds since the formation of the GDR, but in 1978 they signed accords which recognized the Church's legitimacy within socialism. Thereafter, the Church could create programs for those unable to organize within the state. Thus, with the support of the Protestant Church nearly 200 groups advocating for issues as diverse as homosexual liberation, pacifism, environmental activism, and disability inclusion formed and operated in the GDR, promoting their social agendas and widening the Church's supporter base (593). The presence of social movements under the Church's umbrella was a threat to state authority and led the state to try and co-opt these movements to avoid their explicit politicization (595). As homosexuals increasingly found an outlet for their voices within the Church, the state came under increased pressure to meet their demands as it strove to undermine the Church's influence on them (592). The Church-state rivalry contributed, thus, to the state's ultimate concession vis-a-vis the gay community more than a decade after the HIB's dissolution.

In 1986, with Peter Rausch's support, Ursula Sillge founded the *Sonntags Club* (589). This club began as a circle of friends with similar convictions that met to discuss issues relevant to homosexuality in the GDR but grew into a full-fledged association (McLellan 124). The name *Sonntags Club* referenced that fact that its members met weekly on Sundays for cultural discussions and parties, but it also served to disguise the goal of putting forth an agenda for gay liberation (Kühlberg). Looking back, Rausch observed in 2019, that with the *Sonntags Club* he had "realized everything [he had] wanted to do in the 70s" (in Kühlberg). With his experiences from the HIB under his belt, Rausch and his colleagues were better equipped for further activism in the 1980s. Despite the HIB's failure to fulfill its goals--to provide its members with a safe and warm environment, to dismantle prejudices against homosexuality, and to engage with the socialist state in a meaningful way--the HIB, as the first gay liberation group in the GDR, served as a learning experience for its members. It set the stage for the *Sonntags Club*, which still operates in Berlin today as an LGBTQ organization and information center. Additionally, the HIB's early advocacy for social change opened the door for even more pronounced gay activism in the 1990s and the final abolition of the infamous Paragraph 175 from reunified Germany's Criminal Code in 1994.

## **Chapter 2: The World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS)**

The World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS) was, and continues to be, the chief undertaking of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), an anti-fascist youth organization which emerged in 1943 as the Communist International (Comintern) dissolved (Bresslein). Vladimir Lenin had established the Comintern in 1919 as an international communist organization composed of socialist and communist parties from across the globe, with the Soviet Union as the model for all members.

The Soviets controlled the organization by housing its headquarters in Moscow, dominating the decision-making bodies, and setting its primary objective, i.e. to incite a global communist revolution. By 1921, it was clear that communist parties needed to appeal to the broader masses, prompting the Comintern to adopt a strategy of united fronts to earn support from non-revolutionary members of the working class. Josef Stalin's claim to power brought a period of alternation between rapprochement and rejection of moderate socialists. By the Comintern's final congress in 1935, the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany had led to a final policy shift: communists again allied with moderates, this time in the fight against fascism (Editors EB, "Third International"). This program proved successful, and in 1942, in the midst of the war, youth from 29 countries united under communism and anti-fascism to form the World Youth Council. Although Stalin dissolved the Comintern in 1943, in the direct aftermath of the war, from October 31 to November 10, 1945, the World Youth Council held the first World Youth

Conference in London, hosting participants from 63 countries and founding the WFDY (Bresslein).

The WFDY aimed to unify international youth of various political, ideological, and religious backgrounds with two goals in mind: to prevent a revival of fascism and to achieve world peace (Kotek 63). The emergence of the WFDY can be directly traced back to the Comintern and its final policy shift toward anti-fascism, meaning that the Soviets controlled the organization and its objectives from the start, even if the Soviet leadership strategically remained behind the scenes in order to give the illusion of bipartisanship in the WFDY.

The organizers of the 1945 conference purposefully distorted the statistics to underrepresent the number of communists present (Kotek 77). According to the Conference Secretary of the World Youth Council, Kutty Hookham, of the 437 delegates and 148 observers from 63 countries, only 18.3% represented political organizations, 13.4% represented religious organizations, 13.5% represented national youth committees. Of those present, 12% were students, 8.2% were progressives, and 4% were Catholics. Only 3.2% were communists. In reality, communists controlled both the organization and a majority of the delegations present at the conference (78).

The conference organizers ensured that the event did not appear on the surface to have heavy communist influences. There was no communist rhetoric in the speeches, but rather they advocated for vague goals that garnered the support of virtually all delegates. Two terms recurred throughout the speeches at the 1945 conference: anti-fascism and democracy. Plenary speakers such as Vaclav Palaček, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Guy de Boysson strategically left these words undefined. Yet it soon became apparent that the

communists were using the term *democratic* as the antithesis of fascist, but considered any regime that was not communist to be fascist (79-80). In controlling the WFDY, the Soviets also dominated the organization of the WFYS, first held in 1947 and developed in conjunction with the International Union of Students (IUS), a Prague-based, left-wing coalition of university students (Bresslein).<sup>6</sup>

In its early years, the WFYS took place every other year in a city of the Eastern Bloc.<sup>7</sup> It was open to youth of all ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds and targeted global youth solidarity (Koivunen 1612). The festival offered film screenings, sport events, lectures, discussions, and political functions (J. C. C., “Berlin Youth Festival” 306). Festival organizers aimed at creating a space for cross-cultural engagement that catered specifically to the younger generation. While the festival hosted delegates from both socialist and democratic countries, the WFDY controlled the event from an organizational standpoint, making the festival a hotspot for communist propaganda. Consequently, capitalist leaders viewed the festival as threatening and made efforts to boycott the event out of fear that youths would be influenced by Soviet propaganda.

Prague hosted the first WFYS in 1947. The month-long festival boasted 75 sporting events that included 1,337 athletes from 27 countries, as well as 279 concerts by 96 groups and 3,459 artists of various nationalities (Kotek 117). Eager for reasons to celebrate after enduring the hardships of World War II, young people flocked to Prague to participate in the festivities. The festival catered to youth interests specifically and fed their desire to mobilize for world peace after the war (Koivunen 1621-1622). Yet, it was

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<sup>6</sup> The IUS, founded in 1946, was similar to the WFDY in its post-war origins and goals of fighting fascism, promoting peace, and advocating for human rights. It was also dominated by the Soviet Union and functioned as a tool for communist propaganda. For more information on the IUS, see J. C. C. “Students in World Politics: The Role of the I.U.S.”

<sup>7</sup> After the eighth WFYS in Helsinki in 1962, the festival began to take place less frequently. Today, the festival is still held regularly, usually in three to five year intervals. See [www.wfdy.org/wfys](http://www.wfdy.org/wfys).

clear early on that the aim was to achieve peace on Soviet terms. Despite promises from the WFDY and the IUS that the festival would be “strictly non-political,” (Kotek 112) the speeches and chants included propaganda against the Marshall Plan (Bresslein). This sentiment was not popular amongst all attendees, as the Marshall Plan had proved successful in improving living standards for many European nations, namely Britain, France, and West Germany (Bresslein).

Further discontent emerged when the United States government in particular complained that it had been misrepresented at the festival. The Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries offered the cream of the crop for their cultural exhibitions. The United States delegation, which had no official governmental support and was led by left-wing youth, displayed gruesome images of lynchings and struggling veterans (Kotek 117-118). Though the government directed its displeasure at the WFDY, this less-than-satisfactory imagery was the result of the United States government’s self sabotage. Amidst rising anti-communist sentiment fueled by Senator Joseph McCarthy, the State Department had refused to fund a delegation and consequently had missed the opportunity to showcase American democracy in Eastern Europe (120). Furthermore, both the United States and Britain became the targets of direct ideological attacks. One pamphlet from the Greek Young Communists claimed that under the occupation of the American and British, “[n]othing ha[d] changed since the German occupation” (qtd. in Kotek 118). This led the British to deem the festival as proof that the WFDY was a communist front and to distance themselves from it (123-124). Nevertheless, the first WFYS was a massive success for the WFDY and set the stage for regularly scheduled festivities for the entire duration of the Cold War.

Budapest hosted the second festival in 1949, which showed a decline in the number of youth in attendance at only 10,000, but welcomed a delegation from the soon-to-be officially proclaimed GDR. The event lasted two weeks rather than a month and emphasized the rejection of Titoism, once again demonstrating the Soviet Union's use of the festival to forward its own political agenda (Bresslein). Heavy praise for the Soviet Union and Josef Stalin set the tone with nationalistic Soviet songs on repeat, blaring over loudspeakers, and the Soviet delegation parading through the streets carrying massive portraits of Stalin (J. C. C., "Berlin Youth Festival" 308-309).

The East German youth organization, the FDJ, took part in the WFYS in Budapest, just weeks before Germany's Soviet occupation zone morphed into the GDR. The Soviet Union had facilitated the creation of the GDR, ensuring that it adopted a Soviet political model. Two months after the festival, on October 7, the FDJ paraded through the streets of East Berlin with portraits of Stalin in celebration of the GDR's formal establishment. Naturally, the SED supported the Soviet-backed WFDY and sponsored 750 FDJ delegates to travel to Budapest ("Gruß an Budapest"). The FDJ's orderly marching to political songs reminded many participants of its wartime predecessor, the Hitler Youth, although the FDJ paraded in blue rather than brown uniforms and exalted Stalin, Hitler's former political adversary (J. C. C., "Berlin Youth Festival" 307).

The decision to hold the 1951 WFYS in Berlin gave rise to a controversy. Europe's collective memory of Germany still conjured images of Hitler's crimes, so many questioned the idea of the former Hitler Youth hosting a festival promoting anti-fascism and peace (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 229). Though many international organizations

at the time hesitated to include either East or West Germany among its members, the Soviet Union used the festival as an opportunity to promote the narrative that Hitler and his cronies had deceived the youth and that capitalist interests had been responsible for the war, not the East German people (229). The SED also took advantage of the festival to increase its claims of legitimacy in response to the FRG's refusal to recognize the GDR's sovereignty (White 590). By hosting the festival, the SED established itself within the internationally recognized WFDY, claiming equal status with previous host nations Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Berlin's WFYS also aimed to improve international perceptions of the GDR to combat West German isolation efforts. The SED organized a task force of volunteers to prepare East Berlin, aiming to impress international guests with the splendors of socialism. Thousands of volunteers, many of whom were members of the FDJ, recovered Berlin from the ruins left by World War II and constructed facilities for the upcoming festival in record time (Wolle, *Große Plan* 229). The SED organized transportation and housing for visitors and created a tiered catering system in which foreign visitors had the largest food allotments, followed by the West Germans and, finally, the East Germans. Naturally, this arrangement aroused frustration amongst East German participants as well as West Germans, resulting in criticism of Erich Honecker, chairman of the FDJ and key organizer of the WFYS (Epstein 112).

Although the WFDY took a back seat at the festival, the FDJ mirrored its sentiments, allowing the third WFYS to continue to function as an outlet for Soviet propaganda. This included imagery and slogans favorable to the Soviet Union, such as massive portraits of Stalin that FDJ members carried during parades, as well as

incitement against western imperialism. There were caricatures of western leaders, such as banners bearing half the face of United States President Harry Truman with Adolf Hitler's face overlaid on the other side. Consistent with the trend of peace on socialist terms, the festival also emphasized resistance to the remilitarization of West Germany (United States Department of State 3). This was primarily in response to the proposed creation of the European Defense Community, a pan-European military force to defend the Western Bloc against a seemingly imminent conflict with the Soviet Union (Kotek 190).

On August 5, 1951, the two-week-long festival commenced at the newly constructed Walter Ulbricht Stadium. With over one million FDJ members, between 35,000 and 60,000 delegates from the FRG, and an additional 30,000 from the rest of the world, the opening act was an extravagant spectacle. Cries of "Friendship! Friendship!" echoed throughout the stadium as delegates marched in traditional garments (United States Department of State 3). The sheer scale of the festival and its unifying music and chants appealed to the emotions of the youth. The festival's call to arms invoked a sense of urgency and personal responsibility amongst young people to take action against remilitarization and imperialism, playing on adolescents' impressionable nature to promote the Soviet-sanctioned political agenda.

However, youth susceptibility turned out to be a drawback for the festival as well. Problems began to arise when the West Berlin Senate invited festival participants through announcements and pamphlets to visit West Berlin (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 232). FDJ members from across the GDR had travelled to East Berlin to partake in the festival. Before arriving in East Berlin, the authorities had strictly forbidden FDJ members from

crossing the border into West Berlin and had warned them of the West German police, who would beat them up and throw them in jail (United States Department of State 4). Nevertheless, upon hearing of the Senate's invitation, FDJ members crossed the border by the thousands, curious about life in West Berlin and eager to get their hands on western reading materials (4). This caused a significant problem for the festival organizers. Mobilizing an armed police force to prevent border-crossings would have been unsustainable and bad press for a festival supposedly promoting peace. Hence, the authorities stationed FDJ members deemed ideologically trustworthy along the borders to Berlin's Western sectors, but this move also proved unsuccessful in deterring their peers from flocking into those parts of the city (5).

Honecker received heavy criticism for FDJ members' noncompliance and failure to uphold communist values. Realizing that the festival was beginning to come apart at the seams, Honecker announced that several thousand reliable FDJ members would accept West Berlin's invitation and cross the border for a "peace demonstration" (6). West Berlin's police violently stopped the demonstration, resulting in some minor injuries and over one hundred arrests, although most of those detained were released within a few hours (6). East German newspapers covered the events in detail the next day, with *Neues Deutschland* describing them as "unheard-of bloody attacks on young Germans by the West German police" (unerhörte blutige Überfälle der Westberliner Polizei auf deutsche Jugendliche) ("Friedensdemonstrationen der FDJ in West Berlin").<sup>8</sup> Honecker considered the incident to have been a major success for the FDJ. The demonstration confirmed

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<sup>8</sup> Some scholars claim that the extent to which the FDJ provoked the West Berlin police is unclear (Rossow, et al.). However, historian Stefan Wolle argues it is clear that Honecker wanted to incite violence to draw attention away from the festival's organizational shortcomings (*Große Plan* 233). In any case, the demonstration did work in Honecker's favor by pressuring the West Berlin police to react.

Soviet and SED propaganda regarding western police brutality, which discouraged East German youths from crossing the border again (United States Department of State 6).

Overall, the third WFYS proved to be a major success. The festival welcomed more guests from more countries than its precursors, with nearly 1.5 million participants from 104 countries. Festival organizers interpreted this turnout as legitimization of the SED and East Germany as a state (Kotek 198). The transgressions of the FDJ certainly posed a setback, but Honecker was able to regain control and use the situation to support his own propaganda campaign. Honecker's calculated decision to allow the FDJ to cross the border foreshadowed his future strategy of controlled liberalization and consumer socialism during his years at the helm of the GDR.

East Berlin hosted the WFYS for a second time from July 28 to August 5, 1973. The tenth festival used the motto "For anti-imperialist solidarity, peace, and friendship" (Für antiimperialistische Solidarität, Frieden und Freundschaft) (White 586). The GDR's key focus on international solidarity against imperialism was in response to existing conflicts in Chile, the Middle East, and Vietnam, in particular. The regime welcomed key figures of the international struggle against oppression such as Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and radical feminist activist and Black Panther affiliate Angela Davis (593). Like the previous festivals, this one offered music, arts, sports, and political forums, all catered towards youth interests (586). The festival lasted nine days and hosted more than 20,000 foreign participants and nearly 350,000 youth from the GDR (Schiller 50).

Several historical factors contributed to the considerable impact of the tenth WFYS. First, the 1968 WFYS in Sofia, Bulgaria, had attracted negative publicity due to a disastrous display of police brutality against radical leftists protesting the Vietnam War

(Schiller 52). It was crucial that the next festival be a success, even though much of Eastern Europe was still coming to terms with the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Since the GDR had not experienced youth protests of the type seen in Czechoslovakia, Poland, or Yugoslavia in 1968, East Berlin appeared to be a reliable location for the tenth festival. East Berlin was also a key border region during the Cold War with West Berlin just beyond the Wall making it thus "both a concrete and imagined point of interaction between the 'East' and 'West'" (White 590).

In addition to East Berlin's status as a safe location and a strategic space to hold the festival, 1973 was also an opportune time for the GDR to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors. Willy Brandt's election as Chancellor of the FRG in 1969 had marked the beginning of *Ostpolitik*, the foreign policy that promoted rapprochement between the two German states (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 59). By December 1972, the two states had signed the Basic Treaty, recognizing one another's sovereignty and seeking to foster "normal, good neighborly relations [...] on the basis of equal rights" between East and West Germany ("The German Basic Treaty"). The Treaty was ratified in June 1973, just weeks before the WFYS, and by that time, fifteen additional states had already officially recognized the GDR's sovereignty (Schiller 52). The festival offered East Germany an opportunity to display its newfound legitimacy while welcoming international visitors.

The festivities also took place soon after a power shift in the GDR's leadership. In 1971, Erich Honecker had taken over the position of First Secretary of the SED, replacing Walter Ulbricht who incidentally died during the course of the festival. Although Honecker had been in power for two years by 1973, the festival served as a "dress rehearsal for Honecker's policy of controlled openness" (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 214). The

festival allowed him to showcase to the world his political vision and social policies, which differed vastly from those of his predecessor. Ulbricht had taken an authoritarian approach to social policies, banning any practices that resembled those of the West such as jazz or rock 'n' roll music. Honecker, in conjunction with the improving relations between the GDR and FRG, began to relax sanctions on West German goods and culture. His aim was to allow for a liberalization of consumer goods and culture in hopes that this would garner greater political support for the SED.

As Honecker was the co-founder and former leader of the FDJ, his administration placed particular emphasis on the role of the youth for GDR society (Schiller 55). The authorities allowed the youth experiences they had long been denied under the Ulbricht administration (White 602). Western singers and bands, such as Franz Josef Degenhardt and Floh de Cologne gave concerts and entertained the festival's participants (Schiller 57). Alexanderplatz functioned as the primary site for cultural exchanges, as people convened there to eat, drink, sing, and converse late into the night with no police forces controlling their conversations or interactions (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 214). Looking back almost thirty years later, Wolfgang Kil, a 24-year-old festival-goer recalled a "hippie feeling" at the festival that was "unprecedented" (qtd. in Rossow, et al.). Authorities made food items that were typically inaccessible such as bananas, oranges, and watermelon readily available to East Germans (Schiller 53).

While the tenth WFYS certainly did allow for GDR youth to experience cultural interactions and discussions with Western youth, the festival was by far not as unregulated as it seemed to some of its participants at the time. Cultural historian Kay Schiller has noted that the youth of the GDR found themselves "in a position of privilege

on the one hand and constant surveillance and control on the other” (55). Moreover, after the festival, life returned to normal, so that the nine days of openness at the festival appeared as an SED-sanctioned charade to show foreign visitors the GDR in the best possible light.

Under Honecker, the regime emphasized the political role of the youth in particular through positive reinforcement. Honecker believed that offering concessions like western clothing and music would appease the youth and keep them loyal to the SED (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 43). Previously mentioned Wolfgang Kil described Honecker’s policy as allowing the youth to “dance on the tables over the weekend [so they would] perform better at the workbench [afterwards]” (qtd. in Rossow, et al.). At the same time, the state viewed young people as particularly susceptible to the temptations of Western culture (Schiller 56). To ensure ideological compliance, the SED organized workshops for the FDJ on how to handle situations of conflict and instructed them to report any sign of “deviance” (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 215).

While the festival catered to the interests and desires of the youth--at least those the regime deemed acceptable--, and the FDJ played a major organizational role in the festivities, the authorities took extensive measures to prevent any subversive activities from occurring (Schiller 56). Organizers invited and encouraged Western folk and rock musicians to perform at the festival, but the SED undertook an extensive vetting process to ensure that all groups were ideologically-conform and advanced international solidarity through their art (White 603). Western groups like Floh de Cologne and Lokomotive Kreuzberg identified as leftists, which was often apparent in their music so

much so that the musical acts at the festival served simultaneously to enthrall and appease the youth, allowing the SED-regime to maintain control over it at all times (603-605).

No other tactic illustrates the regime's strategy better than the covert mobilization of the security apparatus prior to and during the festival. In the months leading up to the festival, the authorities banned 800 individuals from East Berlin, such as those deemed asocial or mentally ill, juvenile delinquents, and sex workers, and had them committed to rehabilitation centers or detained (White 591). The Stasi initiated 6,635 investigations on individuals in the first six months of 1973 and an additional 2,720 in July alone (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 216). The festival itself teemed with East German security personnel who went largely unnoticed by foreign visitors during the operation code named "Aktion Banner." Members of the Stasi and the People's Police created a force of approximately 60,000, meaning that there was one security member for every three festival-goers (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 215; Schiller 55). Many of these security workers wore plain clothes or in some cases the blue shirts of the FDJ in order to work undercover, making the security force far less recognizable and thus more effective (Wolle, *Heile Welt* 214).

The Stasi also used its vast network of informants to report on any subversive activities, particularly concerning border security. With the opening ceremony taking place near the wall at the World Youth Stadium, rumors about storming the wall arose, resulting in several arrests in nearby bars (215). Overall, however, the combination of the Stasi's preemptive removal of individuals deemed threatening to ideological conformity and the undercover security apparatus proved effective; the police only arrested 231 people (of whom only 24 were festival participants) over the course of the festival (217).

The 1973 WFYS, like the 1951 festival, proved to be a successful example of “aestheticized politics,” in which the regime encouraged mass participation in festivities to mask political realities (Benjamin). The SED strategically and artfully staged the festivals to fit its political agendas of 1951 and 1973, respectively. In 1951, the relationship between the FRG and the GDR was tense. Hosting the WFYS bolstered the GDR’s legitimacy by forcing the socialist world to accept the GDR as a comrade-in-arms under the watchful eye of the Soviet Union, whose presence was obvious amidst the banners and Stalin portraits. The festival was also successful in a way for which the SED had not planned, but which had resulted from its own delegation’s misbehavior. Honecker used the FDJ’s disobedience to teach its members a socialist lesson: danger awaits outside the safe haven of the socialist bloc. Honecker, this time as First Secretary of the SED, facilitated success again at the tenth WFYS in 1973. At that time, the GDR celebrated its sovereignty and progress during a period of relaxation in East-West relations, both globally and between the two German states. The GDR authorities allowed for a loosening of restrictions during the festival, but not without sedulous planning prior to the event. The liberalization during the festival was superficial, and it served to advance the SED’s agenda to appear more tolerant and to curry favor with the youth, while in reality the repressive system continued to function, only less visibly. The security system proved successful, as the atmosphere of the festival felt open. Some participants, however, took this openness as an opportunity to instrumentalize the event for their own purposes.

### **Chapter 3: The *Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin* at the Tenth World Festival of Youth and Students**

Six months after the HIB came together, its members publicly engaged in activism at the 1973 WFYS when they marched as openly gay FDJ members. This chapter argues that the HIB's demonstration at the tenth WFYS in summer 1973 was the beginning of its adoption of "consentful contention" as the group's preferred method of interaction with the SED-regime. In "'Taking the State at Its Word': The Arts of Consentful Contention in the German Democratic Republic," sociologist Jeremy Straughn postulates the notion of consentful contention as a form of political engagement in which the actor challenges state policy by appealing to the state's own ideology (1601). The HIB's activism at the festival was in collaboration with Peter Tatchell, a gay rights advocate and British delegate. I analyze three texts from the festival: the HIB's banner, excerpts from Tatchell's leaflet, and Tatchell's placard to compare and contrast Tatchell's chosen methods of political engagement with those of the HIB. I also analyze a letter from the HIB's last year of existence to show that the group continued to engage with the state in a consentfully contentious manner throughout its existence as the HIB's interactions with the state were sincere in the group's desire to advocate for change within the confines of the socialist state.

## **The HIB's Banner**

Cultural studies scholars Kristine Schmidt and Kay Nellißen note in their account of the HIB that no photographs exist of the banner that the HIB allegedly carried at the WFYS. No individuals have come forward with claims of carrying or painting the banner, and no evidence of such a thing exists in the files of the People's Police, who documented every seemingly unimportant detail in the GDR (179). However, Ursula Sillge, herself an active member of the HIB, recalls a banner at the closing ceremony reading, "We homosexuals of the capital welcome the participants in the 10th World Festival and are for socialism in the GDR" (Wir Homosexuelle der Hauptstadt begrüßen die Teilnehmer der X. Weltfestspiele und sind für den Sozialismus in der DDR, Sillge 89).

As a written expression of HIB's viewpoint addressing the GDR decision-makers as much as the other participants in the WFYS, I read this slogan on the HIB's banner as an expression of consentful contention. Working with limited space, the HIB's members had to be concise and explicit in their message. From the outset, they self-identified as "homosexuals." This word choice was consistent with that of the state which used the term because of its medical and psychiatric connotations. Conversely, HIB members referred to themselves privately as "gay," a Western term that embodied their confidence and positive attitude toward their sexuality (McLellan 120). By using the dry term "homosexual" rather than defaulting to their own preference, the HIB demonstrated its compliance with the views of the state. By using the word "we" they asserted that there was a group of homosexuals who viewed themselves as a collective. As the GDR offered no representation for homosexuals at the time, coming forward as a group gave individual members confidence and allowed them to unite around a common goal-- in this case, welcoming festival guests.

The HIB's banner also stated that this group of homosexuals were further unified in their place of origin, "the capital." At this point, Berlin was a divided city, but there was only one Berlin that served as a capital: East Berlin. By identifying themselves as "of the capital," HIB members both anchored themselves within the social body of East Berlin and demonstrated their roots in and loyalty to the GDR. The formulation of the first half of the sentence-- identifying a group and stating that this group welcomed the festival participants-- was textbook socialist jargon at the time, as the headlines of major East German publications show. The first page of *Berliner Zeitung* on the festival's opening day included a whole section greeting visitors on behalf of the festival committee that stated "Berlin greets the youth of the world!" ("Berlin grüßt die Weltjugend!"). The headline on the first page of *Neues Deutschland* the day before read "The capital of the GDR receives the guests with open arms and open hearts" ("Mit offenen Armen und offenen Herzen empfängt die Hauptstadt der DDR die Gäste"). In the original German version, "with open arms and open hearts" holds the emphasis, expressing the welcoming atmosphere that the state sought to create. By using the state-approved lingo, the HIB established that it was conversant in the ideological language of socialism and conformed to its norms in a desire to function within its confines.

The HIB also stated explicitly that its members were "*for* socialism *in* the GDR" (emphasis added). Rather than stating that they were socialists, which could be interpreted as designating individuals living in a socialist state, HIB members demonstrated commitment to the socialist cause by stating that they were "for," i.e. in

favor of socialism and embraced the teachings of the SED. Furthermore, the preposition “in” decisively established their belief that socialism was the right ideology for the GDR.

Notably, the HIB’s banner did not make any demands toward the state, but rather established those wielding the banner as both homosexuals and supporters of socialism, who engaged in the same kind of behavior as the rest of the GDR when they “greeted” the festival participants. Despite this lack of outright dispute, the banner exemplified contention, yet of the consensual type. By publicly identifying as open homosexuals, HIB members contravened state norms, which dictated silence around and remained ambivalent about lived homosexuality despite the country’s judicial code. In choosing to showcase their sexuality at the WFYS, the HIB appropriated--or as historian Malte Rolf would say “creatively colonized” (51)-- a state-organized event for its own purposes. The HIB employed the rhetoric and sentiments of the state to come forward as homosexuals at that specific point in time because in the eyes of its members, the state’s facilitation of an open and tolerant atmosphere permitted this. Nevertheless, they navigated the situation with caution by adhering to the behaviors of the ideal socialist citizen and explicitly establishing their support for state socialism.

### **Tatchell’s Account of the Festival**

HIB members engaged in activism at the 1973 WFYS alongside Peter Tatchell, a twenty-one year-old British delegate and gay activist.<sup>9</sup> Tatchell came to the festival eager to advocate for homosexual human rights in an Eastern Bloc country, laden with 2,000 gay rights leaflets, half of which were in German, and 30 pamphlets in English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish.<sup>10</sup> Gay activists from West Berlin, who frequented East

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<sup>9</sup> I draw my information on Tatchell from Tatchell’s account of the tenth WFYS, “Queer Comrades: East Berlin” and an email exchange between myself and Tatchell from February 7-11, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, my analysis will not address the pamphlets as I was unable to obtain a copy (Cassisa).

German gay bars, connected Tatchell with HIB members, who decided to support Tatchell's efforts to distribute leaflets and publicize the issue of homosexual human rights throughout the duration of the festival.

At the opening ceremony, Tatchell sought to connect with other gay participants. He briefly met two Australians involved in the gay liberation movement, but other delegates from France and the United States issued homophobic slurs upon learning that Tatchell was gay. This prompted Tatchell to distribute his leaflets in the United States delegates' quarters later that day. The United States delegates angrily reported Tatchell to both the British delegation and the East German authorities, denouncing the "disruptive activities" of "petty bourgeois gay liberationists" at the peaceful festival. British delegates seemed to agree and scolded Tatchell for failing to get approval for his actions.

Tatchell's activism efforts caused further displeasure amongst the British delegates when East German authorities heard about his plan to place a wreath bearing a pink triangle at the site of Sachsenhausen, a Nazi camp that had seen the death of thousands of homosexuals. In the spirit of anti-fascism, but with his own motives in mind, Tatchell had obtained permission from the British delegation to place a wreath at Sachsenhausen, but East German authorities deemed it "not permissible." Not wanting to offend their hosts, the majority of the British delegation agreed that Tatchell should not be allowed to lay the wreath. In a prolonged negotiation effort, Tatchell agreed to abandon his plan if he was allowed to speak at a scheduled youth rights conference on August 3. Reluctantly, the British delegation agreed.

Tatchell gave his speech at the Humboldt University in the auditorium, but a "technical malfunction" set in right after he had mentioned gay and lesbian rights. While

Tatchell refused to leave the podium and chaos ensued, Tatchell's supporters distributed leaflets to those in attendance. After nearly an hour, the authorities allowed Tatchell to continue his address, but the simultaneous multilingual translations were muddled to censor its aspects that were deemed inappropriate for socialist audiences. After Tatchell's speech, a French communist took over the microphone and condemned Tatchell as a "bourgeois degenerate and troublemaker," accusing him of "peddling fascist perversions." This resulted in many delegates disposing of Tatchell's "capitalist propaganda," but some retained their leaflets and scavenged for more.

The next day, Tatchell attended an outdoor concert to continue passing out leaflets. Soon after arriving, an outraged FDJ official lit one of the leaflets on fire and instructed onlookers to do the same. Passersby quickly began snatching leaflets and throwing them into the fire without even pausing to read them. Tatchell recalls this as being reminiscent of the Nazi book-burning of 1933, as GDR state officials mirrored Nazi behavior through the destruction of intellectual property that did not align with the regime's views. The officials attempted to arrest Tatchell, but sympathetic British delegates pulled him away. The arrival of "plain-clothes officials," whom East German bystanders identified as Stasi agents, put an end to the commotion as they ordered Tatchell's release, and the FDJ officials complied. Tatchell was able to leave and return to his room with his fellow British delegates.

The following day, a scheduled closing rally took place on Marx-Engels Square (today again Palace Square). The festival organizers encouraged all attendees to make banners to bring with them. Tatchell intended to carry a placard advocating for gay rights. It read in German "Homosexual Liberation! Revolutionary Homosexuals Support

Socialism!” (Homosexuelle Befreiung! Revolutionäre Homosexuelle unterstützen den Sozialismus!) on one side, and on the other, “*Gay Liberation Front – London. Civil Rights for Homosexuals*” (Bürgerrechte für Homosexuelle) (Fig. 1). As Tatchell was eating near Alexanderplatz before the rally, three East German officials approached him and courteously inquired whether he would be carrying a banner advocating gay rights.<sup>11</sup> Upon hearing his affirmative reply, their polite demeanors vanished and they angrily questioned him, announcing that, “[such a banner would] confuse the minds of [GDR] youth [who would] not understand it” before emphasizing that they themselves “found it offensive.” As Tatchell argued with them, the situation escalated and began to draw the attention of other festival-goers. The East German police attempted to drag Tatchell into the eatery’s kitchen, presumably to beat him up. As passersby began to notice the altercation, Tatchell’s assailants released him, not wanting to attract negative attention. They permitted him to leave after warning him that “under no circumstances” could he carry a gay rights placard to the closing rally.

Rejoining the British delegation, Tatchell quickly encountered hostility there as well. Many of his fellow delegates objected to the placard because it was “destroying the atmosphere of the festival, disgracing the good name of the British delegation and deliberately trying to offend and embarrass East Germany.” Tatchell responded that East Germans should not take issue with the placard as the GDR had relatively liberal laws around homosexuality. The British delegates decided to put it to a vote, which concluded that Tatchell should not be permitted to carry his sign to the rally after some of the British incorrectly translated the sign to read “East Germany persecutes homosexuals.” Tatchell

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<sup>11</sup> Tatchell’s East German acquaintances told him that these officials were members of the Stasi, claiming that their behavior and clothing gave it away. He presumed that hostile British delegates, who had witnessed him making the placard, had informed officials of his plan to carry it at the closing rally.

refused to accept the verdict and defiantly held up his placard. Homophobic British delegates beat Tatchell and those who sought to shield him, tore his placard in half, and left for the closing rally without him. Subsequently, Tatchell and more than 30 ad-hoc supporters, including three HIB members, marched to the rally on Marx-Engels Square.<sup>12</sup> They wielded the remaining half of the placard that read “Homosexual Liberation,” chanted gay rights slogans, and distributed more leaflets (Fig. 2). This spontaneous march was the first gay rights demonstration in a socialist country. Despite demands for the activists to disband, they continued marching but were quickly met by angry British delegates who had remained behind to prevent them from reaching the rally. Tatchell and his supporters managed to fight them off and continue through Alexanderplatz, but before long met their assailants yet again, this time accompanied by members of the FDJ. The homophobic delegates and FDJ members advanced with sticks to further beat Tatchell and his fellow activists, who soon realized that at this point, they had to flee. Tatchell took cover in the apartment of an HIB member who warned him that the police would surely arrest him. The same night at 2 am Tatchell fled to West Berlin through an obscure checkpoint to avoid the East Germany police.

### **Tatchell’s Leaflet**

The content of Tatchell’s leaflet and placard, respectively, gives insight into his political agenda and motivations for attending the festival. Tatchell was a member of the London branch of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), an organization that originated in New York City in response to the 1969 Stonewall riots (Walter 7). Although England had decriminalized homosexuality in 1967, a culture of societal intolerance prevailed there as

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<sup>12</sup> Most of Tatchell’s supporters were members of the British delegation whose political loyalties lay with either the Labour or the Communist Party.

much as in the GDR after the abolition of Paragraph 175. Students at the London School of Economics founded the London GLF on October 13, 1970 after attending a conference hosted by the Black Panthers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Walter 11). Naturally, the group's primary goal was gay liberation, but it also promoted Leftist political views. In a December 1970 issue of the London GLF's newspaper, *Come Together*, the author, listed only as Jonathan, identified the group as "part of the wider movement to abolish all forms of social oppression," allying with Black people, national minorities, women, the working class, and youth who reject the "bourgeois family" (qtd. in Walter 44).

Tatchell's leaflet outlined the goals of the GLF and called for gay liberation in the Eastern Bloc. The leaflet opened with "Gay means homosexual – gay is good – gay is proud – gay is angry – gay liberation." It went on to criticize the Eastern Bloc for retaining capitalist values, stating "unfortunately many of our communist comrades whilst having transformed the economic base of their society, have left capitalist sexual morals intact." It further pointed out that same-sex relationships were "the most free and equal" and "female homosexuals [were] amongst the few women who [were] independent of men." Finally, the leaflet denounced the traditional family unit, demanded the abolition of "the oppressive heterosexual institution of marriage," and proposed communal living as an alternative to the nuclear family.<sup>13</sup> By the standards of the GDR, these claims threatened the peaceful atmosphere of the festival and the state's ambivalent stance on homosexuality.

Tatchell's repetition of the word "gay" demonstrates his confidence in his identity, while describing "gay" as "proud" expresses his positive view on homosexuality.

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<sup>13</sup> I was unable to obtain a copy of the leaflet for the purposes of this research (Cassisa). These quotes are from McLellan p. 110 from an English translation of the leaflet.

American gay rights activist Dr. Franklin Kameny, inspired by the Black Power phrase “black is beautiful,” had coined the phrase “gay is good” in 1968 to affirm gay men and women (Bruce 38). Tatchell’s usage of this phrase substantiates that he (and other members of the London GLF) were familiar with the strategies of the American gay liberation movement, and these forms of activism influenced not only his actions in England, but also his tactics in the GDR. His further claim that “gay is angry” underscores his frustration at the social conditions of the time, which repressed homosexuals, and informs his appeal for gay liberation. In equating gayness with homosexuality, Tatchell proposes that sexuality is not indicative of particular ideological beliefs, but of sexual preferences, disputing the SED-state’s claim that being gay made one capitalist or bourgeois. Indeed, his usage of the word “unfortunately” to describe the Eastern Bloc’s societal views on homosexuality at the time suggests that he himself supported socialism, and that his desire was for socialist states to make as much progress socially as they had economically. Similarly, using the ideologically charged term “comrade” establishes Tatchell as a communist sympathizer, in accordance with the GLF’s Leftist views, and illustrates his aim to show the GDR regime, and the Eastern Bloc as a whole, that homosexuality could be compatible with socialism.

However, some elements of the leaflet were particularly inflammatory in the context of East Germany. For example, Tatchell’s claim that socialist states had “left capitalist sexual morals intact” was controversial, as the SED identified capitalism as the root of all evil and justified its every action by denouncing the West and its bourgeois society. Moreover, Tatchell’s suggestion that lesbians were “amongst the few women who [were] independent of men” was also problematic, as the SED-regime promoted gender

equality in accordance with socialist values. In the eyes of the state, women had already been emancipated in the GDR because they had achieved economic independence. Women's sexual independence from men was not a point of focus for the state, as it relied on heterosexual couples for procreating and raising good socialist children.

Tatchell's chosen method of expressing his grievances paired with the taboo subject matter of the leaflets made his actions particularly subversive in the eyes of the state. The SED-state may have been more apt to respond had he brought up the issue of homosexual social inequality in a written petition (Eingabe), which was a common practice in the GDR, when citizens wanted to nudge the authorities into action.<sup>14</sup> Yet, Tatchell, as an outsider, did not appeal directly to the state to address the problem, but publicly critiqued the conservatism of state socialism in a manner typical for western activists.

Tatchell's open and very public critique was consistent with his socialization in the West and his affiliation with the London GLF. By late 1971, the London GLF had published a manifesto, had held the first gay pride celebration, and had been holding demonstrations protesting social oppression regularly (Walter 12). It was common for GLF members to bring handmade posters and pass out leaflets at their demonstrations. By 1973 Tatchell had participated in enough demonstrations as a GLF member to be an experienced activist.<sup>15</sup> Tatchell's experiences with western means of protest informed his decision to distribute leaflets at the WFYS. Moreover, his leaflet included rhetoric commonly used by American gay rights activists, indicating that the campaign for gay

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<sup>14</sup> On the practice of petition-writing in the GDR, see Betts.

<sup>15</sup> For Tatchell's own account of his experiences in the GLF, as well as a photo of Tatchell holding a poster reading, "Gay, Proud, and Angry" (reminiscent of the wording in his leaflet in East Berlin), see "The Gay Liberation Front's Social Revolution."

liberation had become a transnational movement that Tatchell wanted to bring behind the Iron Curtain. Although some of the principles of the London GLF-- anti-capitalism, anti-racism, and anti-war-- aligned with those of the SED, Tatchell's methods were too overt to successfully appeal to the East German state.

### **Tatchell's Placard**

Tatchell's placard at the closing rally of the festival is an additional example of his western style of activism. As indicated before, Tatchell's original placard was in German and it read, "Homosexual Liberation! Revolutionary Homosexuals Support Socialism!" (Revolutionäre Homosexuelle unterstützen den Sozialismus), on one side, and "*Gay Liberation Front – London. Civil Rights for Homosexuals*" (Bürgerrechte für Homosexuelle), on the other.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the dispute with the British delegates, Tatchell marched alongside his supporters as he "held aloft a tattered piece of placard, a small piece of cardboard with the words 'Homosexual Liberation.'" In photos from the demonstration, most of the words "revolutionary homosexuals" are visible as well (Fig. 2). Tatchell's placard was certainly less inflammatory than his leaflet, but it also formulated explicit demands, unlike the HIB's banner. His purpose in carrying the placard was not only to appear publicly as a homosexual in a socialist state, but also to advocate for gay rights under socialism.

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<sup>16</sup> This is the punctuation and capitalization Tatchell uses in his retrospective account of the 1973 WFYS. See "Queer Comrades in East Berlin" and also Fig. 1 and 2.

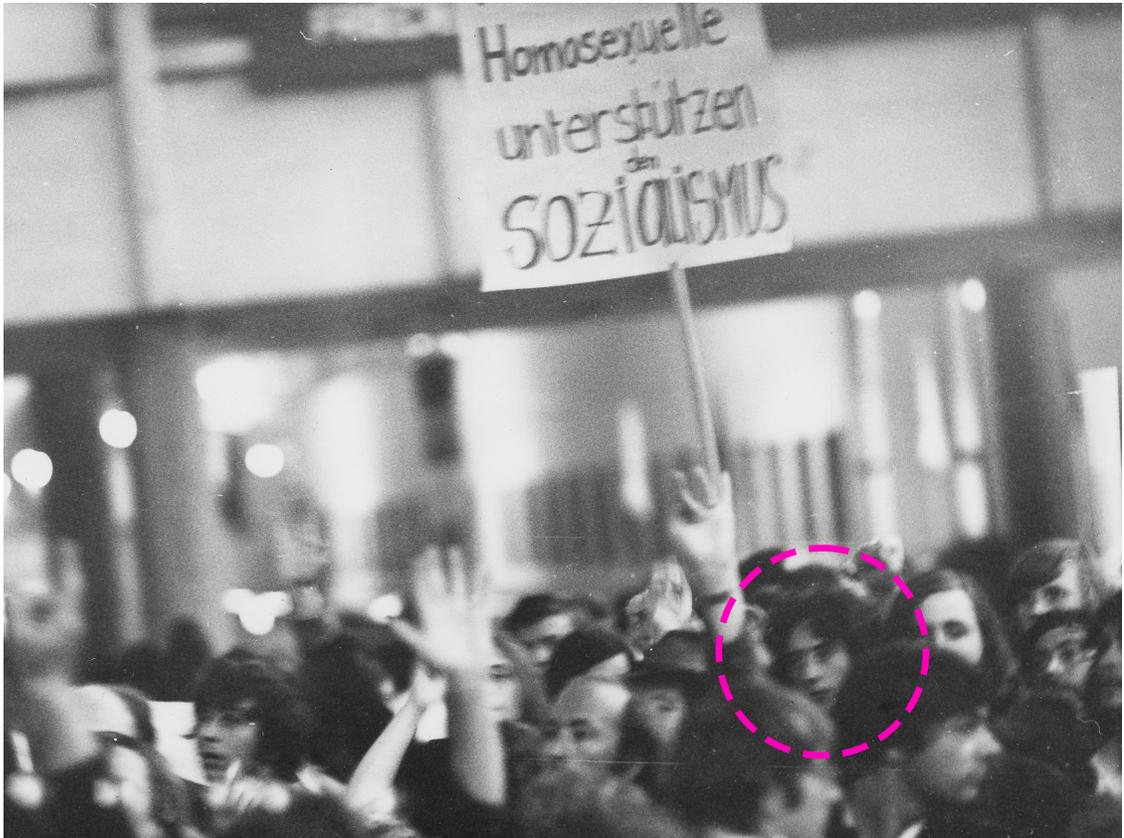


Fig. 1 Tatchell (circled) bravely wields his placard before British delegates tore it in half.



Fig. 2 Tatchell (not pictured) wields the remaining portion of his placard.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Both images have been reprinted with Peter Tatchell's permission.

Beginning with “Gay Liberation Front – London,” Tatchell identified his affiliation with a particular organization and the city he represented, contextualizing his demands through his status as a Western delegate. Under that, “Civil Rights for Homosexuals” acknowledged that East German homosexuals enjoyed legal rights but lacked social equality. On the opposite side of the placard, Tatchell also advocated for homosexual liberation. In its original German wording, the emphasis is placed on the lexeme “Befreiung.” As the dictionary indicates, *Befreiung* means “to free by overcoming obstacles” [das Freimachen (durch Überwinden von Widerständen)] and bears in English the meaning of liberation as *deliverance* rather than *emancipation*.<sup>18</sup> Those marching with the sign had emancipated themselves by coming out as gay and publicly marching for gay rights, but their emancipation was limited by the state’s disregard for their needs and refusal to promote them as social beings. Tatchell expected a socialist regime that guaranteed equal treatment for all citizens to deliver its gay citizens from their plight, particularly when they exemplified the qualities of ideal citizens. Tatchell, thus, demanded more than de jure freedom for homosexuals; his call for liberation reflected his demand for homosexuals to hold equal status in Eastern Bloc societies.

After identifying his demands, Tatchell justified them by claiming, “Revolutionary Homosexuals Support Socialism!” This phrase integrated socialist jargon through the use of the word “revolutionary” with his own agenda. The phrase “revolutionary homosexuals” asserted that homosexuals were not bourgeois degenerates but comrades-in-arms. Similar to his leaflet, by stating that homosexuals supported socialism, Tatchell aimed to explicitly convey that homosexuals’ political goals aligned with those

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<sup>18</sup> See “Befreiung” in *Digital Dictionary of the German Language* (Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache) [www.dwds.de/wb/Befreiung](http://www.dwds.de/wb/Befreiung) and “liberation” in *Merriam-Webster* [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liberation](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liberation)

of the Left and, thus, did not conflict with those of state socialism. In establishing his support for socialism, Tatchell sought to eliminate the belief that homosexuality was a bourgeois phenomenon that would eventually disappear under socialism. Not only did homosexuals exist under socialism, but they were good citizens of the state as well.

When Tatchell travelled to East Berlin, he brought along leaflets and pamphlets and made a placard because this was the type of activism with which he was familiar in the West. As previously stated, he drew inspiration from the gay rights movement that had begun in the United States and spread to Western Europe, without considering that his activism might play out very differently in the GDR. The SED-state viewed Tatchell as an instigator not only because of his sexuality, but also because of his public form of protest. Tatchell's methods were direct and bold, showing little regard for the SED's sensitivity to political and social subversion. Yet, Tatchell's activism in the GDR was also momentary: he came to advocate for homosexual human rights and protest homophobia in socialist countries and then fled for safety to a western country when the situation turned against him. The HIB, on the other hand, neither had the option nor did its members intend to escape the GDR. The group aimed for longitudinal activism, as its members had more at stake. They sought to bring about concrete changes for themselves and other homosexuals in the GDR. As GDR citizens, they recognized the SED's low threshold for confrontation and, therefore, adopted more calculated methods of seeking publicity and enacting change under state socialism. While the HIB drew inspiration from Tatchell and began its public activism at the WFYS, their engagement with the state in and post-1973 was distinctly East German in nature.

### **The HIB's 1978 Letter to the People's Chamber (October 22, 1978)**

The HIB's banner at the WFYS might have been the first instance of consentfully contentious behavior on its part, but it soon became the predominant form of engagement with the state throughout the group's existence. The HIB made use of the SED-state's system of written petitions to communicate the hardships the gay community faced in the GDR and advocate for change. The SED-state guaranteed citizens' right to file formal complaints, petitions, and requests to ensure a close relationship between citizen and the state. In fact, the opportunity for citizens to voice their opinions was so important in the eyes of the state that regional departments competed for the greatest number of submitted petitions (Betts 175). By the early 1960s, the government received over 100,000 such writings annually and, by 1989, that number had grown to over one million (4). This system of communication was highly successful and allowed both individuals and groups to present their concerns and desires directly to state officials in a state-approved manner, although it did not obligate the state to oblige the complainant (2).

On October 22, 1978, five HIB members signed and mailed such a petition to the People's Chamber entitled "Socialist leisure activities of a minority" (Sozialistische Freizeitgestaltung einer Minderheit).<sup>19</sup> The six-page epistle detailed the problems that East German homosexuals faced in their day-to-day lives and advocated for an information center primarily for homosexuals.

The writers opened by referencing two recent murders that had occurred in East Berlin which, to their mind, had been the result of the victims' homosexuality, and expressed their desire to explain to the authorities the problems that homosexuals faced in

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<sup>19</sup> The letter is signed by HIB members Peter Rausch, Thomas Kaminski, P. Sonnenburg, Siegfried Spremberg, and Michael Eggert. See "Schreiben an die Volkskammer der DDR (Rechtsausschuss) vom 22.10.1978 (Sozialistische Freizeitgestaltung einer Minderheit)." Schwules Museum.

the GDR. First, however, they praised the state for its abolition of Paragraph 175 ten years earlier. With same-sex love no longer punishable by law, homosexuals should have been able to develop into socialist personalities with equal rights under the law. But centuries of prejudice informed by an enduring petit bourgeois morality had led to emotional rejection of and, in some cases, violence against homosexuals in the GDR. While the workplace was generally safe for homosexuals, the leisure sector was where discrimination was most prominent, especially in places where one might seek to find a romantic or sexual partner. While heterosexuals could find partners in the workplace, at bars or clubs, or through newspaper personal column advertisements, homosexuals often faced discrimination in these situations. Only a few restaurants were openly accepting to the homosexual community. There were no bars or clubs where they could socialize uninhibitedly. To meet their need for socialization, some homosexuals resorted to public parks or toilets and consequently fell victim to violent hate crimes.

According to the authors of the letter, these conditions did not correspond to socialist ideals. Working class homosexuals contributed equally to social wealth, including raising socialist children, and were thus entitled to an equal share of societal benefits. The situation in which homosexuals found themselves at that time, the letter stressed, was a remnant of capitalist legacy that had not yet been addressed under state socialism. However, the authors insisted, they were thoroughly convinced that homosexuals could enhance the quality of their life in the GDR, as they trusted the state to find a solution for their issues that did not rid them of their homosexuality, but allowed them to flourish as homosexual socialist citizens.

In an effort to motivate the authorities into action, the signatories made concrete suggestions to their interlocutors. While some magazines had published informative articles about homosexuality, they admitted, there remained insufficient education on the topic in schools and through television programs. This lack of information led to degrading and dangerous situations for homosexuals, such as meeting clandestinely in public toilets, so much so that homosexuals faced violence daily. Yet the police did not view these crimes as major offenses worthy of their full attention. The victims rarely reported their attacks as they mistrusted the authorities to apprehend the offenders. In some instances, homosexuals even dealt with cases of police brutality. Of course, the authors emphasized, these instances were not representative of the state's attitudes, but rather expressed the prejudices of individual officers, instructed to protect homosexuals as they would any other citizens, but failing to comprehend their mission due to their faulty education.

This argument led the authors to their primary concern in writing the letter. They posed the question: How did the state, that was as much theirs as that of any other of its inhabitants, intend to win the trust of its homosexual citizens? The signatories clarified that they did not question the notion of trust in the socialist system *per se*, but rather the trust that homosexuals could only draw from full integration and acceptance within a socialist society. Yet the state had acted contradictorily: while decriminalizing homosexuality, it had also endorsed research on intervention during pregnancy to prevent the birth of homosexuals, which implied that homosexuality was a hereditary disease that required a cure. The writers argued that it was not; it was the natural tendency of a number of citizens, and it did not contravene the principles of socialism. Homosexuals

should, therefore, be entirely integrated into the GDR's socialist society. Yet, ridding society of prejudices could take years and, with homosexuals facing violence and discrimination, the problem demanded immediate attention. The authors of the letter proposed a solution: a leisure and information center primarily for homosexuals, fully operating under the auspices of state socialism. The HIB had petitioned this type of facility from the state for years, but for various reasons it had not been successful in obtaining it, despite its complete legality under the GDR's existing legislation. All that was required was for the state to apply its laws without discrimination in the interest of its homosexual citizens.

The signatories closed by expressing an interest in discussing the matter further with state representatives and beseeching the People's Chamber to recognize their plight and the urgent need for change. Finally, they claimed that changing the situation would benefit not only homosexuals, but society as a whole by adhering to the SED's own socialist standards and empowering more members of the working class. The letter ended by expressing confidence in the authorities and their acknowledgement of the HIB's concerns in the interest of socialist democracy.

The letter illustrates HIB's use of consensual contention when engaging with the state. Although the SED had legalized homosexuality in 1968, many still viewed same-sex love as bourgeoisie or immoral. The HIB did not blame the SED-regime for this; on the contrary, the letter praised it for having abolished Paragraph 175 and attributed the resentful attitudes to centuries of misinformation about and discrimination against homosexuals. They addressed this problem as one that had not yet been addressed in the GDR, but certainly would be given the state's dedication to socialist values. The

HIB took on the role of the messenger, bringing to the state's attention the capitalist nature of the problems homosexuals faced so that the state could rectify them.

The HIB also flipped the assumption of homosexuality as a bourgeois phenomenon, claiming that homosexuality and the socialist personality were not mutually exclusive; it was the circumstances to which homosexuals were subjected that were reminiscent of capitalism. The authors of the letter used the SED's own ideals to support this logic, arguing that as homosexuals were part of the working class, they were entitled to equal enjoyment of social benefits. Thus, the mistreatment of homosexuals was in urgent need of attention as it did not uphold the standards of socialism set by the SED. The writers presented their argument as a byproduct of their devotion to the socialist cause.

It is also notable that the HIB sought support from the state in the first place. They wanted circumstances to improve for homosexuals through socialism, not outside of it. The HIB did not desire to subvert the state, but rather to work with the state to improve social conditions by applying socialist values equally to homosexuals. They acknowledged that there was a general lack of trust in the state within the homosexual community. However, in writing this letter, the HIB demonstrated a certain level of confidence in the state. They trusted that the SED-regime, when presented with the proper information, would address their problems as part of the Party's commitment to equality through socialism. By describing their concerns from the perspective of a minority, as indicated by the letter's title, the HIB hoped to gently but determinedly pressure the Party into honoring its supposed commitment to equality for all under socialism as formulated by none other than Vladimir I. Lenin, when he guaranteed the

principles of freedom of representation and equality to all national minority groups in his “Bill on the Equality of Nations and the Safeguarding of National Minorities”.

In advocating for better social conditions for homosexuals under socialism and citing specific socialist policies that supported their argument, the HIB took the state by its word and demanded action in consent with the state’s ideology but critical of its praxis. The HIB was not against the SED-state; on the contrary, its members wanted to assert visibility of homosexuality and educate at the proposed information center within the boundaries set by state socialism. Many members of the HIB were SED Party members, but even those who were not recognized the importance of working within the confines of socialism. The HIB’s consentful contention was thus not “dissimulated.”<sup>20</sup> Rather, it represented the genuine convictions of HIB members who felt that socialism was the best way to achieve their goals. In 1990, Peter Rausch recalled that the HIB genuinely felt that homosexual emancipation should be achieved through cooperation with the state. The HIB’s co-founder Michael Eggert highlighted this fact in a statement from 2010 when he remarked: “[W]e lived in the state and it was clear, when we want[ed] something, that [was] only possible with the existing institutions, and that [was] the way we want[ed] to do things" (qtd. in McLellan 115). HIB members were convinced that gay liberation could be part of successful socialism, if only the state were aware of all that true liberation entailed. As the SED-state was not, the HIB took upon themselves the responsibility of informing the state about it and about the potential benefits of improving social conditions for its homosexual citizens (Rausch” 2).

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<sup>20</sup> Straughn defines “dissimulated consentful contention” as a form of political engagement in which actors manipulate the system by posing as loyal citizens, often to make their argument more “palatable to authorities” (1607-1609).

On November 8, 1978, the HIB received notice that the petition had been forwarded to the Ministry of Interior and later to the Ministry of Health. Members wrote additional letters explaining that theirs was neither a security nor a health, but simply a social issue (Rausch 7). After multiple other petitions, the Council of Ministers met with members of the HIB on September 20, 1979, nearly a year after the group's first supplication, to discuss the proposed information center (7). The Council of Ministers proved dismissive of the HIB's demands, arguing that the state understood the problem but could not promote homosexuals, as same-sex partnerships did not benefit the state through procreation. The Council was further hesitant to support the goals of homosexuals because it saw the HIB's societal and political goals as different from its own, as the state viewed intimate relationships first and foremost as a means to propagate socialist society (7).

The state's flat rejection to address their concerns led HIB members to question their supposition that the state only needed to know the real concerns of homosexuals in order to address them and, ultimately, resulted in the dissolution of the group. While the HIB did not achieve the results for which they had hoped, the state's willingness to engage with them indicates that their consentfully contentious petition campaign was successful to an extent. While the Council's response felt like a failure to HIB members at the time, they effectively brought to the state's attention the issues that homosexuals faced in the GDR. For the first time, the SED heard and acknowledged gay voices, meaning the HIB laid the groundwork for future gay activism in the GDR.

## **Conclusion**

The tenth WFYS was a turning point in the history of gay activism in the GDR and the HIB's engagement with the SED-state. For the first time, the HIB publicly appeared as gay citizens and assisted Peter Tatchell in his efforts to bring the transnational gay liberation movement to Eastern Europe. Inspired by Tatchell's bravery but aware of the SED-state's sensitivity to dissent, the HIB developed methods of activism that functioned within the GDR's socialist regime. The HIB's banner was the first example of the group's consensual contention vis-a-vis the SED-state, but members of the HIB pursued this approach throughout the duration of the group's existence, until the state outright rejected their requests for an information center.

This led the group to give up on its activism and to disappear into the private realms of its individual members. In a lecture from 1990, Rausch identified five factors that had prevented the HIB from achieving its goals: (1) state-sanctioned research on homosexuality was motivated by negative attitudes and biases; (2) scientific research reflected these negative opinions; (3) scientists aimed to find a cure for homosexuality; (4) researchers viewed homosexuals only as an object of research; and (5) Marxist social scientists considered the problem of gender roles but ignored homosexuals in the process (Rausch 4). Though the circumstances of the 1970s prohibited success, the experience of activism itself allowed the HIB's founding members to mature and evolve strategically during the 1980s. They ably navigated the subversive spaces of the opposition promoted by the Protestant Church and by 1986 established a full-fledged gay association under the

inconspicuous name, *Sonntags Club*. Although the HIB never succeeded in pressuring the state to openly support the gay community, their experiences in the 1970s informed their social engagement in the 1980s and contributed to the abolition of Paragraph 175 in reunified Germany in 1994.

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