

## CHAPTER 5

# The Politics of Homosexuality in Weimar Germany

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter tells the story of the homosexual movement and the fight against Paragraph 175 during the Weimar era. It considers how the First World War and the German revolution of 1918 created both new opportunities and new challenges for the homosexual movement.

### OVERVIEW

This chapter considers how the First World War and the German revolution of 1918 created both new opportunities and new challenges for the homosexual movement. In the context of the flourishing gay scenes of the Weimar era, the homosexual movement experienced an amazing upswing in interest and participation. Socialist and democratic ideas were in the air at the opening of the Weimar era, and homosexual activists across Europe watched with excitement as the victory of communism in the Soviet Union led to the repeal of that country's laws against homosexuality. For many gay men and women it was an exciting time—especially for those in the big cities, where they found opportunities they had never seen before. Like many other Germans, gay men and lesbians were energized by the war and the revolution, which inspired them to make claims toward citizenship more forcefully than they had in the past.

There has, however, been a tendency to exaggerate Weimar Germany's tolerance of homosexuality. This chapter offers an important corrective. Conservative voices warning against the dangers of modern life were plentiful. Politically, parties such as the Catholic Center Party and the nationalist German National People's Party quickly recovered, while fringe parties like the newly organized Nazi Party lurked ominously in the background. The WhK, consequently, had its work cut out for it. Magnus Hirschfeld carried on with his business of spreading public enlightenment about sexuality and fighting against Paragraph 175. He was joined by both old friends and new supporters, but he also encountered many new challenges: professional adversaries, rivals for control of the growing homosexual movement, and, most dangerously, nationalist opponents of his sex reform agenda who would have been happy to see him dead.

### KEY TERMS

Magnus Hirschfeld; Kurt Hiller; *Der Eigene*; Scientific-Humanitarian Committee; Federation for Human Rights; Paragraph 175; Weimar era

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

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