

27 January - Holocaust Memorial Day : LGBT People, the Holocaust and Fascism

GMB and GMB Shout! support and engage with LGBT members and LGBT and cross-equality, anti-fascism causes, such as Holocaust Memorial Day. By doing so we are bringing into the present day the voices and personal testimonies of those people and minority groups who were suppressed, persecuted and eliminated.

Holocaust Memorial Day provides a great opportunity to highlight and campaign for positive change in our communities and workplaces, and to remind us all of our responsibility to protect the civil and human rights of everyone in our society.

History has taught us that standing together means we are stronger.

The ‘Untermenschen’ and Paragraph 175

We all know that the Nazis hated anyone who did not fit their narrow idea of who or what was ‘normal’. Millions of lives were destroyed or changed beyond recognition because of this hatred. As the Holocaust Memorial Day website says:

“Those deemed *untersmenschen* – sub-human, unworthy of life, included those who did not agree with Nazi views so Jehovah’s Witnesses, political opponents such as communists and socialists, trade unionists and Freemasons... . Those who did not conform to the Aryan ideal were also targeted. Black Germans, gay men and lesbians, and mentally or physically disabled people ...their lives were destroyed or irrevocably damaged.”



The Nazis began their persecution of gay people within a month of Hitler coming to power. Between 1933-1945, an estimated 100,000 gay men were arrested for violating [Paragraph 175](#), the anti-sodomy provision of the German penal code, dating back to 1871. As records are incomplete we will never know the true scale of how many ended up in concentration camps and who were medically experimented on, but it must have been many thousands.

Lesbians

Lesbianism was not technically a crime and so lesbians were generally not treated as harshly as gay men. Although there are a few reports that lesbians were sometimes imprisoned for their sexuality, it seems most would have been imprisoned for other reasons.

Lesbians did suffer though, for example, “the same destruction of clubs and other organisations of the homosexual subculture, the banning of its papers and magazines, the closure or surveillance of the bars at which they met. This led to a dispersal of lesbian women and their withdrawal into private circles of friends. Many broke off all contacts for fear of discovery and even changed their place of residence. A collective lesbian life-style and identity, which had begun to take shape since the turn of the century and especially in

the years of the Weimar Republic, was destroyed when the Nazi's came to power, and the effects would last well beyond the end of the 'Third Reich'." (<http://www.pink-triangle.org/%20>).

In the Concentration Camps

In 2000, the documentary film *Paragraph 175* chronicled the lives of gay men and a lesbian – with one witness account of a man seeing his lover eaten to death by dogs released by guards.

In the concentration camps, those deemed to be homosexual, the '175ers', were identified by the pink triangle which has since been adopted as an international symbol of LGBT pride. The film *Bent* portrayed this pride even in a concentration camp, in a striking and unforgettable way.

Estimates of those who died are difficult to ascertain as many records were destroyed; it could be anything from 15,000 to 400,000, some at the hands of fellow inmates. "There was no solidarity for the homosexual prisoners; they belonged to the lowest caste. Other prisoners, even when between themselves, used to target them." This political and personal hatred, contempt and scorn are the same hatred that is used to "justify" the abuse, attacks and killings of so many LGBT people even today, here and abroad.

Research by Professor Ruediger Lautmann of the University of Bremen shows that of the non-Jewish camp inmates, gay men had the highest rate of death (53%). Three out of four deaths among gay men occurred within the first year of their internment.

After World War 2

In spite of most Nazi-era laws being revoked following Germany's defeat, Paragraph 175 remained in effect. Consequently, the post-war years saw the persecution of gay men and some lesbians continue with many being re-arrested on charges that the Nazis had brought.

Under Allied Occupation, some gay men were forced to serve out their terms of imprisonment regardless of time already served in concentration camps. Gay men were specifically denied compensation as victims of National Socialism.

Recognition and Commemoration

In 1969, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) revised Paragraph 175 decriminalising homosexual relations between men over the age of 21.

In 1994, Germany abolished Paragraph 175 and in 2002 pardoned those convicted under the statute during the Nazi era. At long last, recognition of the persecution of LGBT people during the Holocaust became internationally understood and the survivors officially recognised.



The Homomonument in Amsterdam commemorates LGBT victims of the Holocaust

Why do trade unionists support Holocaust Memorial Day?

Nowadays, we face very real threats to and hatred of our 'differences' from the far right and other extremists on our streets, at the polls, in our workplaces and in our homes. This affects us all.

We are passionate about tackling homo-, bi- and transphobia, discrimination and exclusion wherever it arises, and in sharing and promoting our diverse stories, lives and achievements. By doing so, we come to understand and commemorate our past, to organise ourselves in the present and to create a shared future with equality and human rights at the heart of everything we do.

This is why trade unions like GMB and trade union LGBT networks like GMB Shout! commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day in workplaces and in society.

Websites and Resources

Holocaust Memorial Day www.hmd.org.uk

Homocaust www.hardenet.com/homocaust/index.htm

Paragraph 175 www.hardenet.com/homocaust/paragraph175.htm

Pink Triangle www.pink-triangle.org/%20

US Holocaust Memorial Museum www.ushmm.org/

GMB Shout! – LGBT network

Web: www.gmbunion.org/equality/shout1.htm

Email: gmbshout@hotmail.co.uk

Facebook: GMB Shout! – LGBT

Join GMB Shout! and help us make the workplace and world a better place for us all. You can join regardless of your trade union status, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Our recruitment form is available on the above webpage and our Facebook page. Alternatively, complete the form on the next page.



THE DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998

The information supplied on the application form will be retained by GMB Shout! on a database and will be used to compile a membership list. Your details will remain confidential at all times and will not be revealed to any other parties other than the national and your region's Shout! networks. The information will **not** be used for marketing purposes. GMB Shout! will contact you by post, telephone or email with details of future events, courses organised or promoted by GMB Shout! and updates and briefings linked by the activities of the network and GMB Union. For all enquiries about data protection and to leave GMB Shout!, please contact us on gmbshout@hotmail.co.uk

