

Kurt Hiller. / Oosterhuis, Harry. Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to the Second World War. ed. / R. Aldrich; G. Wotherspoon. New York, Londen: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2000. p. 209-2010.

Hiller, Kurt (1885-1972), German lawyer, publicist and activist. When Hiller died in 1972, he was the last of the leading men of the German homosexual movement of the pre-World War II era. During the final years of his life, Hiller wrote his memoirs, published as *Leben gegen die Zeit* (1972). The title concisely demonstrates how he, as both a homosexual and a leftist-liberal political activist, looked back on his life: as a fight against the maelstrom of history, against the overwhelming forces in Germany that threatened humanism, individual freedom and rationalism.

Hiller grew up in an assimilated Jewish family and a liberal intellectual ambiance. He studied law and he wrote a dissertation in which he questioned the penalization of homosexual intercourse ('unnatural vice' according to Article 175 of the German penal code), abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, incest and bestiality. As long as other people and society at large were not harmed, according to Hiller, any curtailment of individual freedom was rationally indefensible. This was, in fact, also the basic principle of his political activism. At the time of World War I, he was one of the main spokesmen of a group of young progressive intellectuals who gathered around the label *Aktivismus* and who criticized in particular the authoritarian structures and radical nationalism of Wilhelmine Germany.

In the Weimar Republic, Hiller not only played a prominent role in the peace movement but also in the homosexual movement. Already before World War I, he was active in Hirschfeld's *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* and during the 1920s he was one of the driving forces behind attempts at reforming Germany's laws in the field of sexuality, marriage and family. Although Hiller cooperated with Hirschfeld, he did not agree with his biological explanation of homosexuality, nor did he believe that the Hirschfeld's theory of various gendered *Zwischenstufen* should be used for political ends. The starting point for homosexual emancipation, according to Hiller, should not be found in scientific evidence for homosexuality as a natural, innate condition, but in the fundamental liberal right to self-determination. In contrast to many other leading figures in the homosexual movement of those days, Hiller did not see a need for a scientific explanation as a justification for homosexuality. To him, such a defensive attitude was merely a sign that homosexuals lacked political awareness and self-esteem. Already in 1912, in Hirschfeld's *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, Hiller wrote that homosexuals do not need to be satisfied with the compassion and understanding of those 'who pretend to be progressive', but that they have to stand up for their rights out of a sense of self-respect. Not homosexuals but their oppressors

should offer their apologies, he felt. With such statements, Hiller was well ahead of his time.

Right after the Nazi take-over, Hiller was arrested, because he had sharply criticized the Nazi party in the famous leftist journal *Die Weltbühne*. During his nine months in concentration camps, he was seriously maltreated. After his release in 1934, he escaped from Germany and tried to continue his work as writer and political activist in Prague and later in London. His efforts to build a unified antifascist front on the left was frustrated by the communist politics dictated by Stalin. Only in 1955 did Hiller return to his native country for good. Article 175 of the penal code, which had made even more rigid by the Nazis, was still in effect in West Germany. One of Hiller's last activities involved the re-establishment of the *Wissenschaft-humanitäres Komitee* in 1962, but it did not generate much support. After homosexual intercourse had been decriminalized in 1969, Hiller disbanded the committee. Three years later he died.

K. Hiller, *Leben Gegen die Zeit. I Logos, II Eros*. Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1972.