

The History of the Institut for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics

Summary:

The history of the Institute was strongly influenced by the changing political and social environment. In 1920, the physician Alfred Grotjahn was appointed as first Chair for Social Hygiene in Germany at the University of Berlin. During reign of national socialism, the Institute for Social Hygiene was closed and many social medicine co-workers emigrated due to political, religious or racial prosecution.

From 1933 and 1945 the Institut was transformed into an Institute for Racial Hygiene, chaired by Fritz Lenz.

In 1947 the professorship for social hygiene was re-established at the Humboldt University's Institute of Hygiene and Microbiology and directed by Alfred Beyer (1885-1961), who reconceptualised and reorganised the field of study.

Under his successor, Kurt Winter (1909-1987), the Institute of Hygiene was separated from the Institute of Hygiene and Microbiology and became an independent Department of Social Hygiene.

The aim of the project is to work up the scientific history of the institute as well as the history of the staff. The work is based on comprehensive material in the institute as well as the investigation of external sources.

Part 1 of the project, which comprised the illustration of Grotjahn's work and the work of his co-workers who had to emigrate into the USA, has been finished. This biographical presentation was based on research conducted at German and American Archives. The Jewish scientists were active in different areas of public health and pursued relatively successful careers. The societal system and mentality of the USA have obviously profited from the professional background and experience arising from the emigration of the former social medicine experts of the Charité.

Part 2 of the project includes the work up of the history between 1949 and 1989 and is currently under process. For this purpose former co-workers were interviewed and scientific material was evaluated.

Principal investigator:
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