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A man from eastern Spain has become the first to receive an apology from the State for a 1970's law which criminalised homosexuality.



Antoni Ruiz, from Valencia, received an official letter signed by the Spanish justice minister, plus a 4,000-euros (£3,600) compensation cheque after spending 3 months in prison in 1976 under the Social Danger and Rehabilitation Law (La Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitacion Social), according to BBC.

This is the first case recognised since the Socialist Government enacted the Historical Memory Law in 2007, which honours "those who were prosecuted unfairly and suffered violence" during the decades between the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship that oppressed the country for over 30 years.

"This law sets a landmark as it gives the dictatorship's victims the opportunity to expose Franco's oppression as well as the accomplice silence and long-lasting permissiveness of the European governments such as the British and the German in that time", explained Diego Arcos, President of Casal Argentino in Barcelona, which is an association that supports Franco's victims movement.

According to Spanish broadsheet, El País, when Ruiz revealed his homosexuality to his parents at the age of 17, a nun denounced him to the authorities and police imprisoned him without a trial. Not only did he go to Valencia's Modelo prison, but he was also punished in other provinces' penitentiary centres such as Madrid and Extremadura.

His file was not destroyed until 2001.

After the law came into force in 1970, thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people lived an ordeal in prisons across Spain. It was not until 1978, two years after Franco's death, that the law was abolished. However, unlike the political prisoners, gay people were not regarded as victims of Franco's fascist regime and were forgotten by the Spanish democratic transition and years afterwards.

It is difficult to estimate exactly how many people were deprived of freedom due to their sexual orientation during the dictatorship as a previous legislation called "Ley de Vagos y Maleantes" (Lazy and Bad People Law) was passed in 1954 also sent gay people to prison and considered them as "dangerous" beings.

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