

# **'The Small Wars of Everyday Life.' Population Politics and the *Mutterberatungsstellen* in the German Borderlands of Czechoslovakia**

by

Teresa Balkenende

The *Mutterberatungsstellen* (MB), or mother advisory clinics, first appeared in the region of Northern Bohemia and Moravia in the opening decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Built usually through a local alliance of progressive doctors, ethnic protection societies, and middle-class women's groups, these facilities were intended to provide especially working mothers with educational information on health and nutrition as well as material assistance in the form of milk, food, and cash subsidies. Organizers expressed hopes that clinic services would raise the standard of health culture within the German national community, instill positive family and ethnic values, and lower the region's high rates of infant mortality by addressing the social causes believed to be at the root of these phenomena. In some senses, the clinic movement was quite successful. Thanks largely to the protection societies' efforts to promote them through the larger Youth Welfare system, the facilities mushroomed all across the Sudetenland in the pre-World War I period and especially in the interwar years. Individual clinics were nonetheless almost always terribly underfunded, and efforts to bring technological and personnel changes were generally assigned a rather low political priority. All this would change, however, in the mid-1930s when the MB were suddenly launched to the center of a protracted public opinion battle over the so-called "population crisis" in the Sudetenland.

On its surface, this "population crisis" concerned the fundamental physical vulnerability of the Sudetenland community as evidenced above all by its low and declining fertility rate but also by the high incidence of infant mortality and child illness in the area. Agents of the Czechoslovak state argued that the crisis was primarily medical, and recommendations generally fell along the lines of strengthening centralized state supervision and funding for public health facilities like the MB in the borderland so as to improve their technical performance. Challenges to this interpretation were proffered by representatives of the ethnic protection societies and particularly by those which had played such a prominent role in developing the MB, namely, the *Bund der Deutschen* (BdD), and the *Kulturverband* (KV). These actors argued that the crisis was not so much one of health, but of poor ethical training and that the physical decline of the German community was rooted in its rejection of traditional family values and of "natural" gender roles and hierarchies.

Clearly, there were broader matters at stake in this debate, and it is tempting to argue that the "real" population crisis in Czechoslovakia during the

1930s had more to do with the irredentism of the German residents of the Sudetenland than with the demographic transition that had been underway in the area already for several decades. Protection society leaders sought to transform the “problem” of declining birth rates into an instrument of nationalist mobilization while representatives of the state hoped to defuse the issue by treating it as an objective matter of efficient scientific management. But it would be a mistake to regard the “population crisis” of the 1930s as nothing more than a red herring to distract from the more fundamental problem of Nazi German designs on Czechoslovakia. It was, in other words, no accident that this period of political upheaval should be accompanied by debates about the sustainability of the borderland population. As Michel Foucault has warned us, modern “governmentality” since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century has been largely one of population management. Modern state rule thus “has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on.”<sup>1</sup> It therefore makes sense that the Sudeten German challenges to Czechoslovak rule should have been framed in terms of population mismanagement and gender crisis.

What the example of the MB demonstrates is how central beliefs about gender hierarchy and traditional “family values” were to notions of proper government and of social order within the German middle-class associations. Historians of East Central Europe have devoted considerable attention to the rise of class and nationalist ideologies within the Sudetenland voluntary associations and have demonstrated how middle-class Germans of the late imperial and interwar periods responded to social and political challenges by adopting a more strident nationalism and by appealing to the grievances of the lower social orders.<sup>2</sup> Thus far, however, there have been very few attempts to address the ways that those same middle-class organizations approached the so-called “woman question” regarding the growth of female wage labor in the Sudeten territories. Female labor and women’s public activism were, nonetheless, important concerns for the middle-class nationalist organizations, and they became all the more so in the context of the political and economic crises of the 1930s. The history of the clinics thus provides us with an interesting lens on the evolution of middle-class nationalist attitudes about the intersections of race, class, and gender in the German-inhabited border territories of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>1</sup> MICHEL FOUCAULT: *Governmentality*, in: *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 3: *Power*, ed. by JAMES D. FAUBION, New York 1994, pp. 216-217.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, GARY B. COHEN: *The Politics of Ethnic Survival. Germans in Prague, 1861-1914*, Princeton/NJ 1981; PIETER JUDSON: *Exclusive Revolutionaries. Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914*, Ann Arbor/MI 1996; JEREMY KING: *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans. A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948*, Princeton and Oxford 2002.

This essay will describe the evolution of the MB over the course of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and will use the example of their development to try to tease out some of the gender and racial assumptions that informed the middle-class men's and women's groups that organized them. It will argue that the protection societies' success in mobilizing the residents of the Sudetenland in defense of their own national agenda demonstrates how weak Czechoslovak "governmentality" was in the borderland regions. It will also show that these groups were well served in their battles against the state by eugenics and race hygiene discourses, which provided them with a very flexible rhetoric with which to defend "traditional" middle-class assumptions about gender and social hierarchy.

### The Foundations of Youth Welfare and the *Mutterberatungsstellen*

The organizational foundations for the establishment of the Youth Welfare system of which the *Mutterberatungsstellen* were a part were laid in 1907 with the Congress for Child Protection in Vienna. This meeting represented the first coordinated attempt on the part of the Austrian medical profession to grapple with the causes of infant mortality in the Empire. The physician attendees determined to ensure that the momentum of their work would not be lost, and therefore established the *Zentralstelle für Kinderschutz und Jugendfürsorge* to generate public awareness and sympathy for the cause of child mortality prevention.<sup>3</sup>

The Vienna-based *Jugendfürsorge* (JF) became the locus of a series of efforts in the next few years. Immediately following the Congress, for example, physicians affiliated with the institution initiated a five-year investigation into the scope and causes of infant mortality in Cisleithenia intended to raise awareness about the problem of child health among members of the reading public.<sup>4</sup> Other efforts of the JF centered on the "Everything for the Child" campaign. This initiative, launched in connection with the celebrations of the 1908 Emperor Jubilee, succeeded in raising 2,000,000 Crowns for the estab-

<sup>3</sup> JAROSLAV KALLAB: *Pracovní Plán Sociální Péče o Mládež na Moravě* [Working Plan for the Social Care of Youth in Moravia], Brno 1926, pp. 9-18; Also, HYNEK PELC: *Sociální lékařství* [Social Medicine], Praha 1937, pp. 105-115.

<sup>4</sup> Based on questionnaires returned by provincial medical officers, the study ultimately concluded that rates of mortality were indeed very high in the region. In all Austria, for example, 25.2% of all pregnancies ended in stillbirths and another 20.5% of those children delivered alive died within their first year of life. Figures for Bohemia were somewhat higher than average, with the rate of stillborns registering at almost 30% and infant deaths reaching 21.2%. The study's authors argued that social causes – namely, the poverty, factory employment and poor education of women – were largely to blame for these dire statistics, and they urged their fellow physicians to organize against infant mortality and to contribute to organizational efforts on behalf of mother education and child mortality prevention. See: LEOPOLD MOLL: *Säuglingssterblichkeit in Österreich. Ursachen und Bekämpfung*, Wien 1914.

lishment of an Imperial Office for Mother and Infant Welfare in Vienna. It also provided the occasion for the creation of the *Landeskommission für Kinderschutz und Jugendfürsorge* (LK) at the provincial level. The LK was to provide the organizational framework for a statewide network of associations that would oversee the construction and maintenance of institutions committed to better medical and social care for Austria's mothers and children. In the Bohemian lands these were organized on a national basis, so that German and Czech sections were established in Bohemia in 1908, in Silesia in 1914, and in Moravia resp. in 1908 (the German section) and 1910 (the Czech section).<sup>5</sup>

The LK relied on private voluntary and charitable groups to carry out its goals at the local level. These were usually religious charities and national or women's associations that had organized earlier in defense of orphaned or abandoned children on the basis of the 1860s poor laws. Individual institutions depended on private contributions and community moneys and were often grossly underfunded. Affiliation with the Vienna-based Youth Welfare offered these groups greater financial security through the pooling of resources. As Austria's only statewide child welfare organization, it also conferred upon its affiliates a kind of quasi-official status. Local groups nonetheless maintained the legal character of private associations, and while it is probable that organizers hoped the timing of their campaign would endow it with an appeal of *Kaiserstreue*, the local groups sometimes used the organizational structure of the Youth Welfare for nationalist aims that were very much in opposition to the notion of a peaceable, multi-national Empire.

Such was the case in the Sudetenland. Initially, organizers attempted to ensure that the two national organizations within Bohemia and Moravia would cooperate closely and provide mutual material support. These efforts were stalled, however, when leaders of one of the largest orphan protection societies in the Sudetenland, the *Zentralstelle für deutsche Waisenpflege und Jugendfürsorge*, made complete autonomy of the German and Czech groups a condition for their participation in the Viennese organization.

The *Zentralstelle* was itself older than the Vienna-based Youth Welfare system, having been established in 1898 by representatives of the BdD, the *Deutscher Volksrat* (DV), and the *Kanzlei der deutschen Bezirke Böhmens* in response to the political pressures of the late imperial era. Prior decades had witnessed the arrival of a new mass politics and, with it, a new emphasis on the demographic relationship between the regions' Czech and German populations. Recognizing the potential political consequences of an erosion of their numerical strength in this new era, leaders of German voluntary associations had begun to make overtures to the lower social orders by promoting a new kind of German nationalism. In place of the "scholastic" and "merely intellectual" concerns of the old national movement, they now committed themselves to the protection of the German racial inheritance through a new *Men-*

<sup>5</sup> KALLAB (cf. footnote 3), pp. 12-13.



*schonpflege* – that is, through “the care for the welfare of the *Volk* members in their existential conditions.”<sup>6</sup> Initial interest in the cause of infant and child health was actually minimal. The original mission of the *Zentralstelle* was simply to provide orphans in the mixed German-Czech language districts with German-speaking homes.<sup>7</sup> In 1908, however, the founders of the *Zentralstelle* expressed their willingness to lend their organizational base to a broader agenda of infant and child care on the condition that the original nationalist intentions of the group were not compromised through too close an association with the Czechs. The provincial organizations ultimately agreed, and thereafter efforts of the two national committees proceeded along separate routes.

The creation of the Provincial Child Welfare Commissions prior to the First World War represented an important step toward centralization and co-ordination in the sphere of child welfare. Nonetheless, this was not to be a straight and unbroken path. Many of the local associations cooperated with the central institution only when it was advantageous, and others evaded Viennese leadership entirely.<sup>8</sup> In other instances, private associations broke away from the central organization and began independent work. This would change only after 1918, when the social dislocations that accompanied the demobilization and anxieties about the need to replace the huge wartime population losses generated a renewed interest in child and infant welfare.

<sup>6</sup> The words come from an essay printed in *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau*, introducing the new *Jugendfürsorge* organization to the public. “Die Vorschläge, die etwa 15 Jahre vorher auf einer Hauptversammlung des Bundes der Deutschen in Böhmen zum Ziele einer Neuverfassung der Jugendfürsorgearbeit erstattet worden waren, bauten sich auf dem Gedanken auf, daß der ‘destillierte Nationalismus’, der ‘scholastische’, ‘dogmatische’, bloß intellektuellen Erwägungen und Abteilungen entstammende Nationalismus auf die Dauer nur für einen kleinen Kreis von Volksgenossen lebensfähig sei, daß aber ein einheitlicher Volkswille, ein zielbewußtes Volksleben und -streben nur auf verwirklichter Volkspflege, Volkskultur aufgebaut werden könne. Diese Volkskultur dürfe nicht wieder bloß den gewöhnlichen literarischen volksbildnerischen Charakter tragen, indem man bloß Vorträge hält und Büchereien gründet, sondern sie müsse Menschenpflege sein, Sorge und Fürsorge für den Volksgenossen in seinen Existenzbedingungen und die Arbeit des Bundes wäre schlecht eingestellt, wollte sie aus Volksmitteln ankauten, was der Abgewirtschaftete nicht halten kann, statt das Volk durch tiefgehende Kulturarbeit zu befähigen, aus eigener Kraft immer tüchtiger, selbständiger, lebensfroher, tatkräftiger, siegreicher zu werden.” See: Grundgedanken des Jahresberichtes der deutschen Landeskommission für Kinderschutz und Jugendfürsorge, in: *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau*, September 10, 1923, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> ROBERT GOLITSCHKE: *Jugendfürsorge*, in: *Caritas* 14 (1935), 1, pp. 4-9; see also RUŽENA KOLLMANNOVÁ: 15 let práce České zemské komise pro péči o mládež v Praze [15 Years of Work of the Czech Provincial Commission for Youth Care in Prague], in: *Péče o mládež* 2 (1924), 4-5, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> LUKÁŠ FASORA: *Systém České zemské péče o mládež na Moravě v letech 1921-1937* [The Organization of the Czech Provincial Youth Care in Moravia in the Years 1921-1937], Ph.D. diss., Masarykova univerzita, Brno 2000, p. 5.

Efforts to establish a well-organized network of MB grew out of these post-war concerns. A handful of such clinics had been established in the Bohemian borderlands in the years just prior to the First World War, usually by middle-class women's groups such as the Mother Protection Society (*Mutterschutz*), the Women's Assistance Society (*Frauenhilfsverein*), or the Society of German Housewives (*Verein deutscher Hausfrauen*) in cooperation with municipal officials or physicians. Based on a model imported from France before the turn of the century, the MB educated new mothers on infant and child nutrition and distributed fresh milk to those employed outside the home.<sup>9</sup> The creation of such clinics in the Sudetenland virtually ceased during the First World War, but in the months and years immediately following the armistice, German and Czech volunteers affiliated with private charitable organizations began to establish clinics with renewed energy.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, so many of these groups began operations in the immediate post-war period that broad popular enthusiasm began to grow for some kind of centralized oversight and state funding.<sup>11</sup> Agents within the newly organized Ministries of Public Health and of Social Welfare took the first deliberate steps in this direction in the years just following the war. Fearing that Czechoslovak state supervision would mean an end to the autonomous work of the voluntary organizations in the borderlands, representatives of the BdD and DV seized the initiative to force stronger ties among German infant and child welfare groups. In 1921, they succeeded in convincing agents of the Czechoslovak Social Welfare Ministry to preserve the national division in the state's restructured youth welfare system. The voluntary associations that provided the organizational labor for German Youth Welfare at the local level maintained the character of private associations and continued to represent a broad range of political and social viewpoints. Individual groups were now also eligible to compete for small annual subsidies from the Ministries of Health and of Social Welfare. These were, however, notoriously small and funding in the interwar years still derived primarily from public community funds and private donations. Beyond this, all interactions between the state's Ministries of Health and of Social Welfare and the local organizations were mediated by the agents of the German Youth Welfare organization in Reichenberg (Liberec), and they often used their position to try to shield the local organizations from the state as much as possible. Until the administrative re-

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, pp. 55-69.

<sup>10</sup> *Náš program a naše práce před a po 28. říjnu 1918* [Our Program and Our Work Before and After 28. October 1918], in: *Zprávy Československé Ochrany Matek a Děti* 5 (1928), 10/11, pp. 109-122.

<sup>11</sup> FASORA (cf. footnote 8), pp. 10-13; for contemporary German sources on this question, see: Bericht des Organisationsbeamten Karl Theimer, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 4 (1919), 8/9, pp. 177-184, and MAX LENGSELDER: Die letzten Erfolge und die neuen Wege in der Bewegung für Mutter- und Säuglingsschutz, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 5 (1921), 12/13, pp. 293-296.

form of the 1930s, no other intermediary body existed that could claim such a role.<sup>12</sup>

### The Work of the "Women's Committees"

On the basis of this new organization, construction of new MB accelerated over the course of the immediate post-war years. In October of 1923, this work was given an important boost when JF organizers announced that they would sponsor the establishment of special "women's sections" within each district affiliate. These organizations were unique to the German organization and had no parallel in the Czech or Slovak contexts. Within German Youth Welfare, however, the women's sections were to oversee all mother protection services, infant welfare, and educational programs for female youth. Most importantly, the women's sections would be responsible for the creation and maintenance of new MB throughout the German speaking districts of Czechoslovakia.

In many German communities, the creation of the women's sections simply formalized a pattern that had emerged in the decades prior to the war, when middle-class women had first begun to organize in the name of national uplift and to involve themselves in the domestic affairs of their poor and working class counterparts. Interpretations of what the new divisions actually meant in terms of women's status within their communities differed, however. Some suggested, for example, that they represented an acknowledgment of women's new and important public roles. More than one writer noted that, in the postwar context where women now outnumbered men by a substantial margin, it simply was not possible for all women to marry.<sup>13</sup> For those who could not or wished not to raise families of their own, work on behalf of the national community represented a viable and worthy option.

The overwhelming tendency, however, was to describe the work of the women's sections in terms of women's natural maternal roles. In their public work inside the clinics, for example, women were said to draw upon their "innate subjectivity" and "natural feelings of human empathy." Maria Linhart, a clinic organizer from Brüx (Most), thus described the public labors of women in domestic terms at the founding meeting of the women's sections in 1923. As she noted, the establishment of the new divisions represented an acknowledgment of the distance that women had come in embracing public roles. Nonetheless, she assured her listeners:

<sup>12</sup> Problem described in LADISLAV PROCHÁZKA: *Reforma správy a zdravotnictví* [Reform of Administration and Health], in: *Zprávy Československé Ochrany Matek a Děti* 5 (1928), 9, pp. 99-100, and 12, pp. 132-133.

<sup>13</sup> See: PAULA HOTKO: *Frauenarbeit in der öffentlichen Fürsorge*, in: *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau* 1 (1926), 9, pp. 5-6; also: *Soziale Frauenberufe*, in: *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau* 8 (1933), 7/8, pp. 8-9; MILA TREU: *Zur Frauenfrage*, in: *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau* 6 (1931), 4, p. 6, and IRENE KIRPAL: *Die Frau im Beruf*, in: *Die Sozialdemokratin* 6 (1925), 6, pp. 5-6.

"The fundamental character of the woman's work remains the same, whether she carries out her work in small circles or whether it serves the broad public. The motto of her work 'to serve and to help' remains the same and can also become the lodestar for the work of the woman in Youth Welfare."<sup>14</sup>

The MB claimed to provide women with the opportunity to carry out familiar domestic roles in a broader national family. In some ways, the women's sections seem to have represented a kind of reinvention of a private sphere within the JF system. "As she works in the family," Paula Hotko, a clinic social worker explained, "[...] so too is [woman's] action in public based in altruism, in the care for others."<sup>15</sup>

Organizers of the women's sections appear to have been ambivalent about their clients' wage work outside the home. Middle-class attitudes toward women's labor had long been plagued by contradictions. On the one hand, middle-class Germans tended to define social reform in terms of workers' assimilation to their own family and gender norms. As the old liberal argument went, only through family responsibility would the male breadwinner achieve stability, purpose and the ambition to accumulate his own wealth, and only by becoming a property owner could he earn the "right" to participate in public, political life. Women were to remain at home with the children, financially dependent on the work of their men. Commentators argued that female wage labor contradicted this ideal and, it was believed, contributed to the instability of the working class family. At the same time, however, many business owners also recognized the necessity of cheap female labor and generally proved unwilling to support legal protections against women's wage work.

In the course of the 1920s, the MB reacted to these contradictions by trying to assist working women in balancing their family and wage labor obligations. Thus, on the one hand, much of the clinics' activities focused on the promotion of middle-class values like self-reliance and thrift, and associations between cleanliness, health and morality. Interactions between clinic volunteers and clients typically assumed the character of mentoring and patronage, and volunteers often described their work in terms of providing an "ethical example" that would lift the poor or working mother out of her ignorance and her poverty.<sup>16</sup> Unannounced visits to clients' homes were important for instil-

<sup>14</sup> "Der Grundcharakter des Wirkens der Frau aber ist der gleiche geblieben, ob sich nun ihr Schaffen und Walten im kleinen Kreise vollzieht oder ob es der großen Allgemeinheit dient. Das Motto ihres Wirkens, 'dienen und helfen', ist das gleiche geblieben und möge auch der Leitstern für das Schaffen der Frau in der Jugendfürsorge werden." See: *Frauenarbeit in der Jugendfürsorge*, in: *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau* 2 (1923), 3, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> "Wie sie in der Familie wirkt, mütterlich und schwesterlich, immer für die anderen sorgend, immer sich in die anderen einfühlend, so ist ihr Tun auch in der Öffentlichkeit auf Altruismus gestellt, auf die Sorge für die anderen." HOTKO (cf. footnote 13), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the comments of ANNA HART: *Vortrag über Mutterschutz und Säuglingsfürsorge* anlässlich der Tagung der Vertreterinnen der Frauenausschüsse in Reichenberg am 27. und 28. Oktober 1923, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 8 (1924), 1, pp. 31-38; also



ling a kind of self-monitoring behavior among clinic patrons around issues of household cleanliness and hygiene.<sup>17</sup> In other instances, volunteers relied on competition between clinic visitors to spur women to try to achieve middle-class standards of hygiene and dress. As one Dux (Duchov) worker explained:

"In quite a natural way, ambitions are awakened in women which stimulate the noblest sort of rivalry. At home, an exhausted mother might be on the verge of collapse under her onerous duties as housewife. Yet here, if her child is well-groomed and provided for, one might see a quietly transfiguring glimmer glide over her face."<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, female visitors to the MB were often encouraged to find work. In some cases, clinic workers went so far as to find clients employment in local factories (often the enterprises of their own husbands), or to provide them with work as domestics in their own homes.<sup>19</sup> As one clinic worker explained, this was necessary with younger mothers in particular "to distract them from foolish thoughts."<sup>20</sup> Clinics also sought, by providing day care options to working class patrons, to help women balance domestic roles with wage labor obligations. Where these kinds of support did not suffice, the MB frequently distributed small cash amounts and subsidies in kind. The level of this support was kept intentionally low, however, to encourage thrift and self-reliance. This practice became a matter of some dispute with clients, who naturally demanded more generous subsidies. Clinic workers stressed, however, that their primary work was education. Clients had to be conditioned to appreciate the advisory work of the clinics and to regard the distribution of provisions "as superfluous or as necessary only in urgent emergencies."<sup>21</sup>

MARIA RUNTSCH-LINHART: Arbeitsfeld der Frauenausschüsse, in: Jugendfürsorge 8 (1924), 12, pp. 367-386.

<sup>17</sup> MARGARETHE KÖRNER: Mutterberatungsstellen, in: Jugendfürsorge 5 (1929), 2, pp. 29-33.

<sup>18</sup> "Auf ganz natürliche Weise wird hier ein Ehrgeiz in den Frauen geweckt, der den edelsten Wettbewerb auslöst. Und manch einer abgehetzten Mutter, die vielleicht zu Hause beinahe mut- und kraftlos zusammenbricht unter all den schweren Hausfrauenpflichten, hier huscht ein stillverklärender Schimmer über ihre versorgten Züge, wenn ihr Kind mit zu den wohlgepflegten gehört." See: MITZI KLEE: Ein Besuch bei der deutschen Mutterberatungsstelle in Dux, in: Jugendfürsorge 4 (1919), 8/9, p. 224.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the incidents reported to the Silesian provincial office in ZAO (Zemský Archiv v Opaví), Inv. No. 2030, Kart. 3900, Ad. Zahl. C, č. 325, dated spring – summer 1920; also see RUNTSCH-LINHART (cf. footnote 16), p. 369.

<sup>20</sup> RUNTSCH-LINHART (cf. footnote 16), p. 369.

<sup>21</sup> Remenowsky explained: "Die vielfach bestehende Meinung, daß die Mütter nur dann in die Mutterberatungsstelle kommen, wenn sie Lebensmittel zugewiesen erhalten, läßt auf vollständige Verkenntung des Zweckes und der Bedeutung der Mutterberatungsstelle schließen. Kommt die Frau nur zur Beratungsstunde, damit sie das ½ Kg. Grieß oder den Liter Milch bekommt, dann ist es wohl besser, sie kommt überhaupt nicht, denn sie wird auf die Vorschläge des Arztes wenig hören und zu Hause dann doch wieder dem Rat 'der Großmutter' folgen. Dafür sind Mutterberatungen nicht geschaffen worden.

## Population Politics in the 1930s

The MB generated very little controversy in the 1920s. JF organizers at higher levels sometimes expressed concern about the need to maintain national independence in JF management. Likewise, there were occasional conflicts between the German and Czech clinics, especially in the mixed language districts where Czech women were in some cases turned away from German clinics, or when local JF organizers interfered with the establishment of Czech facilities. Such occurrences remained exceptional, however, and by large the work of the MB went on very quietly.

Matters began to change only in the 1930s, when the economic crisis exposed the weaknesses of the existing network of clinics. The clinics had generated a fair amount of enthusiasm in the 1920s, and the number of German establishments had grown from a mere handful to almost five hundred within a decade.<sup>22</sup> However, many of these lacked adequate funding and were otherwise substandard. Clinics, for example, typically occupied no more than single schoolrooms or local *Sokol* or *Turnverein* halls, where they shared space with desks, gym equipment, or other spare furniture. Health inspectors reported that clinics were cold and damp, lacked heat, electricity, medical equipment or – worse still – even doctors.<sup>23</sup> In newspaper editorials and in party journals, female clients of the facilities often complained that clinic staff members were often poorly trained and that facilities were insufficiently outfitted. The most common charge made against clinics, however, was that they were overcrowded, with queues that grew by the month.<sup>24</sup> Such criticisms testified to the inadequacies of the maternal and infant clinics, but also to the enormous and growing popularity of their services among women. The de-

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Diese müssen daher so eingerichtet sein, daß sie auf die Frauen aufklärend wirken und ihnen der Wert der Beratung allein klargemacht wird, so daß die Verteilung von Lebensmitteln überflüssig oder nur in dringenden Notfällen notwendig erscheint." See: JOHANNA REMENOWSKY: Die Mutterberatungsstellen der deutschmährischen Fürsorgeorganisationen und ihre Tätigkeit, in: Jugendfürsorge 5 (1921), 9, p. 227.

<sup>22</sup> JOSEF VESELÝ: Zdravotní péče o mládež v Československu [Health Care of Youth in Czechoslovakia], in: Zdravotnictví revue 9 (1927), 8, pp. 547-552.

<sup>23</sup> See reports in ZAB (Zemský Archiv v Brně), Fond G110; Karton 108; Inv. No. 42; also VESELÝ (cf. footnote 22), p. 545.

<sup>24</sup> The Communist women's journals frequently printed letters from women complaining of the inadequate staffing and facilities at the mother and child clinics or of the improper treatment they received there. Political desires to discredit the middle-class philanthropic organizations no doubt motivated the publication of these missives, but district medical reports and clinic records nonetheless frequently corroborate the observations of the letter writers. Socialist women's journals also printed women's complaints, but tended to give a more sympathetic view of the work of the clinics. See, for example, S. BASÁKOVÁ: Lístky dělnic [Letters of Workwomen], in: Komunistka 3 (1924), 31, p. 6, and S.L.: Útulek pro batolata v Kroměříži [Shelter for Toddlers in Kroměříž], in: Komunistka 3 (1924), 48, p. 3. Also the series, "Matky Budoucnosti [Mothers of the Future]," in: Ženské Noviny 12 (1930), pp. 22-29.

pression simply made these problems worse by eroding levels of public contributions and, at the same time, further increasing the demand for services. In response to these pressures, many clinics began closing their doors, leaving communities with no maternal or infant service facilities at all.<sup>25</sup>

The first moves by the government to respond to those calls came in early 1933, and were heralded by German Social Democrat, Ludwig Czech, the new Minister of Social Welfare. Czech had himself been a long time organizer within the JF system and well understood the troubles facing the MB facilities. In his January 25<sup>th</sup> address to the budget committee of the Congress of Representatives, Czech reported that the Ministry was currently working with the Youth Welfare organizations to find a solution to the crisis in youth and child services. He noted that the Ministry's objectives were not limited merely to bailing out mother and child clinics currently experiencing troubles, but also included the construction of new clinics and new institutions in the neediest areas of the state.<sup>26</sup>

Consultations between Ministry officials, the insurance treasuries and Youth Welfare organizers continued over the following years. In June of 1935, the government finally entrusted agents of the Ministry of Social Welfare with drafting a new law on child and youth welfare to serve as the basis for discussions. These initiatives faltered, however, when the proposed bill failed to gain the support of the private organizations. In February of the following year, the Social Welfare Ministry announced a new plan to reorganize the system; this time, however, the state was to have a much larger role not only in financing but also in supervision Youth Welfare work. Under the new design, Youth Welfare offices would have been organized not only at the state and provincial levels, but also in the districts. The old national organizations would have thus lost their intermediary roles, and only those local organizations that consented to direct oversight by the state would have been eligible for state subsidy support.<sup>27</sup>

Needless to say, the state's plan did not go uncontested. In a lengthy memo submitted to the Ministry of Social Welfare on March 9, 1936, German Youth Welfare organizers spelled out their opposition to any effort to enlarge the role of the state in the administration or finance of Youth Welfare. Drafters of the memo argued that direct voluntary involvement in Youth Welfare through the middle-class associations had long been prized for providing the organiza-

<sup>25</sup> FASORA (cf. footnote 8), pp. 40-41.

<sup>26</sup> Výklad ministra sociální péče dr. Ludvíka Czecha v rozpočtovém výboru poslanecké sněmovny dne 25. ledna 1933 [Exposition of the Minister of Social Care, Dr. Ludvík Czech in the Budgetary Committee of the House of Commons on the Day of 25. January 1933], in: Sociální revue 14 (1933), p. 14; See also Výklad ministra sociální péče dr. Ludvíka Czecha v rozpočtovém výboru poslanecké sněmovny 22. listopadu 1933 [Exposition of the Minister of Social Care, Dr. Ludvík Czech in the Budgetary Committee of the House of Commons on 22. November 1933], *ibidem*, pp. 451-477.

<sup>27</sup> FASORA (cf. footnote 8), pp. 289-294.

tion with its moral backbone. In the German territories, such work was even more important as it endowed Youth Welfare with its national character. They asserted that any effort to intrude upon German community controls by the state now would be forcefully resisted, and they cited the 1919 Treaty of St. Germain, which guaranteed national minorities within Czechoslovakia the same rights as ethnic Czechoslovaks to erect humanitarian, religious or social institutions as the basis of their opposition. Drafters of the statement went on to argue that the state's efforts were doomed to failure anyway, since the German public would withdraw its voluntary and financial support from any bureaucratic state welfare agency not subordinate to community control. Finally, they stressed that the expansion of the welfare system was ill-conceived, as it would assuredly contribute to a damaging psychology of dependence among the population completely at odds with a self-reliant civic mentality. They wrote:

"The *Jugendfürsorge* views the necessity of welfare and care work not as an achievement, but as emergency assistance in light of decay in the natural and healthy development of culture [...] Only a "well born generation" will be able to perform the dismantling of an overgrowth of welfare assistance of all kinds. The more dependent the individual and the broad strata of the population become on welfare provision, the less healthy the cultural development of the state. The JF thus supports the view that the natural basis for the prosperity of the people must be restored only through the creation of work, housing, culture, and the feasibility of an independent, ordered lifestyle."<sup>28</sup>

It was against this background of mounting conflict within the Youth Welfare system that the first announcements of a devastating crisis in population growth began to surface in the German press. By no means was this idea new in the 1930s. World attention had initially focused on the decline of fertility and population growth rates among the so-called "civilized races" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when birth rates began to fall in many European and American states in response to deliberate family planning efforts of individual households. In the Czech lands, statisticians first recorded similar phenomena in the industri-

<sup>28</sup> "Die Jugendfürsorge betrachtet die Notwendigkeit dieser fürsorgerischen und pflegerischen Arbeit nicht als Errungenschaft, sondern als eine Nothilfe infolge verschiedener Verfallserscheinungen in der natürlichen und gesunden Entwicklung der Kultur. Sie sieht in der tunlichsten Beseitigung dieser Begleiterscheinungen des modernen Lebens eine hohe Aufgabe der Aufklärung und Bildung. Diese volksbildnerischen Bestrebungen liegen in der Linie der Erbbiologie, der Eugenik und der Eubiotik, der Mutterschulung und Erziehungsberatung. Erst ein 'wohlgeborenes Geschlecht' wird den Abbau des Übermaßes von Fürsorgebehelfen aller Art vornehmen können. Je abhängiger der Einzelne und ganze weite Bevölkerungsschichten von Stütz- und Wohlfahrtsmaßnahmen werden, desto ungesünder ist die kulturelle Entwicklung des Staates. Die Jugendfürsorge vertritt deshalb die Anschauung, daß zunächst der natürliche Boden für das Gedeihen des Volkes durch Arbeitsbeschaffung, Wohnungskultur und Ermöglichung einer selbständigen, geordneten Lebensführung wiederhergestellt werden muß." See: Grundforderungen für die Vertretung der deutschen Jugendfürsorge, in: Jugendfürsorge 20 (1936), 11, p. 391.



alized regions of northern and western Bohemia starting in the 1880s, but lower fertility rates were soon noted in outlying districts as well. By the First World War, commentators were suggesting that the regions' fertility woes in combination with the terrible human losses of the war might destroy the new state's economic and military competitiveness.

Discussions in the German territories largely mirrored these arguments. As many commentators of the period pointed out, the German's population question was undoubtedly more dire than that of the Czechs. The predominantly German districts of North Eastern and North Central Bohemia had posted the earliest and most dramatic declines in the birth rate before 1900, and they maintained their position at the bottom of the Czech lands' fertility figures well into the next century. By the years of the First Republic, fertility rates in the largely German cities of these regions ranked as the lowest in all of Europe.<sup>29</sup> German writers had already introduced the idea of a German "population crisis" in the early years of the Republic. Those who proposed measures to try to increase the fertility rates through birth incentives to individual families received very little attention in the 1920s, however, and the majority of writers stressed the need for better health, social and educational supports to serve the existing population. With the depression and the subsequent crisis in social services, however, the weight of public opinion began to shift in favor of the pronatalists. Newspapers, professional journals and books soon began to appear suggesting that the low fertility rates in the Sudetenland's largest cities portended the slow erosion of the German community's physical existence. The only answer was for Germans to build their population reserves. As one writer explained, "Population politics are people politics in the truest senses of the word today. Whoever wants to secure a life for his people must first provide that it does not die out."<sup>30</sup>

### Politicization of the *Mutterberatungsstellen*

The first clues that the new pronatalist rhetoric would be used to politicize the work of the MB came in October of 1934 when organizers of the BdD met in Eger (Cheb) to discuss the Germans' population crisis and the problem of fertility decline over recent decades.<sup>31</sup> Speakers at the conference emphasized the need to "overcome the decline in the birth rate" and called on Ger-

<sup>29</sup> JAN HAVRÁNEK: Social Classes, Nationality Ratios, Demographic Trends in Prague 1880-1900, in: Československá Akademie Věd, *Historica* 13 (1966), pp. 199-205. See also the chapter: Die Völker nach Geschlecht, Alter und Stand, in: ALBIN OBERSCHALL: *Die Nationalitätenfrage in der Tschechoslowakei*, Reichenberg 1927, pp. 38-42.

<sup>30</sup> AUGUST KOBERG: *Die bevölkerungspolitischen Aufgaben der Gemeinde*, Teplitz-Schönau 1937.

<sup>31</sup> Zur Frage des Geburtenrückganges, in: *Gleichheit* 9 (1935), 8, pp. 3-4; ALBIN FRIEDRICH: Die Sudetendeutsche Volkshilfe, in: *Caritas* 14 (1935), 1, pp. 9-11, and KARL PATZELT: Familienfürsorge innerhalb der deutschen Volkskultur, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 19 (1935), 11, pp. 415-431.

mans to resist the “degeneration of life.” All efforts, they acknowledged, rested on the concerted cooperation at the community level of the various German national societies and on the support of the “self-consciously German political parties.”

This last remark no doubt referred to Konrad Henlein’s *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront*, the later *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (SdP). Henlein’s party materialized on the Czechoslovak political scene in 1933, shortly after the state acted to ban two of the largest German nationalist parties in the Sudetenland, the German National Party (*Deutschnationale Partei*, DNP) and the German National Socialist Workers Party (*Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei*, DNSAP), both of which had strong ties to Nazi Germany. As the only existing German nationalist party, Henlein’s SdP undoubtedly drew members from former supporters of the outlawed parties. Its leadership was, however, planted firmly in the German middle-class protection societies of Czechoslovakia – groups like the BdD, the KB, and, of course, Youth Welfare. They thus tended to be somewhat more conservative than their counterparts in the DNP and the DNSAP, and more focused on German unification within Czechoslovakia than on union with a greater German state.<sup>32</sup> Toward that end, SdP organizers intended to use the organizational bases of the protection societies to carry out a German national revival. The concept of “population crisis” in a sense provided them with the rhetorical vehicle to rally Germans throughout the Sudetenland to restore traditional *völkisch* values and family structures, and the meeting in Eger was meant to signal the beginning of this new campaign.

In the months and years following the Eger conference, BdD and Youth Welfare organizers launched an extensive media campaign to promote their message. BdD functionary, Karl Patzelt, outlined the principles to which the press organs loyal to the German pronatalist cause would be asked to adhere. The population question, he stated, should appear as often as possible as a lead story, and newspapers should feature reports on births, deaths, and marriages that emphasized the genealogies of the persons in question. Stories of abortion convictions should also be forefronted, especially where a woman’s health was damaged or her life lost as a result of a mismanaged operation. Above all, Patzelt noted, papers should print only those articles that promoted family life and the dignity of motherhood. Essays must stress parenthood over extra-marital relationships and should emphasize the woman’s role as wife and mother. As he succinctly put it, “film divas, woman pilots and dog breeders have nothing to tell the German mother.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> RONALD M. SMELSER: *The Sudeten Problem, 1933-1938*, Middletown/CT 1975, pp. 56-69.

<sup>33</sup> “Eine Filmdiva, eine Fliegerin, eine Hundezüchterin wie überhaupt eine Frau, die nichts anderes macht, als irgendeinen ganz bestimmten Sportzweig zu pflegen, hat der deutschen Mutter nichts zu sagen.” KARL PATZELT: *Bevölkerungspolitische Aufgaben der Presse*, Teplitz-Schönau 1937, passim.

The primary venue for the campaign to educate German women for their roles as mothers and as wives would not be the media, however, but rather the *Mutterberatungsstelle*. The BdD leadership noted the success of these facilities in reaching German women in years past, and it now proposed the expansion of the clinics' activities to include educational outreach not only to the mothers whose children were already registered but also to the thousands of single young German women who would be called upon to deliver children for the good of the German ethnic community. Women, BdD leaders argued, must be taught to repress their love of pleasure and luxuries and to reject the falsities of feminism, which told them to selfishly pursue their own educational and professional goals at the expense of family obligations. Instead, they argued, women must learn that their only true occupation was as mother and wife.<sup>34</sup> Above all, German women must be persuaded to renounce all ambitions for obtaining wage-labor positions that, organizers believed, rightfully belonged to men. While organizers within the German protection societies and even Konrad Henlein himself acknowledged the necessity of women's wage labor under exceptional conditions, they nonetheless argued that women must confine themselves to explicitly female positions and never compete with men for jobs.<sup>35</sup> The woman's primary role, they emphasized, was not to work for wages or to provide economically for the family but to make good homes for German men and, above all, to produce new children for the race. It was only through this role that women could assist their men in rebuilding the German community and assume their rightful and venerable position in the nation.

It is tempting to argue that, whatever fears the protection societies may have expressed regarding the lack of children in the Sudeten German communities, their more genuine concerns hinged on the question of employment for German men and that, faced with a devastating economic crisis, the immediate response of the men's associations was to try to restore a vision of social order rooted in the patriarchal family structure. Many women of the period actually made a similar argument, and they interpreted the new pronatalist messages gaining currency in public discussions as an attack on women's public and political roles. Most did not make this connection, however, and instead found ways to reconcile their roles outside the home with the pronatalist political messages espoused by the German nationalist leaders. Falling back on a rhetoric that defined women's work in the JF in terms of their traditional domestic roles, they argued that theirs was not so much public activism as national work, and in no way contradictory to the nationalist agenda.

<sup>34</sup> BdD pamphlets in support of this view include Koberg's, Patzelt's, and "Frauenarbeit im Bunde der Deutschen in Böhmen" (Teplitz-Schönau 1930); also OTTO MUNTENDORF: Volkstod droht! Die biologische Gefahrlage des Sudetendeutschtums in Bildern und Zahlen, Teplitz-Schönau 1937; and ERWIN WINKLER: Die Tschechoslowakei im Spiegel der Statistik, Karlsbad, Leipzig 1937.

<sup>35</sup> KONRAD HENLEIN: Die völkische Sendung der Frau, Karlsbad, Leipzig 1937, p. 3.

The subtleties in women's attitudes are perhaps best demonstrated by a series of exchanges published through the spring and summer months of 1935. Emma Rott, the Chairperson of the Women's Committee for the whole German Youth Welfare organization, began the debate with an essay she had published in April in *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau*, the monthly journal of the Association of German Women in Czechoslovakia (*Verein deutscher Frauen*, VdF). Rott noted that the economic crisis had stripped women of their protections as wives and as mothers inside the home while at the same time leaving them with primary responsibility over family affairs and private life. As such, women were uniquely damaged by the new pressures of everyday life and uniquely called upon to rise to the occasion. She explained:

"Unemployment inescapably brings on the decay of the family, threatens youth, and causes a decline in fertility; it casts a shadow of tragedy over thousands who struggle in weary resignation against increasing impoverishment and watch as opportunities melt away. The woman stands right in the middle of all this, burdened by the petty trials of everyday life. There is no small business that is not in some way influenced by the economic crisis, nor is there any household which does not bear long-lasting traces of economic policies."<sup>36</sup>

Rott concluded that the current population crisis had made women's work outside the home more necessary than ever, and she called on women to become actively involved in social politics for the sake of Germans' national, cultural and demographic survival.

In her diagnosis of the peculiarly feminine nature of the current economic crisis, Rott was not alone, and her analysis drew a number of supporters. Giesela Rotsch, editor of *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau*, announced her agreement with Rott's views in an essay which appeared in early May. Rotsch argued that women had to date been unable to meet the challenges placed before them in the sphere of social policy primarily because of their lack of political might. She went on to accuse the male political leadership of playing a deceitful sport with women voters. Most parties, she pointed out, paid lip service to women's rights and even deigned to run a couple of female candidates, but women's names rarely appeared higher than position six or seven, too far from the top of the voter lists to make much of a difference. Rotsch singled out the Henleinists as being the worst perpetrators of this offense. The party advertised its commitments to German women and families in the slogan plastered across its election posters: "German women and mothers, to you be-

<sup>36</sup> "Die Arbeitslosigkeit bringt zwangsläufig den Verfall der Familie, die Bedrohung der Jugend, den Rückgang der Geburten mit sich; sie wirkt den Schatten der Tragik über Tausende, die in müder Resignation gegen die steigende Not des Tages ankämpfen und Glücksmöglichkeiten zerrinnen sehen. Gerade die Frau steht mitten im zermürbenden Kleinkampf des Lebens, keine Privatwirtschaft, die nicht irgendwie durch die Wirtschaftskrise beeinflusst wäre, kein Haushalt, bei dem sich nicht nachhaltig die Auswirkungen der Volkswirtschaftspolitik zeigen würden." See: EMMA ROTT: Die Frau und die kommenden Wahlen, in: *Die Sudetendeutsche Frau* 10 (1935), 4, p. 3.



longs political equality!" It nonetheless failed to run even a single female candidate. She concluded: "This election announcement is constructed for thoughtless women and is an insult for any woman who thinks logically. Not a single woman is to be found on the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* list."<sup>37</sup>

Rotsch expressed sympathy for the Social Democratic party, which, as she noted, regularly ran women candidates and sponsored the largest contingent of female representatives. She argued, however, that "women's interests" represented something at once broader and more particular than the narrow, partisan view of this one political organization, and she thus proposed the creation of a separate women's list as a means of addressing women's under-representation in government.

Rotsch's front-page essay was published simultaneously in the *Aussiger Tageblatt*, and she obviously hoped that it would generate some debate among her fellow female readers. In this she succeeded, and though her proposal for a women's list was all but forgotten, her off-handed dismissal of the Henleinists generated a rash of angry responses. One Frau Schmidt noted in a letter carried in the *Reichenberger Zeitung* immediately after the SdP's dramatic May election showing that Rotsch dismissed about eighty percent of the state's German women when she described Henlein's female proponents as "thoughtless."<sup>38</sup> Another Frau Schneider of Friedland, took Rotsch to task for her characteristically feminine selfishness saying that "First the Volk, then me" should be every woman's motto.<sup>39</sup> Schneider appealed for a return to the wholesome family values of the past that reserved an honored place for women as wives and as mothers. For this, she stated, she would gladly sacrifice the superficial political rights offered by the Republic:

"We want to be women to whom our husbands and sons look again with reverence. Why do we need external rights? We can whole-heartedly affirm the male political leadership, but this does not mean that we refuse responsibility for our own sex. We devote ourselves to the peaceful work of strengthening our homeland – this is truly a rich sphere of activity."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> "Dieser Wahlaufdruck ist nur für gedankenlose Frauen konstruiert und eine Beleidigung für jede logisch denkende Frau, denn in den Listen der sudetendeutschen Partei ist nicht eine einzige Frau vertreten." See: GIESELA ROTSCH: Die Frauenliste als taktisches Mittel für die Durchsetzung politischen Fraueneinflusses, in: Die Sudetendeutsche Frau 10 (1935), 5, pp. 3-4.

<sup>38</sup> Die Frauenliste als taktisches Mittel für die Durchsetzung politischen Fraueneinflusses; in: Die Sudetendeutsche Frau 10 (1935), 6, pp. 4-5; see also GIESELA ROTSCH: Die Sudetendeutsche Partei und unsere Frauenwelt, in: Die Sudetendeutsche Frau 10 (1935), 7/8, pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> "'Erst das Volk – dann ich' muß unser Wahlspruch werden." See: Die Frauenliste als taktisches Mittel, in: Die Sudetendeutsche Frau 10 (1935), 6, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> "Wir wollen wieder Frauen werden, zu denen unsere Männer, unsere Söhne mit Ehrfurcht blicken können. Was brauchen wir da äußere Rechte! Wir können aus vollem Herzen die männliche, politische Führung bejahen, wir lehnen dadurch keine Verant-

Schneider's remarks evidently represented a popular sentiment among Sudeten feminists, one with the force of a growing national movement behind it, namely that a woman's place must be in the home. Emma Rott herself contributed to this sentiment in an essay carried in *Jugendfürsorge*, wherein she likened the current population crisis among the Sudeten Germans to a national war for liberation. Women, too, she argued, had their place among the combatants in this war:

"Admittedly, their battle lines lie behind the parliamentary and world economy fronts. It is the small war of everyday life that she must fight daily; it is the ground of the family that she must recapture; it is – and this again characterizes so well the greatness of her historical mission – the health of the offspring which she as mother of the people must ensure; it is her willingness to admit new life into herself and thereby to connect, link by link, to the ancient chain of the past, ensuring that it will not suddenly be snapped, so that the people will be and will continue to be."<sup>41</sup>

Rott's references to warfare – to the battle lines behind the political and economic fronts, to the recapture of the home and to the daily fights in the private sphere – were not at all uncommon during this period, and it is important to point out how pervasive this kind of rhetoric became after 1935. One can point as well to a short poem, published in the Youth Welfare journal in 1936, describing the work of the MB:

"We do not stand on the front lines,  
Not there, where the guns crash,  
We want only to be loyal mothers,  
And to watch over the Heimat."<sup>42</sup>

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wortung für unser Geschlecht ab, und uns der stillen Aufbauarbeit in der Heimat widmen, die uns ein so reiches Betätigungsfeld bietet." Ibidem, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> "Freilich liegen ihre Kampflinien hinter den großen parlamentarischen und Weltwirtschaftsfronten. Es ist der Kleinkrieg des Alltags, den sie täglich ausfechten muß, es ist vor allem der abgleitende Boden der Familie, den sie zurückerobert, es ist – und dies wieder kennzeichnet so ganz die Größe ihrer geschichtlichen Sendung – die Gesundheit des Nachwuchses, den sie als Mutter des Volkes sicherstellen muß, es ist ihre Bereitwilligkeit, neues Leben in sich aufzunehmen und so an die uralte Kette der Vergangenheit Glied um Glied anzuschließen, damit sie nicht jäh abreiße – damit das Volk sei und bestehe." See: EMMA ROTT: Die Frau in der Gemeinschaft, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 20 (1936), 11, p. 396.

<sup>42</sup> The whole poem read:

Wir stehen nicht in den vordersten Reih'n,  
nicht dort, wo Geschütze krachen,  
wir wollen nur treue Mütter sein,  
und über die Heimat wachen.

Wir stehen ja trotzdem im Gefecht,  
wir ringen um unsere Erde,  
wir bauen mit am neuen Geschlecht,  
wir hüten die alten Werte.

If the population crisis had now taken on the significance of a national struggle for existence, the MB were the terrain over which it was fought. In any case, the metaphors were apparently quite convincing. Those in disagreement with the strict nationalist perspective – including those who, like Rotsch, still called for women's political and economic rights – were quickly drawn in line. For her part, Rotsch soon recanted her statements. Calling for an end to divisiveness demonstrated by her detractors' letters, she added that: "As the mother of three grown children who belonged to the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* long before the election not only as enlisted, but as active, cooperative members, I have paid my tribute to Germandom as a German woman."<sup>43</sup> Rotsch emphasized her common identity as a German mother with her opponents and stressed the need to suppress controversy for the sake of Sudeten German unity. At the same time, however, she stood firm on her conviction that German women must play an active role in any political solution to the Sudetenland's social and economic problems. While it is impossible to detail the many ways that individual German women responded to the demands of the pro-natalists and nationalist political movements, it is nonetheless clear that opponents of Rotsch's point of view had seized the upper hand.

By 1935, many MB under the women's committee direction had begun to reflect the pronatalist attitudes promoted by the BdD organizers. Clinics began placing greater emphasis on the creation of new "mother training schools" for young, still unmarried girls as well as seasoned wives and mothers who would promote pronatalist attitudes about female roles as well as a kind of pseudo-spiritualism that linked the individual woman and her child to a larger racial community. Eugenics and race hygiene became staples of the new curriculum, and organizers expressed the hope that the woman who participated in the training would begin to regard her child "not only as a piece of her own flesh to which all the fibers of her heart fasten [...] [but as] a child of her people."<sup>44</sup>

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Wir sehen des Volkes tägliche Not  
und müssen sie täglich bekriegen.  
Doch in uns allen lebt ein Gebot:  
Zusammenstehen und Siegen!

Wir stehen nicht in den vordersten Reih'n  
nicht dort, wo Geschütze krachen,  
aber wir wollen Mütter sein,  
die treulich die Heimat bewachen.

See: ILSE BRÄUER: Mutterschulung, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 20 (1936), 11, p. 411.

<sup>43</sup> "Ich habe als Mutter von drei erwachsenen Kindern, die der sudetendeutschen Partei schon lange vor den Wahlen nicht nur als eingeschriebene, sondern als tätige, hilfsbereite Mitglieder angehören, dem Deutschtum als deutsche Frau meinen Tribut gezollt..." See: ROTSCH: *Die Sudetendeutsche Partei und unsere Frauenwelt* (cf. footnote 38), p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> ROBERT GOLITSCHKE: *Mutterschulung und Jugendfürsorge*, in: *Jugendfürsorge* 20 (1936), 11, p. 406.

Along with these messages, German women began to receive not only the usual food and milk contributions, but also an impressive array of other household items. The distribution of such items was important to the pronatalist agenda of the MB. Whereas supports prior to 1934 were kept deliberately low to promote thrift and self-reliance, the new programs were intended only to support the establishment of new and larger families and were thus distributed on a much more generous scale. One clinic in the North Bohemian town of Gablonz, for example, began distributing baby strollers, cribs, children's clothing and blankets to women clients. According to a report filed with the Ministry of Health, the money needed to purchase those items was raised locally, through the assiduous efforts of the German Housewives' Association.<sup>45</sup> Given that Gablonz had one of the highest unemployment rates in the state, however, it seems likely that some of the money also came from the protection societies, which were receiving regular contributions from Reich sources at least through 1936.<sup>46</sup>

Disputes over the Sudetenland's demographic growth rates and the legal fate of the MB continued through the remaining years of the First Republic without any definitive resolution. By 1938, the only thing that had really changed was the symbolic importance afforded the clinics. The rhetoric of "population crisis" had, in a sense, transformed them. No longer merely institutions committed to infant health and public education, the MB now took on a more important national significance as sites where the perfection of the nation's reproductive labors and the transmission of its ethnic culture took place. The race hygiene and eugenic instruction offered in the mother training schools served to underscore this interpretation.

This symbolic transformation of the MB reflects a subtle migration of reproductive issues and everyday family labors from the periphery to the center of Sudeten German national political concerns over the course of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As this essay has shown, reproduction and family life first entered the national agenda in the late imperial era as a result of medical and political efforts to address the growing phenomenon of women's wage labor outside the home. The MB played a crucial role in those efforts, as institutions organized to enlighten and ennoble poor and working mothers. Reproductive issues, and the MB along with them, really remained marginal to national concerns, however, through the First World War and interwar years when they were relegated to the "women's sections," a small and often neg-

<sup>45</sup> See German clinic reports in SÚA (Státní Ústřední Archiv), Fond ZÚP (Zemský Úřad v Praze); Karton 368, Sign. VII/86/e, Inv. No. 3344, dated 1936-1938.

<sup>46</sup> ELIZABETH WISKEMANN notes the easy access to Reich money enjoyed by Sudeten German organizations for pro-German propaganda efforts. See: ELIZABETH WISKEMANN: *Czechs and Germans. A Study of the Struggle in the Historic Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia*, New York 1967, pp. 247-248. RONALD SMELSER essentially confirms this view but adds that the use of Berlin money was not necessarily an indication of pro-Nazi sympathies. See: SMELSER (cf. footnote 32), pp. 113-115.



lected sphere within Youth Welfare. Only in the course of the political upheavals of the 1930s did the MB begin to occupy a more central position, largely as a result of the language of population crisis employed by the German protection societies in their disputes with the state. Middle-class women could now begin to describe their efforts inside the clinics in militaristic terms – as work carried out on the home-front for a nation under siege.

It is interesting to read this example against Elisabeth Domansky's study of "Militarization and Reproduction in World War I Germany," which argues that the reorganization of the spheres of reproduction and production preceded and conditioned the shift toward total war among the European states in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. War, she explains, "moved toward the center of society because the positioning of production and reproduction in the structure of society changed."<sup>47</sup> This description fits the Sudetenland context as well, where the announcement of a "population crisis" in the mid 1930s seems to have necessitated at least a rhetorical militarization of all spheres of life, including reproduction.

For their part, Sudeten women responded to these changes in much the same way as their German counterparts, by drawing on familiar maternalist arguments to try to carve out a separate feminine sphere for themselves within the broader German nationalist movement. Historians of women's involvement in campaigns for social and political rights in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century have frequently noted the contradictions implicit in maternalist rhetoric, which attempted to root women's claims to political and social rights in their roles as mothers and as wives. These scholars have argued that, by emphasizing their innate maternal sentiments and family care obligations in making what were undoubtedly political claims for greater protections for women and children, women undermined traditional divisions between public and private, and successfully laid claim to new prerogatives in the state. At the same time, however, they had burdened themselves with what has been described as "Wollstonecraft's dilemma" – the problem of how to balance their demands for equal participation in the liberal-democratic political sphere with their often simultaneous appeals for the recognition of women's unique talents and concerns as women.<sup>48</sup>

Such reflections clearly apply to the efforts of Sudeten German women of interwar Czechoslovakia as well. While many German women subscribed to

<sup>47</sup> ELISABETH DOMANSKY: *Militarization and Reproduction in World War I Germany*, in: *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870-1930*, ed. by GEOFF ELEY, Ann Arbor/MI 1997, p. 430.

<sup>48</sup> CAROLE PATEMAN: *The Patriarchal Welfare State*, in: IDEM: *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Stanford 1989, pp. 179-209. See also SETH KOVEN, SONYA MICHEL: *Womanly Duties. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880-1920*, in: *American Historical Review* 95 (1990), pp. 1076-1108; *Maternity and Gender Policies. Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s*, ed. by GISELA BOCK and PAT THANE, London 1991.

contemporary feminist beliefs about the necessity of women's political participation and demanded access to education and employment opportunities, they also defined their public and political work in terms of traditional maternal roles. Their political identities as mothers thus ultimately left them defenseless against the assertions of their political rivals that women should let go of their "selfish" demands to superficial political rights and seize instead the "higher rights" of motherhood. Middle-class women may have lost their access to the former, but their "public" work in the MB went unchallenged, largely because those facilities could still be imagined in largely domestic terms. During the 1930s, it appears, there were many women in the borderlands for whom this was enough.

### Zusammenfassung

*„Die kleinen Kriege des Alltags“. Bevölkerungspolitik und die Mutterberatungsstellen in den deutsch besiedelten Grenzgebieten der Tschechoslowakei*

Mit den als Zentren sozialer und medizinischer Versorgung für Mütter und Kleinkinder zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts in den böhmischen Ländern gegründeten Mutterberatungsstellen war auch die Absicht verbunden, durch Anregungen für ein Bevölkerungswachstum die wirtschaftliche und militärische Leistungsfähigkeit der Region zu erhöhen. Die Arbeit dieser Einrichtungen wurde zunächst vom österreichischen, dann vom tschechoslowakischen Staat sowohl mit Finanzmitteln als auch durch administrative Aufsicht unterstützt. Die wichtigsten Personal- und Finanzangelegenheiten fielen jedoch in den Verantwortungsbereich der Kommunen, so daß lokale Behörden ein erhebliches Maß an Kontrolle über die alltäglichen Belange der Mutterberatungsstellen ausübten – ein Umstand, der dazu beitrug, daß die Stellen im Sudetenland zum Gegenstand deutscher nationalistischer Bestrebungen wurden. Diese zielten zum einen darauf ab, den Anteil der deutschen Bevölkerung in den umstrittenen tschechoslowakischen Grenzgebieten zu erhöhen, und sollten zum anderen dazu dienen, das Verhalten und die Einstellung der deutschen Frauen zu beeinflussen – zu einem Zeitpunkt, da ihre nationale und ihre gesellschaftliche Stellung höchst umstritten waren.

Die Autorin vertritt die These, daß sich am Beispiel der Mutterberatungsstellen letztlich erkennen läßt, daß der Glaube an eine Hierarchie der Geschlechter und traditionelle „Familienwerte“ ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der Vorstellungen von „richtiger“ Regierung und gesellschaftlicher Ordnung für die Vertreter der deutschen Mittelschichtvereine war.