

Henlein's Flying Bicycle Brigades. The SdP in the 1935 General Elections

by

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Konrad Henlein founded the Sudeten German *Heimatfront* (SHF) in October of 1933 and in less than a year and a half it became the largest party in the First Czechoslovak Republic. This achievement is all the more remarkable in light of the initiative undertaken by the Czech and the German Social Democrats, as well as the Communists, to have the SHF banned in the year before the elections. This initiative would most likely have succeeded had the matter not been referred to Czechoslovakia's ailing President, Tomáš G. Masaryk. After the state had banned both the Sudeten German Nazi and Nationalist parties on account of their alleged ties to Hitler, Masaryk concluded one month before the May 19th general elections that the SHF should be allowed to campaign.¹ Masaryk, however, mandated that the *Heimatfront* must change its name to the more democratic "Sudeten German Party" (SdP).

Despite the specter of a ban that still haunted the party in the month before the election, the SdP succeeded in transforming itself from a political pariah into a majority German party by using the legal protections and security forces of Czech democracy to wage a legalistic campaign against the state. In light of this stunning success, how then did the party leadership perform this act of political alchemy and what strategies did it deploy in campaigning against the state?

The case of the 1935 SdP campaign illustrates many of the potential pitfalls for a democracy in overseeing a modern multi-ethnic election. In plotting this campaign, the SdP leadership faced the conflicting political imperatives of avoiding a government ban, while mobilizing German communities against the state. The leadership responded to these imperatives by developing a repertoire of tactics that I have defined broadly as "strategic legality." This concept designates the SdP campaign strategy of using the republic's laws and police against it. This strategy encompassed a platform of anti-state rhetoric, the manipulation of political opponents, as well as the police, and even acts of premeditated political violence.

Based on a careful analysis of SdP demonstrations, it appears that this strategy allowed the SdP to wage a campaign against the state, while denying Czech authorities a clear pretext for banning the party. For example, even

¹ The Sudeten Nazi and Nationalist parties had been banned in October of 1933, only a week before Henlein founded the SHF. Although former Nazis became undercover Nazis within the SHF, it was not a successor party on account of its independent leadership.

though the rhetoric of the party's campaign speeches was often anti-state in tone, SdP demonstrations were consistently carried out to the letter of the Czechoslovak law on public gatherings. In confrontations with political opponents, SdP functionaries consistently goaded their rivals into striking first. This tactic allowed Henlein to present his henchmen as "keepers of order," who were supposedly allied with the police in combating Marxist provocateurs. Finally, when the party chose to initiate political violence, it did so only at the most opportune moments, when it could maximize the political impact of these disturbances and minimize its exposure to state sanctions. Strategic legality not only helped SdP leaders to avert an impending ban and outmaneuver their political rivals, it ultimately proved instrumental in allowing them to usher two-thirds of the Sudeten German electorate into their ranks.

This concept must be understood in the context of the Czech-German nationality competition. Within the Czechoslovak nation-state, the Sudeten Germans were regarded as a national minority, in spite of the fact that they made up a significantly larger proportion of the population than did the Slovaks.² This underlying tension became acute in 1933, when the Depression peaked in Czechoslovakia and Adolf Hitler seized power in Germany. In the republic's northern and western border regions, Sudeten communities were particularly hard hit by the economic crisis, due mainly to the nature of their antiquated and export-oriented industries. When the unemployment rate of the German border regions rose to twice that of the Czech interior, Sudeten German radicalism and resentment of the state grew proportionately. Understandably daunted by this trend and intimidated by its Nazi neighbor, the state banned the Sudeten German Nazi and Nationalist Parties in October of 1933 and left no political outlet for the expression of Sudeten German nationalist sentiment.

That same month, Konrad Henlein, the leader of the German *Turnverband*, or Gymnastics Society, filled this political void by founding the Sudeten German *Heimatfront*. Henlein's decision to seize this historic moment to found his movement guaranteed that it would be both immediately popular and exceedingly controversial. Although the leaders of the banned parties did solicit Henlein about founding a successor party, he and his close circle of advisors, known as the *Kameradschaftsbund* (KB), declined their offer and shut them out of the SHF. Rather than sharing power with these former nationalist politicians, Henlein and the KB preferred to preside independently over their own movement and to pursue their own program of Sudeten German national unity within Czechoslovakia. In contrast to KB leadership, the majority of its membership was made up of former Nazis and Nationalists, who favored

² In 1930, the Sudeten Germans made up 22.32% of the state's population, while the Slovaks comprised only 15.76%. *Čechoslovinská Statistik, Reihe VI: Volkszählung*, 7[98], Prag 1934. Found in: Odsun. Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen, Bd. 1, ed. by the Sudeten German Archive, Munich 2000, p. 597.

closer relations with Berlin and eventual *Anschluß* to the Reich.³ The massive influx of functionaries from the banned parties into the SHF convinced the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry that the Henlein Movement represented only the most recent incarnation of the Sudeten Nazi and Nationalist Parties. Thus, on the eve of their election campaign, Henlein and the KB leadership of the *Heimatfront* were viewed with mounting skepticism by the state and with deepening resentment by the leaders of the banned parties.

Within the party, the main leadership was dominated by the *Kameradschaftsbund* which made up an influential clique of advisors around Konrad Henlein. The KB had been founded in 1926 by a tight circle of young Bohemian intellectuals, who sought to implement the teachings of their mentor at the University of Vienna, Professor Othmar Spann. In his lectures, Spann developed a strain of neo-conservatism, known as universalism. Spann rejected the racial teachings of National Socialism and instead insisted upon German spiritual unity as the organizing principle for the formation of a Catholic, corporatist empire that would unite Germans across Central Europe.

In an attempt to transform Spann's theory into a political program in the First Republic, the KB worked to infiltrate several German nationalist organizations in the 1920s. They established their political base in the German *Turnverband*, which had been led by Konrad Henlein since 1931. Although Henlein was neither an intellectual, nor a politician, he was befriended by KB co-founder Heinz Rutha and taken into the inner circle of the *Kameradschaftsbund*, where Rutha and Walter Brand became his closest advisors. After Henlein had founded the SHF with these KB advisors, Brand sculpted a cult of personality around Henlein and dominated the relatively moderate KB leadership over a membership that was increasingly dominated by former Nazis.

The Sudeten Nazi Party had been banned in large part because its agitators had closely emulated the tactics that Hitler's Brown Shirts had used so successfully in destabilizing the Weimar Republic. In the Czechoslovak context, however, the threat of a government ban loomed much larger over SdP leaders, who responded by disciplining their operatives to pay greater attention to legality. In addition, the SdP leadership worked to avoid a ban by distancing their party from Hitler's NSDAP and by carefully concealing the illegal campaign contributions that they had received from the Reich. In defining their moderate image, the KB leadership pursued a program of Sudeten national unity within Czechoslovakia, while the more radical Nazi faction of the membership favored *Anschluß* to the Reich. Despite the differences in their end goals and ideologies, Henlein reached a détente with the leaders of the

³ In May of 1935, *Anschluß* did not yet appear to be a viable political option, but rather it was seen as a longer-term goal for the members of the former nationalist parties.

Nazi faction, assuring that they would cooperate with the KB for the duration of the campaign.⁴

The extent of these differences between the KB and their Nazi rivals has become the subject of the most intense scholarly debate on the SdP in recent years. In their 1996 article, "Die Deutschen in Böhmen, die Sudetendeutsche Partei und der Nationalsozialismus," Christoph Boyer and Jaroslav Kučera contend that the ideological differences between the KB and Nazi worldviews amount to mere nuances.⁵ Boyer and Kučera made their case for the continuity of authoritarianism in the KB and Nazi ideologies in response to Friedrich Prinz's article in the August 15, 1996 edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.⁶ In this article, Prinz argued that the Henlein movement had its own distinct roots and he emphasized regional historical aspects in his ideological comparison.

Although I agree with Prinz that the KB ideology differed fundamentally from that of National Socialism, Boyer and Kučera were also correct that these ideologies did share a common authoritarian, anti-liberal and supremacist worldview. The KB's plans for the restructuring of Central Europe reveal an inherent German supremacy built into their authoritarian ideology. Spann had outlined this ideology in a series of lectures in the summer of 1920, which he then published in his signature work "Der wahre Staat" (The True State). Despite the fact that Spann and the KB rejected the forms of scientific racism that were central to National Socialism, their vision of the "true state" was a hierarchical one, in which Germans would preside over Slavs. Spann's notion of German supremacy stemmed primarily from German spiritual and cultural bonds and to a lesser extent from the bonds of race. In his memoirs, Brand candidly recalled the fate that he envisioned for the Czechs, had the KB succeeded in their proposed reorganization of the Region:

Then what should we do with the Czechs? They would more or less have to be brought into the realm of German influence. It follows then that they could plot no policy against us, nor could they remain a hostile outpost against the German Reich.⁷

Although the KB did not consider race to have been the basis of German unity, as did the Nazis, they did conceive of it as one constitutive element that

⁴ VĚRA OLIVOVÁ: Kameradschaftsbund, in: Z Českých dějin. Sborník prací in memoriam Prof. Dr. Václava Husy [From Czech History. A Collection of Work in Memory of Prof. Dr. Václav Hus], Praha, 1966, p. 252.

⁵ CHRISTOPH BOYER, JAROSLAV KUČERA: Die Deutschen in Böhmen, die Sudetendeutsche Partei und der Nationalsozialismus, in: Nationalsozialismus in der Region, ed. by HORST MÖLLER et al., München 1996, pp. 273-285.

⁶ For a summation of this debate see: WILFRED JILGE: Zwischen Autoritarismus und Totalitarismus. Anmerkungen zu einer Kontroverse, in: Bohemia 39 (1998), 1, pp. 96-109.

⁷ WALTER BRAND: Auf verlorenem Posten. Ein sudetendeutscher Politiker zwischen Autonomie und Anschluß, München 1985, p. 55.

defined the German *Volk*. According to Brand in the KB organ *Volk und Führung*, "The *Volk* is the unity among a group of people, which transcends the past, present and future and it is distinguished from the rest of humanity by its particular spiritual, mental, and racial (biological) traits."⁸ Thus the KB did share the Nazis' supremacist vision that the destruction of the Czechoslovak democracy would bring about a new order of German domination in Central Europe.

The fact that universalism and National Socialism both shared a common contempt for democracy and longing for German unity, however, does not reduce the differences between them to mere nuances.⁹ The KB ideology reflected the aspirations of its provincial intellectual proponents, who sought to create their own Sudeten German fiefdom within a pan-German confederation. This fiefdom would comprise the Sudeten German *Stamm*, or tribe, and it would be divided into a corporatist hierarchy of the *Stände*, or classes. These *Stände* formed corporations based on professions, which would be ordered within the hierarchy by their level of spirituality. On account of their superior spiritual cultivation, the KB made up the *Staatsstand*, which constituted the intellectual and political elite within this hierarchy.¹⁰ The KB *Staatsstand* then would preside over the Sudeten *Stamm* as a closed circle of philosopher kings.

In sharp contrast to the vertical hierarchy of the *Stände*, the KB envisioned that the coming German empire would be made up of a horizontal confederation of *Stämme*.¹¹ The KB imagined a return to the Catholic Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages and they fantasized that the Sudeten *Stamm* would retain its autonomy from the other Prussian, Austrian and Bavarian *Stämme*.¹² Within this confederation, the Slavs would be subordinated, but their cohabitation with Germans would continue. Likewise, cohabitation with Jews would also be tolerated because the Spann circle conceived of them as a religious, rather than racial, group.¹³ As an interim, tactical step to building this empire, the KB supported autonomy within Czechoslovakia.¹⁴ However, once the KB had united the Sudeten *Stamm* and accumulated enough power,

⁸ IDEM: *Liberale oder organische Demokratie*, in: *Volk und Führung*, n.d., pp. 146-151.

⁹ JILGE: *Zwischen Autoritarismus und Totalitarismus* (cf. footnote 6), p. 96.

¹⁰ JOHN HAAG: 'Knights of the Spirit.' *The Kameradschaftsbund*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 8 (1973), 3, pp. 134-135.

¹¹ ANDREAS LUH: *Der Deutsche Turnverband in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, München 1988, p. 234.

¹² Although the Spann circle envisioned Catholicism playing a leading role in this confederation, the Vatican rejected Spann's teachings.

¹³ Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA), R 58/497 (Reichssicherheitshauptamt [RSHA], Geheime Kommandosache: Der Spannkreis. Gefahren und Auswirkungen. Ende Mai 1936).

¹⁴ WILFRIED JILGE: *Die Junge Front (1930-1935). Antidemokratisches Denken und völkische Ideologie in einer sudetendeutschen Zeitschrift*, Master's thesis, Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz 1996, p. 135.

they would replace Czechoslovakia's liberal democracy with the "true state."¹⁵

Heydrich's SD and Ribbentrop's Foreign Office saw this KB ideology as a threat to their plans for the creation of a racially pure greater-Germany in the region. In a 1938 report on the Spann circle, the SD rejected the hierarchy of the *Stände* as a heresy and the authors insisted that "it is not the spirit, but rather the blood, race is the bearer of history."¹⁶ Likewise, the Foreign Office denounced the KB's plans for a horizontal confederation of German tribes as "dangerous separatist strivings."¹⁷ The tenets of universalism aggravated the Nazis' fierce anti-intellectualism and anti-Catholicism. In a series of inflammatory reports on the Spann circle from 1936 to 1943, Heydrich's SD made the case that Spann and the KB were at the center of a vast Catholic conspiracy which threatened the "spiritual isolation of the Reich."¹⁸ As the German occupation of Central Europe during the war later demonstrated, the Nazis' extreme racism and biological anti-Semitism made their policies towards the Jews and the Slavs far more malignant than those envisioned by the *Kameradschaftsbund*. In contrast to Brand's vision of continued cohabitation, the Nazi doctrine of *Lebensraum* dictated that the Jews would eventually have to be eliminated and the Slavs relocated further east.¹⁹ Therefore, the KB and Nazi visions of pan-German unity differed markedly both in terms of their proposed methods and in the outcomes that they envisioned. My definition of the KB as the "moderate" faction within the SdP therefore is only relative to the much more radical program that was advanced by their Nazi rivals.

Karl Hermann Frank represented a key link between these two factions, as both a former Nazi and an associate of the KB.²⁰ Despite his Nazi past, Frank succeeded in breaking the KB monopoly on the main leadership of the movement because the *Bund* so desperately needed his skills as a propagandist that they had to promote him. As a political opportunist, who remained uncommitted to either ideological position, Frank viewed the KB-Nazi rivalry as his ticket to personal advancement within the party. Surviving KB member Edi Burkert recalled in an interview with the author that "Frank worked primarily for himself."²¹ Within the leadership, Frank planned major demonstrations, at

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 138.

¹⁶ BA R 58/834 (RSHA, Geheime Kommandosache: Der Spannkreis. Gefahren und Auswirkungen. Ende August 1938).

¹⁷ BA R 58/1069 (RSHA, Die Ideologie Othmar Spanns).

¹⁸ BA R 58/497 and 834; BA NS 19/2673, p. 5 (RSHA, Der ideologische Einfluss des KB auf die volkspolitische Arbeit und den südosteuropäischen Raum, 17.05.1940).

¹⁹ MARTIN KITCHEN: *Nazi Germany at War*, London 1995, p. 1.

²⁰ Although the KB was led by a closed inner circle of members, there also existed a much larger outer circle of KB associates, who were often referred to as "KB near standing." Frank most likely belonged to this outer circle of the *Bund*. For more on Frank's association with the KB see: JILGE: *Zwischen Autoritarismus und Totalitarismus* (cf. footnote 6), p. 104.

²¹ Interview with Edi Burkert, March 4, 2001.

which illegal transgressions and political violence were carefully choreographed to exploit the discontent of depressed German communities, while denying the state a clear legal pretext for banning future events. In planning these events, Frank sought to maintain total control over the crowds by providing for hundreds of functionaries known as "order-keepers."

As part of the SdP campaign strategy, the official mandate of these functionaries as keepers of order granted them political cover in their unofficial role as what political scientist Paul Brass has called "riot specialists."²² Brass maintains that, as part of an "institutionalized riot system," "riot specialists" provoke incidences, which are intended to incite the poor and dispossessed to spontaneously join into acts of political violence.²³ In the case of the SdP, these specialists came primarily from the banned parties and, within the ranks of the order-keepers, they surreptitiously solicited brawls with agitators from the Communist and the German Social Democratic Party. As part of their competition with these parties, SdP functionaries would goad their Marxist²⁴ rivals into initiating hostilities in front of Czech police through symbolic political acts. For example, on the eve of the elections in Johannesburg (Janovice), order-keepers tore down Socialist propaganda as a means of provoking a fight with their rivals.²⁵ As the Interior Ministry noted in several reports on the SdP, the persistent outbreak of political violence that accompanied Henlein's campaign appeared much more to have been the result of a political calculation on the part of the leadership, than a consequence of insubordination on the part of the order-keepers.²⁶

The political violence that inevitably ensued from these incidents paid a number of political dividends to the SdP campaign and created a vexing dilemma for the state. These so-called order-keepers provoked fights only when they had vastly superior numbers in order to brutalize their opponents. In his memoirs, Walter Brand recalled that the SdP leadership appealed to the

²² For more on this theory of political violence as "an institutionalized riot system" see: PAUL BRASS: *Theft of an Idol. Text and Context in Representation of Collective Violence*, Princeton 1997.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁴ For the purposes of this article, the term 'Marxists' designates only the Communist and German Social Democratic Parties, which made up the primary opposition to the SdP. The Czechoslovak Communist Party was the only party in the republic, which was not divided by nationality.

²⁵ SÚA 225 (Presidium ministerstva vnitra [Presidium of the Interior Ministry]) 960/5 (SdP předvolební agitace v okrese krnovském [SdP pre-election agitation in the region of Krnov (Jägerndorf)], May 30, 1935).

²⁶ This interior report claims that SdP functionaries received orders to agitate on the evening before the final wave of demonstrations broke out on May 18th. Another interior report notes that SdP functionaries were given orders to agitate over the telephone at an SdP demonstration in July of 1934. (SÚA 225 (Presidium ministerstva vnitra [Presidium of the Interior Ministry]) 920/1 (Okresní hejtman, Rada politické správy, Relace [Regional Captain, Office of Political Administration, Report], July 22, 1934).

state for security, reminding police officials that they were obliged to protect both public order and the right of the movement to demonstrate from "Marxist provocateurs."²⁷ The Interior Ministry responded to this request by assigning Czechoslovak police units to protect SdP speakers. Consequently, these police were put in the untenable position of intervening repeatedly against Communist and German Social Democratic agitators in order to restore calm. This constant brawling at SdP events served to undermine the faith of German communities in their police. For example, even though the police broke up three SdP parades "for criminal insubordination" on the eve of the elections, the party held five other SdP demonstrations in German communities that same night.²⁸

This final wave of SdP agitation reveals that the police could not even prevent disturbances that happened right in front of their eyes, let alone protect citizens from petty acts of terror that took place behind their backs. The leadership's appeal to the state for police protection became a coup for the SdP because it lent legitimacy to the movement, while degrading that of the already unpopular state in the borderlands. Ultimately this policy of strategic legality created the following dilemma for the state: that banning future SdP demonstrations would only create more fodder for anti-state propaganda, while allowing them to continue would further undermine federal authority in German communities.

The SdP leadership understood that the legal existence of the movement depended upon their strategy of maintaining the facade of public order on the campaign trail, so this strategy was carefully codified in the party manual, "The Political Gathering. Its Nature, Preparation and Execution," by Richard Goldberg.²⁹ As a former National Socialist, Goldberg exemplifies the wealth of political experience that the functionaries of the banned parties brought with them to the SdP.³⁰ The manual begins with a sophisticated analysis of the 1867 Habsburg Demonstration Law, which still governed public gatherings in the First Republic. Goldberg warned that according to articles four and eleven of the law, the maintenance of order at demonstrations was the responsibility of the leader and the order-keepers, who could be prosecuted in the event of a disturbance.³¹ In addition, if any condition of the law was not met, the authorities could summarily dissolve the gathering. In response to the many restrictions of this law, Goldberg prescribed total compliance with its every provision. Beyond mere compliance, he further recommended that a

²⁷ BRAND: *Auf verlorenem Posten* (cf. footnote 7), p. 111.

²⁸ SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP předvolební agitace v okrese krnovském, May 30, 1935).

²⁹ RICHARD GOLDBERG: *Die Politische Versammlung* [Internal, unpublished SdP document, not dated] (Okresní Archiv v Liberci, Dokumentace, výstřižky o Henleinovi [Regional Archive in Liberec, Documentation, Clippings about Henlein]).

³⁰ STANISLAV BIMAN, JAROSLAV MALÍŘ: *Die Karriere eines Turnlehrers*, Praha 1983, p. 97.

³¹ GOLDBERG (cf. footnote 29), p. 4.

'suitable person' should intervene to energetically support the registration of party gatherings and to personally reassure the examining official that order will be protected.

Having defined the legal boundaries for avoiding a ban, Goldberg then addressed advertising, stating that "the basis for advertising a demonstration has to be the principle of the buildup."³² According to Goldberg, this buildup begins with grassroots networking in small towns, where the party could rely upon its own functionaries, or those of allied organizations. The publicity offensive should gradually mount to coverage in the local media and build to a placard campaign, in which all posters would read "Konrad Henlein speaks!"³³ In the final days before the demonstration, Goldberg stipulated that campaign cars should sweep the main square outfitted with flags, banners and loud-speakers playing patriotic music.³⁴ Goldberg concluded that the buildup should climax just before the Henlein speech with a choir performance, which should whip the crowd into a frenzy. Ironically, after this entire buildup, the speech should last no more than fifteen minutes, presumably before Henlein's bland persona would dissipate the excitement. After the speech, the crowd should join in the singing of a rousing song and then disperse peacefully. The SdP perfected this formula for demonstrating in the 1935 campaign and replicated it in dozens of towns around the entire border of Czechoslovakia.

What the leadership really sought to demonstrate through Goldberg's formula, however, was its claim to political mastery over all German-speakers in Czechoslovakia as "Sudeten Germans." In planning for the movement's breakthrough demonstration at Böhmisches Leipa (Česká Lípa), Karl Hermann Frank stressed the import of making this claim: "In particular for our district leaders and intermediaries, this meeting must lay claim to as much power as possible. The success of this day has to prove that the will of the *Volks-gemeinschaft* is most serious."³⁵ In his manual, Goldberg warned that the speaker must neither speak too long, nor enter into debates with opponents, because "he must maintain his authority from the first to the last moment."³⁶ The movement demonstrated unchallenged authority not only in its rhetoric, but, more significantly, in the aesthetic of its gatherings. The staging of Henlein's speeches on a podium above the masses reinforced the *Führerprinzip*, by subordinating the individual to the membership and the membership in turn to the leadership. Likewise, the endless procession of order-keepers at SdP rallies dwarfed the Czechoslovak police presence and thus demonstrated the party's political mastery over the state and the crowd alike. Political mas-

³² Ibidem, p. 4.

³³ Ibidem, p. 5.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 6.

³⁵ SÚA 225/919/5 (SHF Kreisstelle Karlsbad, Tag der Volksgemeinschaft, Weisung Nr. 2, July 15, 1934).

³⁶ GOLDBERG (cf. footnote 29), p. 7.

tery for the SdP became a self-fulfilling prophecy because the more the movement demonstrated and generated excitement, the larger the demonstrations became. At the party's demonstration at Böhmisches Leipa on October 21, 1934, the SdP drew 20,000 attendees, which until then constituted an unprecedented turnout. But, after a month-long campaign in May of 1935, the SdP shattered its old record by drawing 100,000 at Teplitz-Schönau (Teplice-Sanov) on the eve of the elections.³⁷

This army of order-keepers also had an unofficial function in fomenting disorder in confrontations with the German opposition and the Czech police. As the incident in Tuschkau (Touškov) on May 3, 1935 illustrates, the SdP exploited such confrontations as an opportunity to mobilize support against both the Marxists and the state. On the evening before the planned demonstration in Tuschkau, the SdP leadership ordered in 300 order-keepers in anticipation of a conflict with Marxist agitators.³⁸ Just before the demonstration, SdP supporters allowed themselves to be frisked by the Czechoslovak police, which re-enforced their image as keepers of order.³⁹ The local office of political administration reported that most of the crowd of nearly 300 had come from outside of Tuschkau by bicycle or by bus, and among them were fifteen German Social Democrats.⁴⁰ Before Karl Hermann Frank addressed the crowd, the order-keepers were instructed to eject the Social Democrats, and predictably a fight erupted, which lasted twenty minutes before the Czech police could restore order.⁴¹ The official account of the incident concluded that, although the Social Democrats had come with the intention of disrupting the meeting, "the SdP order-keepers used excessive force and it cannot be reduced to self-defense, given that they were in the vast majority and perhaps it would have been possible to have emptied the hall without the use of force."⁴² The day after the incident, the SdP main leadership responded with an indignant telegram to the Chancellery of the President, stating that: "We protest emphatically against this grave injury to our freedom to demonstrate and we request the strictest investigation, as well as disciplining."⁴³

Despite the indignant tone of this telegram, the sequence of events surrounding this incident suggests that the confrontation was in fact part of the SdP

³⁷ The statistic on the turnout at Böhmisches Leipa is taken from: RONALD SMELSER: *The Sudeten Problem 1933-1938*, Middletown/CT 1975, p. 101. The turnout estimate at Teplitz-Schönau is from: BRAND: *Auf verlorenem Posten* (cf. footnote 7), p. 111.

³⁸ SÚA 225/960/5 (SHF, volební schůze, Touškov [electoral gathering in Touškov], May 2, 1935).

³⁹ KARL HERMANN FRANK: *Sudetendeutschum in Kampf und Not. Ein Bildbericht*, Germany, 1936.

⁴⁰ SÚA 225/960/5 (Volební schůze podle plakátu "Öffentliche Wahlversammlung", Rada polit. Správy [Council of Political Administration], May 3, 1935).

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ SÚA 225/960/5 (SHF, volební schůze, Touškov, May 2, 1935).

campaign strategy. The transfer of 300 order-keepers in advance of a minor demonstration that did not even feature Konrad Henlein indicates the leadership's premeditated intent to respond to any provocation with disproportionate force. Here we see Frank in his "fire-tender" role, when an incident is created by having the order-keepers remove the Social Democrats. In the ensuing riot, Frank's calculated show of force demonstrated the political mastery of his movement over its rivals and served to intimidate any socialist sympathizers in the area. The overwhelming SdP response also forced the Czech garrison to intervene in order to restore order and allow Frank to speak. But, by the time the police had done so, Frank had already moved on to his next speaking engagement and his police escort was obliged to follow him. As Frank had foreseen, this civil disorder not only undermined state authority in the borderlands, it also created a valuable pretext for SdP propaganda against the state, as evidenced by his prompt telegram to the President. In his capacity as the party's chief fire-tender and propagandist, it was likely that Frank orchestrated this incident to serve as a pretext for writing such a telegram. This telegram appears even more disingenuous in light of the fact that it had been the SdP leadership who had requested police protection for this demonstration.⁴⁴ As reports about several other incidents, like that in Tuschkau, worked their way up the chain of command, it became clear to the Interior Ministry that the Henlein Movement was using state security forces to run against the state.⁴⁵

In his speeches, Henlein too stoked the fires of Sudeten German hostility towards the state, while carefully denying officials a clear legal pretext for banning his public appearances. Czechoslovak officials took down every word of Henlein's public statements and they often noted his close attention to legality. At a mass demonstration in Marienbad (Mariánské Lázně) on January 28, 1935, Henlein directly addressed the allegations of his critics, who had charged that his campaign had been secretly financed by the Reich: "Some ask, where does the money come from. Perhaps from Germany! We, however, in reality get our money, to the extent that we have it, from the most poor in the midst of starvation."⁴⁶ This claim would scarcely have reassured the state, but as a populist slogan, it brilliantly brought home the campaign theme that the Sudeten Germans would overcome poverty through national unity. In spite of the fact that Henlein owed both his police escort and his permission to demonstrate to the Interior Ministry, he still ended his speech with a denunciation of police repression of the Sudeten Germans.⁴⁷ Henlein's

⁴⁴ SÚA 225/960/5 (Volební schůze podle plakátu "Öffentliche Wahlversammlung", Rada polit. Správy, May 3, 1935).

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ SÚA 207 (Provincial Offices of the Ministry of the Interior), 1336/2-17 ("Phonogram" z policejního komisariátu v Mar. Lázních ["Phonogram" from the Police Station in Mariánské Lázně], January 28, 1935).

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

anti-state rhetoric, however, was far tamer than Hitler's had been in the years before his seizure of power in Germany. Although both nationalist leaders had to work within the confines of a "liberal" system, Henlein's position as a minority party leader within a Slavic nation-state remained far more tenuous than that of Hitler during his movement phase. Therefore, Henlein was exceedingly careful to couch his criticisms of the state in the context of a legal and orderly demonstration.

The political protection that Henlein received from the Czech and German Agrarian parties also proved instrumental in legitimizing the SdP as the party of law and order. The Czech Agrarians remained loyal to Henlein because they envisioned the SHF as a critical part of a conservative coalition. Beneš commented at the time of the election to the German Agrarian leader Alfred Rosche: "The Agrarians only need Henlein for party political reasons."⁴⁸ As much as the Agrarians thought that they needed the SdP leader, Henlein relied upon them for his political survival and he sought to reassure them by launching a charm offensive to moderate the image of his movement. As part of his campaign, Henlein granted an interview with the Czech Agrarian paper *Večer* on October 6, 1934, and made two personal appeals at the Agrarian-controlled Interior Ministry to request permission for a mass demonstration.⁴⁹ After local authorities had blocked two earlier requests, the Interior Ministry forced local police in Böhmisches-Leipa to allow Henlein to hold a mass rally there on October 21, 1934.⁵⁰

This demonstration marked a political breakthrough for the KB in mobilizing mass support for their national unity movement. Brand had scripted a very moderate speech for Henlein, which committed the movement to the interests of the liberal republic: "I believe that none of our demands violate the interests of this state because these are only demands that are entitled to every nation in accordance with national law and the laws of true humanity – if the nation is to live and not vegetate."⁵¹ This commitment signaled a tactical retreat for the KB away from the anti-liberal tone that it had earlier taken in the *Junge Front*. Ironically, Henlein declared his independence from Nazi Germany at a demonstration that resembled the Nuremberg Rallies, complete with massive columns and martial music.⁵² Despite the mixed messages of the demonstration, the KB succeeded in both mobilizing a mass following and in solidifying Agrarian support.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 76.

⁴⁹ BIMAN, MALÍŘ (cf. footnote 30), p. 77; SMELSER: The Sudeten Problem (cf. footnote 37), p. 101.

⁵⁰ BIMAN, MALÍŘ (cf. footnote 30), p. 77; SMELSER: The Sudeten Problem (cf. footnote 37), p. 101.

⁵¹ SÚA SdP/1/1 (Konrad Henlein in seiner programmatischen Rede auf dem Tag der Heimatfront in Böhmisches-Leipa, October 21, 1934).

⁵² SMELSER: The Sudeten Problem (cf. footnote 37), p. 101.

In staging these mass demonstrations, Frank relied extensively on the discipline of SdP order-keepers to preserve the illusion of legality. The case of the "flying brigades of speech listeners" further illustrates how the dual functionality of these SdP operatives served the party's campaign strategy. In his plans for the Böhmisches Leipa rally, Frank provided for brigades of fifty uniformed bicyclists, who would ride through the whole district on the week before the demonstration displaying SdP banners.⁵³ He instructed that these brigades would peddle into the town square to much fanfare, which would be provided by regional groups, who would be stationed in the square in advance. In order to heighten the build-up to the announcement of the speech, it should be heralded by a drummer and at least two horn players. Frank concluded that the announcement itself should be made by a good speaker and should be punctuated by applause, as the brigade peddled on to the next town.

Interior Ministry reports, however, testify to the unofficial function of SdP operatives, who were accused of terrorizing Socialists at night.⁵⁴ One such report on May 30th indicates that local groups in the borderlands received their agitation orders in advance to launch a wave of eight demonstrations on the eve of the May 19th elections.⁵⁵ The largest of these confrontations, involving approximately 200 combatants, took place in the town square of Johannesburg, where a large mob of SdP supporters provoked a fight with a smaller group of Social Democrats, who were protecting their posters from SdP vandalism and Czech police were once again forced to intervene.⁵⁶ In provoking political violence in the final hours of the campaign, the party could rely upon local cadres of former Nazis and Nationalists to serve as "riot specialists." These former low-level functionaries from the banned parties were seasoned in political violence, which made them indispensable in instigating conflicts with the Marxists. As Ronald Smelser has shown, these provincial, plebian functionaries possessed the experience in mass politics that the more urban and educated KB leadership lacked.⁵⁷

In his research on the timing of riots, Brass had concluded that "fire-tenders" (like Frank) know when to stoke the coals of ethnic tension, or to let them smolder until the moment is "right" for a riot.⁵⁸ According to Brass, the most opportune time for a riot comes during a campaign, or a mass mobilization, when the political balance is in flux and a riot may shift it in one's favor at the expense of a political rival.⁵⁹ Thus the time was indeed "right" for

⁵³ SÚA 225/919/5 (SHF Kreisstelle Karlsbad, Tag der Volksgemeinschaft, Weisung Nr. 2, July 15, 1934).

⁵⁴ SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP předvolební agitace v okrese krnovském, May 30, 1935).

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ RONALD SMELSER: Reich National Socialist and Sudeten German Party Elites. A Collective Biographical Approach, in: ZfO 23 (1974), pp. 639-660.

⁵⁸ BRASS (cf. footnote 22), p. 17.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

a riot on the eve of the Czechoslovak parliamentary elections in May of 1935. The timing of this final wave of violence across the borderlands suggests that it was calculated by the SdP leadership to intimidate the Marxist opposition and unify these border communities behind the Henlein Movement. This calculation achieved its desired result the following day, when the SdP captured 66 percent of the German vote and surpassed all expectations.⁶⁰

While Frank staged the party's demonstrations, Henlein's twenty-eight year old deputy Walter Brand crafted a cult of personality around the "Sudeten-Führer" that portrayed him as the embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the German minority. On Henlein's campaign tour, Brand rode with him and served as his chief handler, speech writer and media relations consultant. Brand effectively marketed the Henlein cult in a technologically sophisticated, multi-media campaign, utilizing film, radio, records, and even postcards featuring the birth home of the *Führer*. Brand so micro-managed the Henlein cult that Henlein himself felt compelled to declare in an order to all party members that there was indeed someone inside the suit:

I am accustomed to making my decisions independently and taking responsibility for myself and I don't let anybody use me as a puppet or tool. Whoever believes that I am controlled by some kind of men behind the scenes doesn't know me very well.⁶¹

Although the radical wing of the SdP remained unconvinced of Henlein's independence from the KB, he was consistently characterized as the embodiment of his movement in the pages of *Der Sozialdemokrat*. By constantly hammering Henlein on the front page of their paper, the German Social Democrats unwittingly played into the Henlein cult and, in so doing, they helped the KB keep him in the center of the political stage.⁶²

According to Brand's memoirs, the most ambitious and successful idea for marketing the Henlein cult during the elections came from Henlein himself.⁶³ Henlein proposed to Brand that they get in his old Cadillac and lead a national unity tour around the entire border of the state. This month-long tour began on April 23, 1935, in Marienbad and progressed clockwise around the border, making sixty-seven stops, at which Henlein gave an average of three speeches per day, seven days a week.⁶⁴ This marathon marketing strategy made the Henlein speech the unifying ritual of the Sudeten German electorate. By leading a migration to every German-speaking region in Czechoslovakia, Henlein offered these far-flung language islands a national liturgy in which every Sudeten German could take part. This large-scale migration defined the

⁶⁰ OLIVOVÁ (cf. footnote 4), p. 253

⁶¹ SÚA 225/919/5 (Hauptstelle SHF, Eger, Persönliche Weisung Konrad Henleins an alle Mitglieder der SHF, September 1, 1934).

⁶² *Der Sozialdemokrat*, May 15, 1935.

⁶³ BRAND: *Auf verlorenem Posten* (cf. footnote 7), p. 104.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*; SÚA 225/918/1 (An die Bezirksleitung der SHF, April 20, 1935).

Sudeten German nation by circumscribing its borders and thus binding its members.⁶⁵ The success of this strategy can be measured by the overwhelming numbers of Germans who not only took part in these demonstrations, but actually joined into the procession from town to town.⁶⁶ At each stop, capacity crowds waited patiently for hours to hear the “Sudeten-Führer.” The tour culminated in the already mentioned demonstration of 100,000 at Teplitz-Schönau on the eve of the May 19th general elections.⁶⁷

Der Sozialdemokrat cleverly characterized this tour as “Circus Henlein,” but much like the appeal of a circus parade, the pageantry of Henlein’s entourage attracted a great deal of attention in small German border towns in the midst of depression.⁶⁸ Brand and Henlein were entertained along the way by a traveling music group and they were protected by a security detail made up of twelve uniformed body guards, a brigade of motorcyclists, an army of local order-keepers, and a detachment of Czech police. In the town of Znaim (Znojmo) on April 27, 1935, however, Henlein’s impressive security staff proved more effective in enhancing his stature than in actually protecting him. When the motorcade arrived in Znaim, it encountered a counter-demonstration of German Social Democrats and, in the midst of the altercation, shots were fired through the window of Henlein’s Cadillac. Although Henlein was not injured, Brand claims that he was deeply traumatized by the incident and had to be forced to give his next speech. Despite the confusion, the SdP immediately turned the incident into a propaganda victory, because it generated more sympathy for Henlein and forced the state to assign him an even larger security detachment.⁶⁹ SdP propagandists published pictures of the bullet holes in Henlein’s windshield in an attempt to vilify the German Social Democrats.⁷⁰ The tour took a terrible toll on Henlein, but as one Czech official noted, “even when his speaking performances were not exactly the most successful, due in part also to his languished voice, he was met everywhere with striking sympathy and agreement.”⁷¹ As this comment suggests, Henlein

⁶⁵ For further discussion of the power of migrations for mobilizing new nationalisms, see: BENEDICT ANDERSON: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York 1991.

⁶⁶ *Sudetendeutscher 1. Mai*, ed. by RUDOLF SANDER, Karlsbad, Leipzig 1938, p. 16.

⁶⁷ SÚA SdP/1/KH [Konrad Henlein] (Henlein Rede in Teplitz-Schönau, May 20, 1935); BRAND: *Auf verlorenem Posten* (cf. footnote 7), p. 111.

⁶⁸ *Der Sozialdemokrat*, May 11, 1935.

⁶⁹ This interior report noted the widespread sympathy that Henlein won on his election tour: SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP Opava, *Přehled činnosti během voleb i po volbách*, Presidium zemského úřadu v Brně [SdP Opava, Overview of the activities in the course of the elections, as well as after the elections, Presidium of the Regional Office in Brno], June 3, 1935). BRAND: *Auf verlorenem Posten* (cf. footnote 7), p. 109.

⁷⁰ *Das ist Konrad Henlein. 200 Bilder aus dem Leben des Sudetendeutschen Einigers*, ed. by ERNST TSCHERNE, Karlsbad, Leipzig 1938, no page numbers.

⁷¹ SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP Opava, *Přehled činnosti během voleb i po volbách*, Presidium zemského úřadu v Brně, June 3, 1935).

was seen more as a sympathetic, rather than an inspirational figure like Hitler. The burden of holding Henlein together on this grueling tour fell on Brand's young shoulders, who later admitted his embarrassment that Henlein compulsively asked the Czech guards if the way was really safe for his motorcade.⁷² What embarrassed Brand and what he worked tirelessly to conceal was that the *Führer* of the Sudeten Germans lacked the nerves to play the part.

Strategic legality made Henlein's campaign tour possible and it yielded the SdP a significant tactical advantage in its rivalry with the Marxist parties. In our interview, former KB member Edi Burkert confirmed that the specter of a ban, which always loomed over the movement, compelled leaders to comply with state-imposed restrictions and to maintain discipline and control at all demonstrations.⁷³ Even an Interior Ministry official had to marvel at the discipline of the SdP operatives in controlling a demonstration of 5,000 in Schluckenau (Šluknov), which was carried out with only one carefully calculated infraction.⁷⁴ According to the report, illegal banners bearing the German national colors appeared in unison and then disappeared at the climax of the speech. The reporter surmised that a secret order was given over the telephone and instructed to cue the display of the banners. The leadership's impressive ability to coordinate this display of banners at the climax of the speech suggests that it did exert a large degree of control over the behavior of its functionaries at such demonstrations. Frank often choreographed every aspect of major demonstrations, so it is more likely that the appearance of these illegal banners was part of those stage directions. These tactics yielded the movement a track record of orderly demonstrations, which greatly strengthened its case in appealing any restriction that the government placed on its right to demonstrate.⁷⁵

By contrast, the Communists lacked this strategic legality and consequently the Henleinists were able to present themselves as the keepers of public order against the "Marxist provocateurs." For example, in Reichenberg (Liberec), the local SdP office followed a long list of rules in requesting permission to hang its election propaganda in specific areas and permission was usually forthcoming. Regarding the press laws, an Interior Ministry official had to admit that the tactics of the SdP were "within the limits of the law."⁷⁶ Conversely, the failure of Communist functionaries to comply with these rules

⁷² BRAND: Auf verlorenem Posten (cf. footnote 7), p. 109.

⁷³ Burkert, interview (cf. footnote 21).

⁷⁴ SÚA 225/920/1 (Okresní hejtman, Rada politické správy, Relace, July 22, 1934).

⁷⁵ See appeal to the director of police in Karlsbad by SHF lawyers, Friedrich Tischer and Josef Peuker, who protested the ban of the "Day of the *Volksgemeinschaft*" in Karlsbad. They effectively countered police charges that the demonstration would constitute an unreasonable threat to public order by detailing the many provisions that the party had made to maintain order at this demonstration. SÚA 225/918/1 (An das Polizeikommissariat in Karlsbad, September 20, 1934).

⁷⁶ SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP Opava, Přehled činnosti během voleb i po volbách, Presidium zemského úřadu v Brně, June 3, 1935).

resulted in the decision of a regional court in Reichenberg to confiscate their illegal flyers against the SdP.⁷⁷ After the initial campaign to ban the SdP had failed, the Interior Ministry noted that the German Social Democrats and the Communists then sought to get individual SdP demonstrations banned by provoking confrontations with Henleinists.⁷⁸ This strategy too failed because the police, who were assigned to protect Henlein and other SdP speakers, usually intervened against the Socialists as the instigators of the disturbances and in the end allowed the SdP leaders to speak. This was the case on April 24 and 25, 1935, when German Social Democrats incited brawls at SdP events in Neusattel (Straž) and Neudek (Nejdek) and on both occasions the police permitted SdP speakers to continue after they had restored order.⁷⁹ This provocation strategy of the German Social Democratic and the Communist party ultimately backfired by allying Czechoslovak police with Henlein's army of order-keepers in maintaining order against Marxist agitation.⁸⁰

Although strategic legality had created the illusion of SdP legitimacy within German communities during the campaign, the inability of the party to keep its campaign promises after the elections rapidly dissipated this illusion. For example, just a day after the elections, SdP order-keepers from Hultschin (Hlučín) began to stream into the local party office looking for work and support.⁸¹ The appearance of these former functionaries at the local SdP office immediately after the elections foreshadowed long-term problems that the party's short-sighted electoral strategy had created. These former agitators embodied the unrealistic expectations that the campaign had raised, as well as a new radicalism among the rank and file. The SdP campaign had offered these legions of unemployed men more than a part-time job. More significantly, it had granted them a sense of belonging and hope that national unity could succeed where cooperation with the Czech parties (i.e. so-called activism) had failed. The fact that the party was ill-prepared to deal with these men after the elections reveals that the leadership had not considered the long-term consequences of strategic legality. Weeks of street fighting had radicalized the rank and file beyond the control of the increasingly isolated KB leadership. In addition, the campaign had created the false expectation that Sudeten German unity would pave the way for national salvation. Henlein, however, would prove to be a very disappointing savior, in large part

⁷⁷ Okresní Archiv v Liberci TX 1914-34 (Okresí soud 1934-38 [Regional Court 1934-38]).

⁷⁸ SÚA 225/920/3 (Presidium zemského úřadu, SHF, důvěrná schůze dne 29. listopadu 1934 v Brně [Presidium of the Regional Office, SHF, secret meeting on the day of 29 November 1934 in Brno], December 1, 1934).

⁷⁹ Die Arbeiter trotzen dem SHF-Terror und Blutiger Kampf in Neudek, in: Der Sozialdemokrat, April 26, 1935, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Sudetendeutscher 1. Mai (cf. footnote 66).

⁸¹ SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP Opava, Přehled činnosti během voleb i po volbách, Presidium zemského úřadu v Brně, June 3, 1935).

because his duplicitous campaign had undermined the moderate image that he had cultivated with the government in his charm offensive before the elections.

In many respects the problem that these order-keepers posed to Henlein after the 1935 elections paralleled the threat that Ernst Röhm's SA had posed to Hitler after his seizure of power in 1933. The way in which both leaders dealt with these threats, however, reveals a fundamental difference in their characters. In both cases, the old "Kämpfer" had already served their purpose by achieving a political breakthrough. But then they became a political liability, which in turn threatened the party leaders. On the so-called "Night of Long Knives" in June of 1934, Hitler ruthlessly removed this threat by sending Röhm and his SA lieutenants to their deaths. Henlein, however, lacked the ruthlessness to intervene decisively against the radical Nazi-wing of his party.⁸² He vacillated until rivals had overtaken him and his KB allies for control of the SdP by the end of 1937.

In the course of the 1935 campaign, however, strategic legality would transform the image of the SdP from that of a Nazi successor party to the movement of unity and order. This policy made political alchemy possible and forestalled an impending ban of the movement. By carefully choreographing both the campaign's legal and illegal activities, the SdP outmaneuvered the state and the Marxist parties. As a final example, on May 12 in Reichenberg, *Der Sozialdemokrat* claimed that their party official, Hermann Hübner, was threatened by an SdP man with a hammer. When a reporter confronted the ethnic-German police inspector in Reichenberg with this allegation, he reportedly dismissed them, commenting that "you have provoked this."⁸³ This incident highlights the pervasive problem of complicity among ethnic-German police in the borderlands, who often failed to protect the political opposition to the SdP. But even a more conscientious police inspector would have had difficulty pursuing these allegations because the movement's carefully crafted legal veneer covered up its illegal activities.

In the short term of the campaign, the SdP leadership had succeeded in creating the public appearance that their functionaries were keepers of order, who were allied with the police and against the "Marxist provocateurs". After the elections, however, this veneer would be stripped away, when the Interior Ministry confirmed its suspicion that the SdP had accepted Reich German funds. It consequently took a much more aggressive posture in policing the party. As part of this posture, Prague replaced ethnic-German police in the borderlands with Czech counterparts, who were then charged with cracking down on the Henleinists. These crackdowns, however, would only further in-

⁸² It should be noted that Henlein's position as party leader in 1935 was far weaker than that of Hitler in 1933. Thus, even if Henlein had possessed the fortitude to move against his rivals, the threat of a schism was much more acute within the SdP.

⁸³ SÚA 225/960/5 (SdP Opava, Přehled činnosti během voleb i po volbách, Presidium zemského úřadu v Brně, June 3, 1935).

flame Czech-German relations and provide "fire tenders" like Frank with ample tinder in the years leading up to the Munich crisis in September of 1938.

Zusammenfassung

Henleins fliegende Fahrrad-Brigaden. Die SdP in der Wahl von 1935.

Die von Konrad Henlein im Oktober 1933 gegründete Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront (SHF) avancierte in rund anderthalb Jahren zur größten Partei der ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik. Diese Entwicklung ist um so bemerkenswerter, als die tschechischen und die deutschen Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten im Jahr vor den Wahlen von 1935 Anstrengungen unternahmen, die Partei verbieten zu lassen. Höchstwahrscheinlich wäre diese Initiative erfolgreich gewesen, wenn die Angelegenheit nicht an den kränklichen Präsidenten Tomáš G. Masaryk verwiesen worden wäre. Nachdem der Staat zuvor bereits sowohl die Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei als auch die Deutsche Nationalpartei verboten hatte, beschloß Masaryk einen Monat vor den Wahlen am 19. Mai, daß die SHF antreten dürfe, sich jedoch den demokratischeren Namen Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP) geben müsse.

Wenngleich die Partei auch nach dieser Entscheidung unter der Drohung des Beinaheverbots stand, gelang der SdP die Wandlung von einem politischen Außenseiter zu einer deutschen Mehrheitspartei. Bei der Planung ihrer Wahlkampagne sah sich die Führung der SdP zwei gegensätzlichen politischen Geboten gegenüber: ein Verbot zu vermeiden und gleichzeitig die deutschen Gemeinden gegen den Staat zu mobilisieren. Um diese Anforderungen miteinander vereinbaren zu können, entwickelte sie bestimmte Taktiken einer „strategischen Legalität“. Dieses Konzept ermöglichte der SdP, den Rechts- und Polizeischutz, der ihr vom Staat gewährt wurde, gegen diesen selbst zu wenden, indem sie unter dem Mantel der Legalität eine anti-staatliche Rhetorik gebrauchte, politische Gegner und die Polizei zu manipulieren suchte und sogar vorsätzlich politische Gewalttaten förderte.

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht das politische Handeln und die Strategien der Parteiführung, die zum erstaunlichen Erfolg der SdP führten. Am Beispiel der SdP-Wahlkampagne von 1935 lassen sich einige der potentiellen Schwierigkeiten erkennen, die sich in demokratischen Staaten bei der Überwachung moderner multi-ethnischer Wahlen entwickeln können.