

Kameradschaftsbund

A Contribution to the History of the Czech-German Relationship¹

(Part two)

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On 1 October 1933² Konrad Henlein published a proclamation whose author was Walter Brand and which has obvious traces of influence of the Kameradschaftsbund (KB): *"I call hereof all parties and estates to unite all the Sudeten German force and I shall be in the lead."*³ Thus the Sudeten German Patriotic Front (Sudetendeutsche Heimatsfront – SHF) was formed. The new subject did not have any strict political program and its only goal was to unite all the Sudeten Germans.⁴

The SHF structure and articles corresponded to the contemporary political situation – the leading positions were occupied by the members of the KB who had great influence in the political, ideological and personal area; the former national socialists had not seized the power so far. The Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront was in many respects similar to the Deutscher Turnverband. Henlein was aware that a prudent and restrained tactics applied by the Kameradschaftsbund would need to be maintained. The SHF was thus *"presented as a voluntary association of loyal Czech*

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² Jörg Hoensch writes down, that the proclamation was on the September 30, 1933. Compare J. K. HOENSCH, *Othmar Spann, Kameradschaftsbund a Sudetoněmecká vlastenecká fronta*, Dějiny a současnost, 1999, No. 5, p. 34.

³ V. OLIVOVÁ, *Kameradschaftsbund*, in: *Z českých dějin. Sborník prací in memoriam prof. Dr. Václava Husy*, Praha 1966, p. 248.

⁴ But the SHF wanted to choose another path than that of National Socialism. It was prepared to acknowledge the Czechoslovak Republic and it clearly formulated its goals – spiritual development of the Sudeten Germans, the accent of the idea of estates. To the negotiations on the establishment of SHF see M. BURIAN, *Deutscher Turnverband a československý stát v letech 1918–1933*, in: M. WAIC, ("Hg.), *Češi a Němci ve světě tělovýchovy a sportu*, Praha 2004, pp. 65–66; J. CESAR, B. ČERNÝ, *Politika německých buržoazních stran v Československu v letech 1918–1938. Díl II. (1930–1938)*, Praha 1962, pp. 196–202.

citizens of German language and culture whose only wish was that their just grievances be redressed".⁵ Henlein avoided any signs of promoting intolerant nationalism. He hoped that this moderate programme would help to save the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront from being prohibited. In this way, he wanted to avoid the fate of the DNSAP and the DNP.⁶ Their ban or dissolution was thus to little avail since most of the DNSAP members joined the SHF.⁷

As Walter Koch, the German envoy in Prague, reported, the situation in the Sudeten movement developed in following way in the first October decade of 1933 – the movement de facto split into three streams: the first one was formed by the activist parties (social democrats and agrarians), the second was represented mainly by Christian socialists and the third was composed of *"unorganized masses of former members of just disbanded parties"*. Koch did not believe in Henlein very much and regarded his movement just as an attempt to unite the Sudeten Germans and not as a political factor, which should be considered.⁸

A close connection existed between the leaders of the Kameradschaftsbund and the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront. Articles of the SHF were conceived so that their validity could have been extended to the entire Sudeten German society. With their double-track – political and estates – structure, holding to the primacy of the political leadership (*"political estate"*), they formed, according to Spann's model of *"the real state"*, an organizational skeleton of the future society.⁹

Accepting most national socialist oriented former DNSAP members after the party's extinguishment in October 1933 meant programming

⁵ J. HAAG, *Knights of the Spirit: The Kameradschaftsbund*, The Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 8, 1973, No. 3, p. 142.

⁶ DNSAP (Deutsche nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei) dissolved; DNP (Deutsche Nationalpartei) did not dissolve and de facto fell apart after its ban.

⁷ R. KVAČEK, *K historii Henleinovy Sudetoněmecké strany*, Dějepis ve škole, Vol. IV, No. 5, 1957, p. 198. *"The Government resolution on dissolving DNSAP and prohibiting the activity of DNP was merely a flash in the pan."* S. BIMAN, J. MALÍŘ, *Kariéra učitele tělocviku*, Ústí nad Labem 1983, p. 69.

⁸ Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag. Innenpolitik und Minderheitenprobleme in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik (further Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag), Teil IV. Vom Vorabend der Machtergreifung in Deutschland bis zum Rücktritt von President Masaryk 1933–1935. Berichte des Gesandten Koch, der Konsuln von Bethusy-Huc, von Druffel, von Pfeil und des Gesandtschaftsrates von Stein. Ausgewählt, eingeleitet und kommentiert von Heidrun und Stephan Dolezel, Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Karolinum, Band 49/IV, München 1991, Situation des Sudetendeutschums, deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, den 10. 12. 1933, Nr. 33, pp. 75–77.

⁹ HOENSCH, p. 35.

a clash between the moderate SHF leadership dominated by KB members and a radical part of the membership.¹⁰ In the following months, the ideological incongruity of the SHF was becoming increasingly evident.¹¹ The views of the radical members were clearly oriented toward German National Socialism, while the opinions of the leadership were influenced by Spann's ideas.¹² However, the claim that the SHF would become a mere stream of the DNSAP and the DNP supporters can in no case be accepted.¹³ The structure of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront represented a double-track way – the intellectual but politically inexperienced party leadership formed a “centre”, which was counterbalanced by a less educated, but politically experienced group of nationally socialist oriented district officials. These people had no direct influence on the decision-making in the party, but they benefited from their close contact with the public.

As regards the ideological roots of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront, the opinions vary. The historians Boyer and Kučera suppose that the SHF ideology “*habe abgesehen von einigen spezifisch sudetendeutschen Merkmalen von Anfang an [...] auch die meisten wesentlichen Elemente der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung enthalten*”, narrowing the differences to mere “nuances”.¹⁴ Ronald Smelser, on the other hand, points out the differences between the two groups, governed by rivalry. One group promoted autonomy, the other national socialist ideas. Therefore, Smelser calls them “traditionalists” and “radicals”.¹⁵ The traditionalists comprised a heterogeneous group of “*orthodoxer Konservative rund rechtsgerichteter, nichtnationalsozialistischer 'konservativer Revolutionäre'*”. Their goal

¹⁰ Concerning the increase in membership, compare V. ZIMMERMANN, *Sudetští Němci v nacistickém státě. Politika a nálada obyvatelstva v říšské župě Sudety (1938–1945)*, Praha 2001, p. 39.

¹¹ Besides different political goals and ideological roots, we should not forget “*daß es sich bei der Auseinandersetzung zwischen den beiden Strömungen zu einem großen Teil schlicht um Kämpfe um Posten und Macht handelte*”. R. GEBEL, “*Heim ins Reich!*” Konrad Henlein und der Reichsgau Sudetenland (1938–1945), München 1999, p. 27.

¹² S. DOLEŽEL, *Základy říšskoněmecké politiky vůči Československu v letech 1933–1938 se zvláštním zřetelům k sudetským Němcům*, in: J. K. HOENSCH, D. KOVÁČ, (eds.), *Ztroskotání spojení. Češi, Němci a Slováci v první republice 1918–1939*, Praha 1993, pp. 107–108.

¹³ Compare ZIMMERMANN, p. 41.

¹⁴ W. JILGE, *Zwischen Autoritarismus und Totalitarismus. Anmerkungen zu einer Kontroverse*, Bohemia. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder, hrsg. im Auftrag des Collegium Carolinum von F. SEIBT, und H. LEMBERG, Band 39, 1998, p. 97. Boyer and Kučera do not deny “*autochthone programmatische Wurzeln*” in the ideology of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront, however, they reduce it to mere “*situationsbedingte Variationen des Nationalsozialismus*”.

¹⁵ Ibidem. “*Henlein's party certainly cannot be from its beginnings identified as Hitler's irredentist 'fifth column'...*” ZIMMERMANN, p. 39.

consisted in the autonomous development of the German "*Volksgruppen im Ausland*". The radicals, on the contrary, leaned toward the Third Reich. "*Ihr Denken war etatistisch, und ihr Bestreben richtete sich auf den Anschluß des Sudetenlandes.*"¹⁶

In the first period of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront's existence, i.e. from its foundation approximately at the end of 1934, the opinions of the KB members clearly prevailed. As mentioned above, Henlein was aware of the necessity to maintain favourable relations with the Czechoslovak government. Therefore, he sought patronage within German activist parties and turned to the most powerful German party – the Bund der Landwirte (BdL).¹⁷ The goal of Henlein's efforts was, with the help of a German agrarian party, to reinforce the KB's position against the radical membership and, particularly in the first week after the foundation of the SHF, to avert a threat of the official ban.¹⁸

The Bund der Landwirte did not oppose negotiations. Its foremen hoped to gain a decisive voice in the new organization and thus reinforce their own position. While the German agrarians had refused to negotiate with national socialists in June and September 1933, their Leader, Franz Spina, now began direct negotiations with Henlein as early as in October 1933. In the negotiations, he was mostly interested in the attitude of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront to the Czechoslovak state and the German agrarians. These discussions enabled Henlein and his movement to survive the initial period of insecurity and to guarantee a benevolent approach of Czechoslovak authorities.¹⁹

These negotiations thus had a major significance as they broke the isolation in which the DNSAP had found itself in 1933. "*It was the more intelligent, sophisticated, sensitive and liberal policy drawn up by the Kameradschaftsbund group that succeeded in leading the entire far-right German nationalist movement out of the political isolation.*"²⁰

¹⁶ GEBEL, p. 34.

¹⁷ German agrarians.

¹⁸ E. FRANZEL, *Sudetendeutsche Geschichte: eine volkstümliche Darstellung*, Mannheim, Würzburg 1990, p. 371. Henlein declared that "*Heimatfront stands on the ground of the state and is principally for participation in the government*". R. N. FOUSTKA, *Konrád Henlein. Neoficiální historie jeho strany*, Praha 1937, p. 28.

¹⁹ F. ŠTĚPÁN, *Spolupráce německých buržoazních stran s henleinovskými fašisty v letech 1933–1935*, Sborník archivních prací XIII, No. 1, 1963, p. 7. Henlein could also rely on the benevolent approach of some "*Czech right-wing politicians in whose mercenary calculations he represented a hope for a government without socialists*". M. VYMAZALOVÁ, *Sudetoněmecká strana 1935–1936* (unpublished thesis), Praha 1999, p. 22.

²⁰ OLIVOVÁ, p. 250.

The approach of the Czechoslovak officials to the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront was ambivalent in the first months of its existence. Part of political elites did not trust the new entity and considered it only a tool of National Socialism, while others hoped that the SHF would become an ally against the threat of Bolshevism.²¹ It was no secret that the KB members controlled the SHF, but since they avoided controversial political appearances in the public, their future actions were hard to predict. The double-track way of Czechoslovak politics was manifested at the end of 1933, when Walter Brand and several KB members were arrested for a suspicion of seditious activity, while Henlein remained at liberty, and the SHF was not prohibited. The government was not able or willing to take forceful action, and the arrested men were eventually released.²²

The German approach to the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront was also ambivalent. On one hand, Berlin was pleased by the fact that some members of the dissolved DNSAP found refuge in the SHF but, on the other hand, it was not sure about Henlein's further steps. The German government knew very well about the KB's influence on the SHF leadership. In November 1933, the German envoy in Prague, Koch, informed his government that the Kameradschaftsbund was still a little-known organization, the programme of which was influenced by ideas of the Austrian philosopher, economist and sociologist Othmar Spann. In the conclusion of his report, he warned that the KB leaders promoted a theory according to which the Sudeten Germans were equal to the Austrian Germans.²³ In his opinion, there were even rumours that the KB wanted to create a "Sudeten man", who would culturally and spiritually feel in the German way but whose political inclination would not necessarily have to lean to the German Reich.²⁴ These

²¹ A report to the Regional Court in Opava written by Dr. Dolný shows that KB conducts seditious activities and its final goal is to "form a new unified state system in Central Europe". *Německý imperialismus proti ČSR (1918–1939)*, Praha 1962, Zpráva Dr. Dolného krajskému soudu v Opavě. Protičeskoslovenská činnost vůdců henleinovského hnutí a organizace Kameradschaftsbund, 14. 12. 1933, No. 166, p. 377.

²² HAAG, p. 143. Keith Robbins claims that it was Franz Spina who arranged for the release of the arrested men. Compare K. G. ROBBINS, *Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten Question and British Foreign Policy*, The Historical Journal 12, 1969, Vol. 4, p. 680. Evidence against the arrested men was not convincing enough to bring them before court. BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 87.

²³ Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag, DNSAP – Kameradschaftsbund – „Volksfront“ und „Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront“ – Schwenkung der Heimatfront in Richtung Aktivismus, Deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, Prag, den 8. November 1933, Nr. 39, pp. 85–90. He also repeated his statement in June 1934, when he wrote in a report that the KB rejected the German Reich and leaned more toward Austria. Compare Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag, Der Kameradschaftsbund, Deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, Prag, den 14. 6. 1934, Nr. 55a, pp. 118–120.

²⁴ HAAG, p. 143.

reports alarmed Berlin, and in a meeting at the Wilhelmstraße held in December 1933, it was decided that the KB would not obtain any finances from the Reich.²⁵ On the other hand, a report by the Czechoslovak consulate in Leipzig from November 1933 stated that German officials considered Henlein "*their man and his movement a parallel action to their irredentist movements. Henlein cannot openly follow their programme, because the Czechoslovak government would ban his activity*". The report also claimed that the tolerance of the Czechoslovak government was generally relied upon in Germany, "*which is, however, acknowledged here with derision*".²⁶

The leaders of the Kameradschaftsbund were aware of the unfavourable image of them and their influence on the SHF in the German capital. Therefore, they tried through their representative in Berlin, Fritz Bürger, to contact persons related to the government, who they assumed would take a favourable stand to the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront. One of the most important people in this respect turned out to be Hans Steinacher, President of the "Association for Germanism Abroad" (Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland, VDA) in 1933–1937. Steinacher agreed to meet with Henlein and Brand in secret. After the meeting, he promised to both men to secure money for the SHF.²⁷

The congress in Česká Lípa in October 1934 was the first occasion to show all year's work of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront led by Spann-inspired intelligence.²⁸ However, officials hesitated about permitting the congress. The Ministry of Interior²⁹ was not very eager, and the BdL deputy Wolfgang Zierhut had to intercede with the leader of the Czech agrarians, Rudolf Beran, on behalf of the SHF. He assured the Czech agrarians of Henlein's loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic. At the same time, Henlein was supposed to publish expressions of his loyalty in government newspapers, which he did. He exactly declared: "*I am saying clearly and responsibly: I did not have and do not have anything in common with Hitlerism. For us,*

²⁵ More compare J. KUČERA, *Mezi Wilhelmstraße a Thunovskou. Finanční podpora Německé říše Sudetoněmecké straně v letech 1935–1938*, Český časopis historický 95, 1997, No. 2, pp. 387–405.

²⁶ *Německý imperialismus proti ČSR (1918–1939)*, Zpráva československého konzulátu v Lipsku generálnímu konzulátu ČSR v Drážďanech o vztahu nacistické iredenty v Německu k Henleinovi a jeho hnutí, 22. 11. 1933, No. 164, p. 373.

²⁷ Compare HAAG, p. 144.

²⁸ Česká Lípa was a third town in which the congress finally took place. The congress was supposed to take place in Karlovy Vary, but was not permitted. The same happened in Jablonec nad Nisou.

²⁹ Occupied by the Czech agrarians (Republikánská strana zemědělského a malorolnického lidu).

the German National Socialism ends at the border, the same way as the SHF ends there. We are not a continuation of the Krebs' party, and let me for once declare openly that we deeply disdain Krebs and leaders like him who desert."³⁰ It was a clear political manoeuvre, since Henlein represented a movement a substantial part of which consisted of the DNSAP members, and the SHF in addition accepted financial subsidies from Germany. In addition, he met with the VDA member Dr. Hermann Ullmann in the spa town of Bad Elster in June 1934. According to Ullmann, Henlein espoused the national socialist view and expressed on behalf of the SHF the readiness to step out alongside Adolf Hitler at an opportune moment.³¹

Konrad Henlein's main speech at the congress³² in Česká Lípa was presented within the liberal and tolerant tone of the Kameradschaftsbund group. Henlein spoke to about 30,000 members of the SHF, who came mostly from North Bohemia by buses and special trains. In his opinion, the goal of the movement was to form a national community, which would overcome the social differences among members of the nation. The Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront aims for cooperation between Czechs and Germans, and it is definitely not a fascist or national socialist movement, so he proclaimed. Henlein did not outline a specific programme of the movement,³³ he dropped hints or used general phrases, but he at least mentioned basic points of the programme. In his words, the SHF was not a political party but a movement, whose main concern was *"the unification of Germans in this state and their assertion as a state conservative element, while preserving their natural right"*.³⁴ In home politics, Henlein demanded self-government to be extended³⁵ and positions in the state administration system, army,

³⁰ O. NOVÁK, *Henleinovci proti Československu. Z historie sudetoněmeckého fašismu v letech 1933–1938*, Praha 1987, p. 41. Compare V. KURAL, *Konflikt místo společenství? Češi a Němci v československém státě (1918–1938)*, Praha 1993, p. 122.

³¹ Compare BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 99.

³² As a precaution, passages concerning Jews were crossed out. For more details on the congress, compare *Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag, Heimatfront – Kundgebung in Böhmisches-Leipa, Deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, Prag, den 22. 10. 1934*, Nr. 73, pp. 155–162. For the reception of Henlein's speech, compare *ibidem*, *Resonanz der Henlein-Rede in der ČSR, Deutsches Konsulat An das Auswärtige Amt, Reichenberg, den 29. 10. 1934*, Nr. 75, pp. 164–166.

³³ And contrary to his proclamation in print, he did not clearly reject Nazism!

³⁴ OLIVOVÁ, p. 251. The speech also contained a sentence saying that the SHF was significantly different from National Socialism, because it respected individual liberty. It is this sentence that indicates the KB's influence on the speech preparation. ROBBINS, p. 681.

³⁵ *"Since we do not live in a nation-state but in a national state, democracy requires that not only individuals but also national groups be provided with development of their life. We see real democracy in decentralization that is in the largest possible self-government."* BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 112.

justice, etc. to be filled based on equal rights. In conclusion of his speech, Henlein offered the Sudeten Germans' cooperation in building the state.³⁶ His speech in Česká Lípa was a well-prepared cover-up manoeuvre as any criticism was only addressed to the Czechoslovak public in order to convince it of the new movement's friendly intentions. Radical members of the SHF did not hide their disappointment about Henlein's publicly dissociating himself from National Socialism. After an interview with a Czech journalist, in which Henlein emphasized that he did not recommend that all Germans unite in a single state formation, "*a group of the honest in the SHF*" published a proclamation addressed to all other members of the movement, saying among other things: "*Are these words of an honest German man or words of a traitor to the German nation?*"³⁷

It was paradoxical that the Česká Lípa's congress of the SHF, where the will for cooperation between Czechs and Germans was so ostentatiously promoted, was completely organized by former national socialist officials. Money from Germany, from which the congress was financed, was sent to their addresses. The significance of the congress can be seen on several levels. First, the congress resonated with Germany in terms of international politics. Second, it affected the home political scene in Czechoslovakia and third, it became a milestone in the proportion of the Kameradschaftsbund group and the Nazi wing within the party. The KB retained their leading positions in the SHF, but leaders of the national socialist wing required larger share in the movement management, which would, in their opinion, correspond to its actual power.³⁸ Henlein was aware that in the pre-election period it was crucial for the SHF to maintain its unity on the outside, as there was a threat of division. In addition, the KB members were slowly but surely becoming isolated, mostly because of the changing foreign-policy climate. It was also getting increasingly difficult for them to push through their ideological and political goals.³⁹

The first phase in the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront's history, a phase during which the Kameradschaftsbund members almost exclusively led the movement, ended at the turn of 1934 and 1935. The national

³⁶ NOVÁK, p. 45.

³⁷ ZIMMERMANN, p. 43.

³⁸ CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 243. There were many negotiations, at the end of which national socialist officials were accepted in the SHF leadership on 8 January 1935. Compare ŠTĚPÁN, No. 21, 1935, 8 January. Protokol o jednání hlavního vedení SHF. Začlenění funkcionářů zakázané DNSAP a nacistických odborů do henleinovského hnutí. Zpráva o jednání Künzla a Neuwirtha se Stoupalem. Volební fond SHF, pp. 46–47.

³⁹ HOENSCH, p. 35.

socialist officials got into the SHF leadership although the KB group was still predominant. A group around the "Aufbruch" magazine even openly opposed the SHF leadership, advocating national socialist, Pan-German, racist and anti-Semitic opinions, and so became a kind of ambassador of National Socialism to the German minority in the Czechoslovak Republic.

This change also brought about a reversal of Germany's attitude to Henlein's movement. Previous mistrust was replaced by a more favourable approach carried in the spirit of more friendly relations. In March 1935, the Reich's leadership of the NSDAP issued a circular, according to which *"fundamentally and under any circumstances, all attacks in the German press on Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront, must stop"*.⁴⁰ At the same time, the money inflow increased, enabling Henlein to organize ever more generous political events, gaining him power and popularity and particularly reinforcing the influence of the Nazi wing in the SHF to the detriment of the KB.

The entire first half of 1935 was filled with the pre-election campaign before the parliament elections to be held in May. On the agrarians' advice,⁴¹ the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront changed into the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP).⁴² The new party was carefully preparing for the election; it did not lack money from the Sudeten German entrepreneurs, as well as from the Reich.⁴³ According to the envoy Koch, the Czechoslovak government hoped to cause problems to Henlein's movement by pressing it to change its name from SHF to SdP.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, there were still lively discussions on the political scene about the possible ban of the SHF in April 1935.⁴⁵ Within the government

⁴⁰ *Německý imperialismus proti ČSR (1918–1939)*, Oběžník říšského vedení NSDAP. Ribbentrop dává příkaz jménem ministra Hesse přestat s útoky na Konráda Henleina, 11. 3. 1935, No. 171, pp. 386–387.

⁴¹ KVAČEK, p. 200.

⁴² Then valid laws only permitted political parties to stand for election. The SHF was a political movement and therefore could have not participate in the election. In addition, the word "party" made a more democratic impression than "movement".

⁴³ Jaroslav Kučera says that the SdP received in total 331,711 Reich marks for election activities. KUČERA, p. 392.

⁴⁴ Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag, Gründung einer neuen nationalen, oppositionellen Sudetendeutsche Wahlgruppe, Deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, Prag, den 2. 5. 1935, Nr. 117, pp. 243–245.

⁴⁵ As early as in February 1935, a report appeared at the Presidium of the Ministry of Interior, informing on "defects which occurred in the activity" of the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront "in the district of the Land of Bohemia". The document informed on the fact that the SHF accepted almost all members of the former parties DNSAP and DNP. Národní archiv (National Archive, hereinafter NA), NA, f. PMV, sg. 225-918-3, fol. 45. I would like to thank to Mgr. David Hubený for his help with my study in the National Archive. In March 1935,

coalition, the “národní socialisté”, the People’s Party members and the Czech as well as the German social democrats were in favour of the ban. The Austrian envoy informed Vienna that “*Czech agrarians have so far wavered under the pressure of the right wing, and it can be assumed that they will support Heinlein in the end*”. The government, however, did not agree on anything and shifted the thorny problem to the Czechoslovak President T. G. Masaryk. He eventually decided that the SHF would not be prohibited. According to Marie Vymazalová, he did not have sufficient evidence to do so.⁴⁶ According to the report by the German envoy Koch, President Masaryk intervened as a *deus ex machina*. The *Národní listy* newspaper wrote on “*daß über Henlein definitiv entschieden worden sei und daß es zur Auflösung der Heimatfront nicht komme*”. According to the paper, it meant “*einen absoluten Sieg der Agrarier und eine vollständige Niederlage der sozialistischen Parteien*”. Konrad Henlein sent a long telegram to the President, assuring him of his complete loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic and his honest will “*zu aktivistischer Politik*”.⁴⁷

One of the goals of the new political party was to weaken the German activist parties (agrarians, social democrats and Christian socials). The SdP proclaimed that every German who did not vote for Heinlein should feel ashamed.

The elections ended with an absolute success of the SdP and Henlein rose to the top.⁴⁸ A considerable weakening of the political influence of the existing German parties was achieved (the agrarians had lost 60% of their votes, the social democrats 50% and the Christian socials 40%).⁴⁹ Having obtained 1,249,534 votes, or 15.18%, the Sudetendeutsche Partei became the most powerful German party.⁵⁰ It won even more votes than the Czech

representatives of BdL and SHF negotiated, and the former promised to step out against the proposal to dissolve the SHF. Compare ŠTĚPÁN, No. 28, 1935, 19. 3. Záznam o jednání henleinovců s německými agrárníky. BdL opět navazuje přerušená jednání a slibuje, že vystoupí proti návrhům na rozpuštění SHF, pp. 60–61.

⁴⁶ VYMAZALOVÁ, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag, Positive Entscheidung über die Henlein-Front, Deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, Prag, den 6. 4. 1935, Nr. 111, pp. 228–230. Henlein’s telegram to Masaryk compare ibidem, Telegramm Konrad Henleins an Staatspräsident Masaryk, Nr. 112a, pp. 231–233.

⁴⁸ “*With our election victory we have shown to the entire civilized world how three and half million Germans fight for their right ... The world is interested in things here going good and right ways. Nobody can turn back our development ...*” BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 124.

⁴⁹ OLIVOVÁ, p. 253.

⁵⁰ [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2006edicniplan.nsf/t/22005E7C52/\\$File/4219rr_1.pdf](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2006edicniplan.nsf/t/22005E7C52/$File/4219rr_1.pdf)

agrarians who, however, gained one mandate more than the SdP thanks to the adjustment.⁵¹

The representatives of the KB reinforced their position in the leadership of the new party. Walter Brand's influence increased over that of Konrad Henlein, making his position in the party more visible. The SdP began to publish its own newspapers, namely the daily *Die Zeit* and the monthly *Volk und Führung*. Brand edited the daily, and other KB members controlled the monthly. Brand, together with Rutha, hoped that the SdP would be able to carry out its own foreign policy and considered establishing contacts with notable personalities and organisations in Western Europe.⁵²

Henlein and other SdP foremen hoped that the election success would also be projected in the political development in Czechoslovakia. They believed that the Sudetendeutsche Partei would be invited in the new government, which was being formed, and thus gain a real possibility to influence the home and the foreign policy of the state. Their hopes were based on the fact that the SdP had become the most powerful political party at all and the existing activist parties had completely failed in the elections.⁵³

After the elections, Henlein decided to reinforce his position within the party.⁵⁴ It was because the election victory had had negative consequences for the internal development of the SdP. As diverse groups with different interests joined it, the party was becoming "*a heterogeneous mosaic charged with internal conflicts*".⁵⁵

Every wing of the SdP oriented at different organisations on the German territory. Henlein and the KB maintained contacts with the *Association for Germanism Abroad* (Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland) led by Hans Steinacher, an advocate of Othmar Spann's theories. The group around the *Aufbruch* magazine, on the other hand, oriented at the *Ethnic Germans' Welfare Office* (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle) and the NSDAP For-

⁵¹ "Overnight, the SdP had grown from a movement without a single deputy in Parliament to the party receiving the largest vote in Sudetenland." HAAG, p. 145. For election results, compare NA, PMV, sg. 225-918-4.

⁵² They established contacts with international organisations dealing with the problem of national minorities, such as relevant committees of the League of Nations, the Pan-Europa Movement of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, etc. Compare HAAG, p. 145.

⁵³ In the end, the SdP was not invited in the government.

⁵⁴ There were also voices proclaiming that "*Henlein himself is still at the head of the movement only because no other more influential personality has been found, who would step out against him*". CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 359.

⁵⁵ OLIVOVÁ, p. 255. Compare also GEBEL, p. 42.

eign Organisation (Auslandsorganisation), which promoted mainly national socialist ideas and the Reich's interests among German minorities.⁵⁶

Henlein mainly tried to strengthen his own authority. He transformed the top leadership into a four-member board, which was to decide on all political issues. Its members were Walter Brand, Wilhelm Sebekowsky, Karl Hermann Frank and Rudolf Sandner. The SdP leadership was thus taken over by a group of people which were mostly the Kameradschaftsbund representatives. At the same time, Henlein began to fight against radical Nazi factions within the party. Despite a certain dependence on Germany, consisting mainly in financial support,⁵⁷ Henlein was not willing to conform fully to the Berlin policy, but to the contrary, he intended to promote the independent existence of his party. Future plans of the new political party and its leaders could thus not be exactly predicted. According to the Communist Party meeting, which took place in Supíkovice on 1 October 1935, the intentions of Henlein's party members were unclear. One part of them looked toward Prague, the other toward Berlin.⁵⁸

Berlin's policy naturally followed the opposite direction. Germany acknowledged Henlein's merits and therefore financially supported the SHF and later the SdP,⁵⁹ but naturally, it was interested in Nazis taking over the leadership of the party. A tendency to reinforce the Nazi line in all organisations of the German minorities became evident in the NSDAP activities in the autumn of 1935. It was no coincidence that in this time, the German immigrant Karl Viererbl launched a fierce attack against Spann's ideology, as well as against the Kameradschaftsbund's ideology. In the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* revue⁶⁰ Viererbl wrote that Spann's metaphysical definition of Volkstum ignored the racial unity of all Germans and "*opened the door to the clerical fascism of Italy and Austria, a system which, in contrast to national-socialism, kept these nations weak and socially impotent*". In particular, Viererbl fundamentally disagreed with Spann's "*spiritual definition of Germandom which allowed for the existence of distinct branches (Stämme) of the Volk*". In his opinion, there

⁵⁶ ZIMMERMANN, p. 45. Different contacts were also maintained with secret services – the Aufbruch magazine group with Sicherheitsdienst and KB members with Abwehr.

⁵⁷ Compare NA, f. PMV, sg. 225-911-3, fol. 52-54.

⁵⁸ NA, f. PMV, sg. 225-916-17, fol. 1-3.

⁵⁹ Compare NA, f. PMV, sg. 225-916-34, fol. 11-18, 19-40. Various collections and charitable events took place for the benefit of the Sudetendeutsche Partei.

⁶⁰ OLIVOVÁ, p. 256. German authorities responded in a similar way. Compare NOVÁK, p. 77.

existed the threat that the role of the Third Reich as a decisive factor in unifying all Germans would be disputed.⁶¹

The group around the *Aufbruch* magazine also attacked the KB and thus the SdP leadership from the outside.⁶² In the brochure *Was ist der KB? Der Kameradschaftsbund. Entlarvung einer Clique* it acknowledged Henlein's and Karl Hermann Frank's Pan-German views, but strongly criticised the influence of the Kameradschaftsbund, Walter Brand and Heinz Rutha in particular. The main aim of the brochure was to attack the KB, whose alleged goal was to form a "Sudeten German tribe" which, according to the authors, contributed to Sudeten German separatism and thus challenged the unity of the German nation.⁶³ The KB members, in return, described the people around the *Aufbruch* magazine as "typical Nazis – uneducated, undisciplined, and incapable of creating a coherent Weltanschauung".⁶⁴

The German consul in Liberec, Walter Lierau, also wrote about two competing factions within SdP. One group promoted "*den Anschluß an das Reich*", which was, on the other hand, opposed by some influential people from the Kameradschaftsbund. In his opinion, this organisation resolved to educate the young generation, which would be able to lead the new Central European "*Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*". It does not mean anything else than rejecting National Socialism and espousing the Roman Catholic Church and Rome, the consul concluded.⁶⁵

Despite all his efforts, Konrad Henlein did not manage to handle the fragmentation and, to some extent, incongruity of the Sudetendeutsche Partei. However, the development in Czechoslovakia could help him gain greater influence in the domestic political scene. In 1935, two foreign policy concepts clashed – the official orientation toward France, represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edvard Beneš, versus a demand to change this line and cooperate more closely with Poland and the Central European states. The SdP thus became closer to the Czech agrarians and the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party in its opinions, and together they formed a conservative bloc reaching beyond a national framework. A decisive clash in terms of home policy took place in December 1935, when the new Czechoslovak

⁶¹ Compare HAAG, p. 148.

⁶² Opponents mostly united around Rudolf Kaspers and Rudolf Haider.

⁶³ ZIMMERMANN, p. 45. Critics spoke of members of the SdP leadership as "academicians" and "theoreticians". BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 136.

⁶⁴ HAAG, p. 147.

⁶⁵ Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag, Politische Strömungen im Sudetendeutschtum, Deutsches Konsulat an die Deutsche Gesandtschaft, Reichenberg, den 23. 7. 1935, Nr. 129, pp. 285–286.

President was elected. So called "December Bloc", refusing Edvard Beneš's candidacy, did not succeed, and the long-time Minister of Foreign Affairs became the second President of the Czechoslovak Republic.⁶⁶ Immediately after the presidential election and the failure of the "December Bloc", a number of measures against Henlein's party were adopted – a ban of the convention summoned to Ústí nad Labem or the ban of the "Sudeten German week of culture". In its session, the government even discussed the dissolution of the SdP.⁶⁷

The failure of the "December Bloc's" attempt to push through their candidate for the presidential office also represented the failure of the Sudetendeutsche Partei and its leadership – Konrad Henlein and members of the Kameradschaftsbund, who were still a decisive group in the party.⁶⁸

Political failures of the Sudetendeutsche Partei decreased its importance for Nazi Germany and raised the question if the existing leadership was able to resolve the situation to the satisfaction of the Third Reich.⁶⁹ At the same time, the domestic political isolation and measures of the Czechoslovak government brought insecurity to the core of the party and deepened the mutual political and personal antagonism caused by the SdP heterogeneous structure.

Tension within the party broke out openly in May 1936. Rudolf Kasper criticised Brand and Rutha for their defence of Spann's opinions and refused their "incorrect" attitude to racial issues. Brand, a leading figure of the SdP and Henlein's main advisor, came to the conclusion that Kasper with his proclamations threatened the party's unity and called for decisive actions. Henlein agreed and demanded Kasper's resignation, since he reputedly did not fulfil his duties. However, to Henlein's unpleasant surprise, the membership took Kasper's side. Disciplinary actions against Kasper were thus suspended.⁷⁰

Even though the dispute ended in a compromise, it was actually clear that any agreement was no longer possible. Negotiations between Kasper

⁶⁶ The SdP agreed to vote for the candidate of the "December Bloc", Professor Němec, on the condition that Hlinka's Slovak People's Party gives its votes to him as well. The People's Party refused that in the end, and the SdP abstained from voting. Compare R. KVAČEK, *K historii Henleinovy Sudetoněmecké strany (Dokončení)*, Dějepis ve škole, Vol. IV., No. 6, 1957, p. 241. The SdP deputies reputedly played the role of "a forgotten umbrella", as a journalist wittily remarked. Compare BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 133.

⁶⁷ Compare FOUSTKA, p. 101.

⁶⁸ OLIVOVÁ, p. 258.

⁶⁹ However, Germany wished that "the arisen conflict be removed as soon as possible". BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 157.

⁷⁰ ROBBINS, p. 684.

and Henlein failed as the former refused to admit that his attacks on Brand were unjust and protested against the influence of the KB on the SdP leadership. The RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt) also started to criticise the KB, and thus indirectly Heinlein, in a secret memorandum for Adolf Hitler. According to authors, there were two schools of National Socialism, namely Rosenberg's and Spann's.⁷¹

Henlein understood that he had to placate the rebels in the party and become a little harder in the relations to the Czechoslovak Republic. He therefore revoked his previous opinion concerning the unconditional acknowledgement of personal rights and began to pursue the idea that "*only protection of the racial group as a whole would ensure the protection of each of its members*".⁷² In this way, he came closer to the Nazi concept of submission of an individual to the society. However, he did not manage to satisfy the rebels. They did not stop their attacks on the KB members and particularly on Walter Brand. They demanded that four or five of their representatives had to be accepted in the SdP leadership and that Brand should leave the party's head.⁷³ The entire dispute was accompanied by sharp polemics in the press and mutual threats and accusations. Often, personal clashes also occurred.⁷⁴

At last, Brand decided to take an unusual step. Not only did he keep promoting the Kameradschaftsbund's opinions in the Rundschau weekly, describing the former DNSAP members as rebels threatening the SdP unity, but he also came to the conclusion that radical measure would be necessary. He therefore asked Henlein to convene the party's "court of honour",⁷⁵ in which he wanted to defend his opinions and get done with his opponents. The "court of honour" institution should have cleared Brand and returned to the KB group its authority.

The court assembled in July 1936.⁷⁶ Brand was accused not only of harming the SdP's interests, but also of leading a secret club, "*whose*

⁷¹ Compare H. K. G. RÖNNEFARTH, *Die Sudetenkrise in der internationalen Politik. Entstehung – Verlauf – Auswirkung. Teil I*, Wiesbaden 1961, pp. 128–133. The memorandum stated that if "Adolf Hitler nach der Machtübernahme die geistige Führung des Reiches nicht Othmar Spann übergibt, dann begeht er einen Verrat am deutschen Volk" (p. 130).

⁷² HAAG, p. 149.

⁷³ CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 364.

⁷⁴ OLIVOVÁ, p. 260.

⁷⁵ Henlein personally selected and appointed the court members. For the court composition, compare NOVÁK, p. 107.

⁷⁶ An important event also happened in the foreign policy sphere in July 1936. On 11 July, the Austrian government concluded so called Juliabkommen with Germany, which represented a fundamental turning point in Austrian policy. In this treaty, Germany promised to

ständisch ideology threatened to destroy the Sudeten German national movement".⁷⁷ Brand denied all accusations, pointing out that the Kameradschaftsbund had voluntarily dissolved itself in 1934. The court did not believe him, because in its opinion it was widely known that the KB had re-established itself at the beginning of 1935.⁷⁸

The court of honour stood up against Brand and recognized the reproaches against him as justified. Henlein requested that the proceedings to be revised and the ruling to be changed, but the court stood up against him as well.⁷⁹ The crisis in the Sudetendeutsche Partei thus reached its peak in mid July 1936. At the same time, however, there was a crucial point – the fact *"that the court of honour defied Konrad Henlein's wish and thus violated the basic, leadership principle, on which the entire party was built, proved that the Nazi faction was even turning against Henlein, who had so far managed to manoeuvre between the two main factions in the party"*.⁸⁰ The SdP found itself in a very difficult situation. Within Czechoslovakia, the party was not successful in promoting its policy, after the failure of the "December Bloc", its activities were systematically restrained and a potential ban of the entire party was threatening.

In late July 1936, it became clear that there were three mutually independent centres (London, Berlin, Vienna) and three different political sections that, for various reasons, were interested in maintaining the existence of the Sudetendeutsche Partei. Each centre provided the SdP with support, which enabled it to preserve its existence.

acknowledge Austrian sovereignty and not to infringe on Austria's internal issues. Vienna, on the other hand, undertook to grant amnesty for imprisoned Nazis, orient its foreign policy toward Germany and appoint two members of the opposition (i.e. Nazis) to the government. Austrian policy thereby set off for "the German way". This treaty brought about a decisive defeat of the Spann-inspired movement and thus fundamental weakening of the KB's position in Czechoslovakia. The Kameradschaftsbund lost its main ideological and power base – Austria and its support.

⁷⁷ HAAG, p. 150.

⁷⁸ The National Archives, London, Kew (further TNA), FO 371/20374, R 3417/32/12, Mr. Hadow (Prague) to Mr. O' Malley, 9th June, 1936. The report stated: *"Early in 1935 the Sudetendeutsche Party 'received open encouragement from certain Czech Parties' the Kameradschaftsbund was, at Bad Ullersdorf, Moravia, revived as the 'Bund für politische und Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Bildung und Erziehung'."*

⁷⁹ In this context, Brand commented on Henlein: *"In all these conflicts, Konrad Henlein took a characteristic, indecisive stance. He certainly was on my side, he had known me from our longtime collaboration after all but, on the other hand, he was not able to take a decisive and clear action against the disruptive forces."* ZIMMERMANN, p. 48. In September 1936, Henlein eventually acknowledged the decision of the court of honour as justified.

⁸⁰ OLIVOVÁ, p. 261.

On 17th July 1936, Walter Brand left for Vienna. He sought support from Othmar Spann. However, his journey took place in a time when it was clear that the Spann movement was receding and possessed neither political, nor material power to support its fellow men.⁸¹ A fight for power was taking place within the SdP,⁸² and the intellectual Spann, even though he wrote an open letter to the court of honour criticising its decision, was no longer able to influence the course of events. The court of honour rejected the letter and confirmed its ruling.⁸³ After the treaty was concluded between Germany and Austria (Juliabkommen), Brand and the entire Kameradschaftsbund group were no longer backed up by any real power.⁸⁴ At this moment, Walter Brand and his companions found themselves at the periphery of events, while all attention was focused on Konrad Henlein.⁸⁵ He was perceived as a unifying element of the entire SdP, and it was therefore necessary to keep him at the head of the party.

Konrad Henlein himself left for London at the time Walter Brand was travelling to the Austrian capital. The goal of his journey was to reinforce his position and internationalize the Sudeten German issues.⁸⁶ Henlein intended to convince the British public opinion that the Sudeten Germans were loyal to Czechoslovakia and that this state did not enable them to develop freely. A domestic political problem was now becoming an international issue.⁸⁷

In London, Henlein met with the British Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Robert Vansittart. During the almost three-hour discussion, Henlein presented himself as a moderate politician. He distanced himself from Nazism and emphasized that his main goal was an agreement with the Czechoslovak government.⁸⁸ However, the government's obstinacy, he declared, drove the Sudeten German population in the arms of the

⁸¹ Henlein even wrote to Spann and asked him to "abandon all contacts with the Sudeten German environment and cease to influence the development here". ZIMMERMANN, p. 49.

⁸² Compare CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 362.

⁸³ FOUSTKA, p. 111. The Aufbruch magazine group saw Spann's letter as clear evidence of his connection and contacts with his pupils.

⁸⁴ Compare CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 368.

⁸⁵ Volker Zimmermann came to the conclusion that Henlein had left his friends in the lurch. ZIMMERMANN, p. 49.

⁸⁶ Compare NOVÁK, p. 90.

⁸⁷ OLIVOVÁ, p. 262.

⁸⁸ "He begged the English to help him convince President Beneš of the good intentions of which his heart was full. He threatened, however, that if no change came, he did not know if he could manage to keep the German peoples in Czechoslovakia from dangerous radicalization and possible commotion which could lead to a civil war." NOVÁK, p. 91.

Third Reich. Vansittart remarked that in the British government's opinion, Czechoslovakia with its national issues was causing problems to entire Europe.⁸⁹ His Majesty's Government believed that "*unless the broad mass of Sudeten Germans felt content with Czechoslovakia, then nothing could save the state*". If the Czechoslovak government had given in, it could have appeared as weakness but, on the other hand, an action was necessary to prevent the radicals from taking control over the SdP.⁹⁰

Here the question arises why Henlein acted like this toward his companions? If he wanted to remain the leader of the Sudeten Germans and keep the support from Berlin, he also had to "*respect Berlin's wishes*".⁹¹ The German representatives did not want the Sudetendeutsche Partei to be controlled by people who refused to conform to the Nazi concept and did not acknowledge the leading role of the Third Reich, people who were oriented at Othmar Spann's ideas and leaned more toward Austria. And since Konrad Henlein wanted to remain the leader of the Sudeten Germans, he had to part with these people.

In August 1936, even the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden, wrote on the issue of the Sudeten Germans in a letter to the envoy Addison in Prague. He pointed out the difficulties, which the Sudeten Germans had to face according to Heinz Rutha. He also mentioned Robert Vansittart's negotiations with Konrad Henlein, who "*had talked no politics at all, but only of his economic difficulties and those of his supporters*". Eden stated that the information provided by Rutha and Henlein on one hand and by the Czechoslovak envoy Jan Masaryk on the other was radically different. The British Minister inclined more to the opinion "*of the minority than of the Administration*" and did not forget to emphasize the good impression Henlein had made on Vansittart. In conclusion, Eden mentioned that His Majesty's Government would not get involved and would carefully observe everything.⁹²

Konrad Henlein could be satisfied with his trip to London. He managed to win the sympathy of official government circles, which helped him reinforce his position, both towards the Czechoslovak government and within the party.

A third centre watching the disputes in the SdP with interest was Berlin. Henlein himself came to understand that the positions of his col-

⁸⁹ OLIVOVÁ, p. 262.

⁹⁰ ROBBINS, p. 686.

⁹¹ BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 170.

⁹² TNA, FO 371/20374, Mr. Eden to Sir J. Addison (Prague), August 5, 1936, fol. 51.

laborators from the KB group could no longer be maintained in the party. He knew that the party could not survive without financial support from Germany. Berlin was strongly interested in placating the situation within the SdP and therefore recommended that Heinlein should refrain from publishing contradictory announcements in the press. In return, the leader of Sudeten Germans was to be an official guest of the Nazi government at the Olympic Games in August 1936.⁹³

The Berlin intervention thus became a decisive factor, which helped to end the internal crisis in the SdP. On 24th July, Walter Brand announced that he was leaving public life. Henlein accepted his resignation and thanked him for his collaboration. By dropping Brand, he essentially distanced himself from the entire KB group, which had stood by him from the beginning and helped him with the complicated development at the beginnings of building the SHF.

After July 1936, when internal disintegration was imminent, the Sudentendeutsche Partei was reorganized and knit together on Nazi foundations and became a party clearly oriented at Berlin. At the same time, however, the solution of the crisis brought an end to the period of Kameradschaftsbund's influence. Most of the KB members remained SdP members; the most important man, Walter Brand, resigned from the SdP top leadership.⁹⁴ Konrad Henlein, who had manoeuvred between both factions in the party, the KB and the Nazi officials, realised in mid-1936 that victorious accession of the Third Reich was evident from an international perspective and so he gradually began to orient himself to Germany.

⁹³ OLIVOVÁ, p. 265. Henlein really met with many Nazi top officials (with Hess, Ley, Göring, Goebbels) and was even received by Adolf Hitler. Compare *Německý imperialismus proti ČSR (1918–1939)*, Policejní zpráva o jednání Henleina s Hitlerem a jinými nacistickými předáky o podpoře SdP Německem, 7. 9. 1936, No. 178, p. 394.

⁹⁴ Heinz Rutha was arrested in October 1937 for a suspicion of homosexuality and hanged himself in his cell on 5th November. Another important SdP man and KB member thus disappeared from the scene.