

AT THE LIMITS OF A MASS MOVEMENT: THE CASE OF THE SUDETEN GERMAN PARTY, 1933—1938

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In spite of the plethora of material which has been written on political mass movements for the past several decades, the question of the appeal of strongly nationalist mass movements such as fascism continues to elude and fascinate. From a scholarly standpoint, part of the difficulty in treating mass movements lies in the problem of how to approach the phenomenon. Particularly, there seems to be a myopic concern with the dramatically successful mass movements in politically powerful states — the most obvious examples being the fascist movements in Italy and Germany. To some extent this emphasis is understandable and legitimate: political success on such a large scale in itself merits the closest of scrutiny. The pitfall comes, however, when such a Great-Power approach to mass movements is applied to the study of such movements in many of the smaller European countries.

In some ways, of course, it is essential to look at smaller European political mass movements in terms of what happened in the more powerful neighboring states. It would be foolhardy to neglect the magnetic effect of German and Italian fascism: movements which inspired imitation and thereby mitigated the *sui generis* nature of other fascisms. Yet, „imitation“ theories can become misleading if such studies become so preoccupied with similarities on a surface level that the unique, indigenous underpinnings of the smaller mass movements are obscured or even distorted. Such appears to have been especially the case with studies of the mass movement which sprang up among the Sudeten Germans during the 1930s.

On October 3, 1933, a politically unknown former calisthenics teacher and bank employee, Konrad Henlein, called into existence a political movement, the Sudeten German *Heimatfront* (Home Front), with the intent of uniting all the Germans in Czechoslovakia within a single political organization. The proclamation, coming as it did directly on the heels of the dissolution of the Sudeten German National Socialist Party (DNSAP) and the smaller right wing German Nationalist Party, led many observers of rightist politics in Czechoslovakia to assume that this new Henlein Front was just that — merely a kind of *ersatz* or „front“ organization for the Sudeten Nazi Party which had come under such heavy fire from the Czechs. By May 1935, just a year and a half after its founding, the Henlein party had grown to the point where it attracted 1,249,530 votes — more than any other party, German or Czech, in the Czechoslovakian general elections¹. By 1938, scarcely five years after its inception, the Henlein

¹ For statistics on the election, see Bruegel, Johann Wolfgang: *Tschechen und Deut-*

movement became the primary tool with which Hitler was able to destroy the Czechoslovakian state from within.

The growth of the Henlein movement from obscure political organization to successful mass party to manipulated fifth column remains a complicated problem for the historian. Despite numerous studies, there is still doubt regarding what attracted Sudeten Germans in such large numbers and so quickly to the movement for ethnic unity². Superficially the resemblances between the Hitler and Henlein movements seem so overwhelming that some historians even go so far as to assume that Henlein and his party were merely puppets of the Reich regime from the outset³. Others see the Henlein Front primarily as a surrogate for the several radical nationalist Sudeten parties which came before it, including the former Sudeten Nazi Party⁴. Although purportedly the goal of Sudeten *Volks-gemeinschaft* (ethnic community) was the primary impetus for the founding of the Henlein movement, some critics maintain that the Germans in Czechoslovakia were in reality looking beyond the borders into the Third Reich when they flocked to Henlein. The links between the growth of the Henlein movement and the Hitler regime in the years 1933—1938 have been stressed so extensively that Hitler's dramatic successes during these years has often been offered as the main factor in Henlein's own precipitate rise from obscurity. Even in the more balanced historical studies on Munich and the Sudeten Germans, the growth of the Hitler movement in the Third Reich continues to overshadow developments in Central Europe during the 1930s.

One stumbling block to assessing the intricacies of the Henlein Sudeten movement and its ties to its Hitlerian counterpart has been the relative inaccessibility of the necessary materials. For a brief period in 1968, however, archival materials consisting in part of statistics gathered by the Sudeten German *Heimatfront* itself during the 1930s were made available — documents which shed light on the whole phenomenon of fascism among the Sudeten Germans. The materials consist primarily of sometimes fragmentary documents detailing the regional and national membership growth of the Henlein movement during the 1930s, as well

sche. Munich 1967, p. 265—269; also Luža, Radomir: The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans. Cincinnati 1964, S. 80—81. The distribution of seats after the election was such that the Sudeten German Party, although it had received the largest number of votes cast, received 44 mandates as opposed to 45 for the second largest vote-getter, the Czech Agrarian Party.

² The most important studies on the Henlein movement are Luža: Transfer; Bruegel: Tschechen; Černý, Bohumil / César, Jaroslav: Politika německých buržoazních stran v Československu v letech 1918—1938. 2 vols. Prague 1962. The Luža work is the more balanced; documentation in Bruegel and in Černý and César is extensive.

³ This is especially true of Bruegel: Tschechen. Note, however, that even Czech historiography is abandoning this extreme position. See, for example, Olivová, Věra: The Doomed Democracy: Czechoslovakia in a Disrupted Europe, 1914—1938. Trans. George Theiner. Montreal 1972, p. 191 ff.; also Olivová's article: Kameradschaftsbund. Z Českých Dějin: Sborník Prací in Memoriam Prof. Dr. Václava Husy. Prague 1966, p. 237—268.

⁴ Typical of this interpretation is Olivová: Democracy.

as party structural growth (*Ortsgruppen* formation) during the same period⁵. On the basis of these statistics it is possible to learn much about overall growth trends in the movement from 1933—1938, geographic distinctions affecting the movement's growth, and social and economic factors relating to the expansion of the Sudeten German Party: evidence which strongly suggests that the Henlein movement cannot be dismissed as a mere imitation of the National Socialist movement in the Reich. Nor it seems can Henlein's success be explained solely in terms of parallels to the rise of the Hitlerian regime. Rather the Sudeten German movement must be first approached from a *sui generis* standpoint if its significance is to be fully understood and if the relationship of the Reich and Sudeten fascist movements is to be correctly assessed.

It is revealing at the outset to look briefly at some of the statistical material bearing on the very earliest period of the Henlein movement's growth: particularly in the interest of pinpointing the identity of the first party activists. Were the original supporters of the Henlein movement merely Sudeten National Socialists in disguise or was the party success, as Henlein and his fellow Front leaders claimed, a sign of spontaneous support from the neglected little man on the periphery of Sudeten politics? Here, a comparison between party growth in terms of *Ortsgruppen* (local organizational units) and individual membership is significant. By December 1933, two months after Henlein proclaimed the formation of the *Heimatfront*, a fairly constant growth ratio develops: with the formation of each new *Ortsgruppe*, about 100 new members are added to the party itself (Charts 1—2). But during the first two months of the new movement's existence, this pattern does not apply. In October, the month the Front was founded, 9,500 Sudeten Germans reported as new members, whereas only four *Ortsgruppen* were organized. The following month membership rose to over 10,000, but still only 55 *Ortsgruppen* had been formed. Only beginning with December was the 1 : 100 ratio reached which applied thereafter, as 94 *Ortsgruppen* corresponded to nearly 11,000 in overall membership. This early growth pattern suggests that it was not a well organized recruiting process which drew the initial Henlein party membership: otherwise there would probably have been a sizeable net of *Ortsgruppen* from the outset with a proportionately lower total membership. Indeed membership totals were initially higher in proportion to the number of local party units (9,500 to 4). The development of an organizational framework followed only *after* the initial influx of members into the movement.

Considering the fact that the Henlein movement only existed on paper initially — as the result of a formal public proclamation — the first surge of members into the party seems rather large. Either there must have been a latent politically interested membership potential for such a movement at this particular point in time or these members could have already been part of some other similar organization prior to this point. Otherwise it would have hardly been likely that 9,500

⁵ Most important are two charts, „Mitgliederstand 1933—1935“ and „Ortsgruppengründungen“, covering the same period. The charts appear to have originated in the Statistische Abteilung des Werbeamtes der Sudetendeutschen Partei. Státní Ústřední Archiv (hereafter SUA). Prague, 5-HS-OA/://: 14.

Sudeten Germans would have found their way into the movement so quickly. There are several possible groups which come into question as sources of this initial membership: members of the recently dissolved right wing parties or members of Henlein's own ostensibly apolitical gymnastic association (*Sudetendeutscher Turnverband*). Czech scholars claim that there is evidence that in Moravia at least roughly 41.5 percent of the Henlein Front membership emerged from the ranks of the disbanded Sudeten Nazi party⁶. On the surface it might seem that since nearly half of the initial members of the Henlein movement may have been fugitives from the suddenly defunct Nazi party, the Henlein party was deliberately founded to serve as a „respectable“ substitute. Yet closer examination seems to indicate that this interpretation is a questionable one. If Henlein had indeed been in close ties with the former National Socialist Party leaders, it would have been only too easy for the new Front to build on the organizational core of the National Socialist Party, rather than relying on a random influx of members. But evidence suggests that Henlein did not in fact take advantage of the disbanded Nazi party structure⁷. As of May 1932, a year before its dissolution, the Sudeten National Socialist Party claimed to have 1,024 *Ortsgruppen*⁸. Compared to this kind of widespread net of local political cells, the beginnings of the Henlein Front seem modest indeed: initially there were only two *Ortsgruppen*; two months later, only 55 such local units. It took more than a year — until January 1935 — for the Henlein Front *Ortsgruppen* totals to pass the 1,000 mark⁹.

The very gradual increase in *Ortsgruppen* suggests that although Henlein might certainly have hoped that the dissolution of the other right wing parties would improve chances of success for his newly proclaimed movement, he was not calculatedly using the National Socialist Party power base as a foundation for his movement or conspiring with former Nazi leaders to speed party growth. The lack of wholesale organizational duplication between the Sudeten Nazi party and the Henlein Front would also tend to support contentions that Henlein's movement was not merely an Ersatz for more radical political organizations, but rather represented what it claimed to be: an independent new political organization for rallying the Sudeten population¹⁰. Henlein and his closest associates

⁶ See Černý / César: *Politika II*, 225 footnote 46.

⁷ For detailed background on the dissolution of the Sudeten National Socialist Party and the formation of the Heimatfront see Smelser, Ronald: *The Sudeten Problem, 1933—1938. Volkstumspolitik and the Formulation of Nazi Foreign Policy*. Middletown/Connecticut 1975, chapter III.

⁸ Pfitzner, Josef: *Sudetendeutsche Einheitsbewegung*. 2nd ed. (Karlsbad and Leipzig 1937, p. 55. From January to June 1932 the Sudeten National Socialist Party claims to have recruited 14,000 new members and added 110 *Ortsgruppen*. *Völkischer Beobachter*, No. 155, June 3, 1932.

⁹ This would tend to refute Olivová: *Democracy 191*, which claims that the Henlein movement took over the organizational structure of the Sudeten German National Socialist Party.

¹⁰ The fact that the Henlein movement was plagued throughout its brief history by serious power struggles often precipitated by former Sudeten German National Socialists seems to give strength to this interpretation. See Smelser: *Sudeten Problem*, chapter V.

continued not only to stress the uniqueness and independence of their movement, but insisted that their approach to ethnic politics was more moderate than that of the National Socialists¹¹. But although Henlein himself may have genuinely seen his new movement in such moderate terms, this self image appears to have been not wholly accurate. If Czech estimates are correct and if such sizeable numbers of former Sudeten National Socialists flocked into the new movement, then a substantial percentage of the initial Front membership would have probably hoped that their political involvement would be of a militant, rather than a moderate nature. This discrepancy between what the Henlein movement leadership intended and what many of the rank and file members possibly expected — so often dismissed as merely an example of duplicity and deception on Henlein's part — helps to explain why the „moderate“ leadership within the Front later so consistently underestimated the strength of the radical thrust which developed among former Sudeten National Socialists who had joined the Henlein movement¹².

As Charts 1—2 indicate, the growth of the Sudeten German movement after 1933 is a steady one, with two periods of spurt in membership — one in spring of 1935, the other in spring of 1938. The first such period of sudden, massive expansion came at a time when national elections were being held in Czechoslovakia, elections out of which the Henlein party emerged as the largest vote-getter in Czechoslovakia. In analyzing the significance of this first major surge in party membership, one thing seems clear: the tremendous growth period in early 1935 would not appear to be primarily a result of the election success itself — or, in other words, it would not seem to be analogous to the „March violet“ influx into the Reich National Socialist Party following Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Rather, most of the growth came just prior to the elections, during a period of great tension and difficulty for the party, at a time when there was considerable doubt as to whether the Henlein organization would even be allowed to take part in the election at all. In January 1935 party membership stood at 107,785. By April (still one month before the unexpected success in the elections and in the midst of the crisis over election participation and the enforced name change of the Henlein movement from „Front“ to „Party“) membership had climbed to 204,401. In short, membership had nearly doubled in just three months. Two months later, at the beginning of June, when the Henlein electoral triumph of May 19th had barely had time to register, membership had risen sharply once again to 370,000. Following this massive influx of members prior to the elections, growth fell off dramatically. From July to October 1935, less

¹¹ See, for example, Henlein's Böhmissh-Leipa declaration of October 21, 1934. Koch to Auswärtiges Amt, October 22, 1934. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn, Pol. IV/Politik 6/Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker/vol. 23 (Hereafter cited as PA).

¹² The radical direction was especially represented by Karl Hermann Frank, a minor publisher and former Sudeten National Socialist member who later gained notoriety for his brutal treatment of Czechs during the Protektorat. See Czechoslovakian Ministry of Information, *Cesky Narod Soudí K. H. Franka*. Prague 1947.

than 14,000 names were added to the membership rolls. It took until May 1937, an additional 17 months, for membership to reach the 500,000 mark.

If this 1935 growth spurt prior to the May elections is not attributable to a Me-too-ism similar to the rush into the Reich National Socialist Party after 1933, then why this sudden influx in membership at this point? Many thought at this time that it was the lodestar of Hitler's Germany that drew Sudeten Germans to Henlein. A short while after the elections, as Sudeten German Party senators and representatives took their places in parliament, one deputy shouted at them that they could now proceed to do what their constituents had elected them to do: to deliver Czechoslovakia into Hitler's hands¹³. Numerous modern scholars have agreed that strong electoral support for the Henlein movement in 1935 did indicate a widespread sympathy for Hitler's regime among the Sudeten populace and one could certainly point to Hitler's political victories during early 1935 as evidence to support such a claim. To be sure, Hitler's political coups in the months prior to the Sudeten elections — the return of the Saar to the Reich in January and the reintroduction of military conscription in Germany in March — could not have helped but foster stronger feelings of ethnic solidarity among the Sudeten electorate¹⁴. But an analysis of Sudeten party growth patterns during this period suggest that the Sudeten population was not thoroughly radicalized in its support of Henlein at this point. Moreover, international considerations probably played only a peripheral role in influencing the 1935 elections: rather, the political climate within Czechoslovakia itself seems to have primarily triggered the wave of support for the Henlein movement at this point.

One piece of evidence which de-emphasizes the international situation as a factor in Sudeten German Party membership growth in 1935 is the fact that the rapid membership spurt peaked *before* the elections, not after. If there was indeed a mood of euphoria among the Sudeten populace as a result of Hitler's successes in early 1935, and if this were indeed a central influence behind the stunning electoral success of Henlein's party, then it would seem likely that the election victory of the Sudeten party would in itself have triggered yet another massive influx of members into the party. Such a triumph for the Sudeten ethnic community would have logically only intensified any supposedly widespread feelings of solidarity with the radical German nationalist cause. Sudeten Party membership figures, however, suggest that such a euphoric, success-oriented mood was not prevalent among Sudeten Germans at this time. Within a month of the electoral triumph, new membership gains trailed off to a fraction of the growth rate prior to May 19th. Whereas 350,000 joined the party in the four months before and in the month during and 2 weeks just after the May election, it took an additional four months for just 14,000 further names to be added to the party membership

¹³ The statement is from Wenzel Jaksch, German Social Democrat, as quoted in Bruegel: Tschechen 268.

¹⁴ On the larger foreign policy implications of these two steps taken by Hitler see Jacobsen, Hans-Adolf: *Nationalsozialistische Außenpolitik, 1933—1938*. Frankfurt 1968, p. 327—328; and Weinberg, Gerhard: *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*. Chicago 1972, chapters 7—8.

rolls¹⁵. In short, although sizeable, the support for Henlein's party at the polls in itself does not seem to point to a climate of rapidly mounting radicalization or political hysteria among the Sudeten electorate.

In this respect it is revealing to explore the relationship between party *Ortsgruppen* growth and general membership increases during this period. Prior to June — i. e. before the elections — the sudden increase in party members was paralleled by an equally large increase in the number of *Ortsgruppen*. Both local organization totals and individual membership totals nearly tripled in the period from January to June. In other words, the growth spurt represented not only an increase in individual membership, but a dramatic geographic expansion of the party's base as well, with nearly 2000 new *Ortsgruppen* being organized in just four months. Although international factors such as Hitler's successes could conceivably have been behind some of this growth, a more immediate reason for this geographic expansion would seem to lie in the fact that at precisely this point in 1935 certain artificial political curbs on Sudeten German Party growth were eliminated, opening up new areas of the Sudetenland to recruitment activities by Henlein and his followers.

Since mid-1934 an informal agreement had existed between the Sudeten German Agrarian Party and the *Heimatfront*, according to which Henlein had promised to restrain the leaders of his movement from recruitment activities in the Agrarianists stronghold, the rural villages¹⁶. Henlein had originally felt constrained to recognize the countryside as an Agrarian party preserve as a concession to Franz Spina, leader of the Agrarian party and Minister of Health in the Prague government. At a time when there seemed to be danger that the Czechs would dissolve the *Heimatfront*, Henlein needed Spina as a protector and an intermediary, roles which Spina could well fulfill thanks to his high government post. By late 1934, however, Henlein felt he no longer needed Spina, and as a consequence, no longer needed to keep his organizers out of the rural areas¹⁷. And well he might, for it was becoming clear that Henlein could get the same things from the Czechs as he had from Spina — without a middle man and without the price of limiting expansion of the *Heimatfront* power base.

A group of Czech politicians was courting Henlein at this time, including Viktor Stoupal, leader of the conservative Moravian wing of the Czech Agrarian Party. Stoupal hoped to win Henlein's support for a widely-based right-wing coalition which could sweep the more liberal Beneš faction out of control of the govern-

¹⁵ The growth rate continued to decrease in spite of further Hitlerian success such as the Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed on June 18. Weinberg: Foreign Policy 210—216.

¹⁶ For a copy of the agreement, signed by Agrarian leader Wolfgang Zierhut and dated January 5, 1935, see SUA, Prague, 40 K/://: 68. Apparently the original agreement was formalized sometime in mid-1934. See Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront document, „Gedächtnisprotokoll. Verhandlung mit dem BdL [Bund der Landwirte or German Agrarian League],“ dated September 17, 1934, *ibidem*.

¹⁷ Henlein had apparently held to the agreement for the most part, according to the Rumburger Zeitung, a north Bohemian paper traditionally close to the German Nationalist Party, March 27, 1935 (No. 73), p. 2.

ment. To this end, Stoupal offered Henlein both protection and money — a move which cut the ground from beneath the feet of the German Agrarians and made their agreement with Henlein superfluous¹⁸. As a result, the tenuous agreement collapsed by December 1934 and Henlein party organizers flocked into the countryside with rather sophisticated propaganda drawing peasants into the *Heimatfront* in considerable numbers¹⁹. By March 5 the youth organization of the German Agrarian Party, the *landständische Jugend*, came over as a group to Henlein's party²⁰. It was at precisely this time that the formation of *Ortsgruppen* accelerated so dramatically. The *Heimatfront* was clearly organizing, with dramatic success, in areas where it had not previously been active.

At this same time, another barrier of a different kind to the expansion of Henlein's movement was crumbling — that represented by the almost decade — long policy of „activism“ on the part of several German political parties. In 1926, after years of almost unanimous rejection of the *Saisonstaat* as the newly-created Czechoslovakian state was derisively labeled, Sudeten German parties had begun for the first time to take an active part in the Czechoslovak government at the cabinet level. This new policy of collaboration with and responsibility in the state came to be called „activism“²¹. By 1935, however, after several years of disastrous economic crisis and depression which hit especially hard the mainly German populated, industrialized parts of Bohemia, many Sudeten Germans began to feel that their acceptance of and participation in the Czech state was simply not bearing sufficient fruit to warrant continuing such in involvement²². Symptomatic of this disillusionment was a small, but clearly perceivable desertion from the ranks of those German parties which had most consistently pursued „activism“. Already in June 1934, the so-called Rosche group, the former industrialist wing of the German Nationalist Party — which ironically had broken with the Nationalists in 1930 over that party's *refusal* to pursue activism

¹⁸ On relations between the Czech Agrarians and the Henlein party see Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront, „Hauptleitungsprotokolle“ of February 2 and March 11, 1935, SUA, Prague, 40 K/://: 68; a slightly different version of the March 11 „Protokoll“, SUA, Prague, 2 KKH/://: 6; and Koch to Auswärtiges Amt, October 19, 1934, National Archives Microcopy, T-120/3523 (hereafter NA/series/roll/frame number [not included in this particular roll]).

¹⁹ See Heimatfront campaign directive (Weisung) ://: 92, April 19, 1935, SUA, Prague, 29 LV/://: 54.

²⁰ For the agreement bringing the landständische Jugend into the Heimatfront, see SUA, Prague, 40 K/://: 68.

²¹ For a background on „activism“ see B r u e g e l : Tschechen, chapters 8—9; also Z a j i c e k , Erwin: Erfolge und Mißerfolge des sudetendeutschen Aktivismus. Beiträge zum deutsch-tschechischen Verhältnis im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Munich 1967, p. 127—142 (Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum 19).

²² Despite this growing disillusionment, „activist“ groups continued to function. In February 1937 several Sudeten German political leaders (Jungaktivisten as they were called), dissatisfied with progress toward ending discrimination especially in the civil service, made their demands known to the government. This was to be the last gasp of the policy of „activism“. Certain concessions, such as the admission of additional Germans into the civil service were made, but basically these measures were a case of too little, too late. See B r u e g e l : Tschechen 308—316. — Z a j i c e k : Erfolge 136—138.

— aligned itself with the Henlein party²³. Now in early spring 1935, the German Small Trader's Party (*Gewerbepartei*) went over to Henlein as well. For a time prior to this new alignment the *Gewerbepartei* had been politically adrift to some extent; nevertheless it had oriented itself more or less with the „activist“ Agrarians. In the early part of 1935, however, this orientation began to waver as goodly numbers of *Gewerbepartei* members deserted the party and joined the Henlein movement. By April this exodus was so widespread that the whole party itself disappeared into Henlein's movement, further contributing to the flood of members into the Sudeten *Heimatfront* during early 1935²⁴.

Henlein chose a course of action best guaranteed to exploit these crumbling barriers for the good of his own political movement. It was a time for skilled political maneuvering, for as elections approached in the spring of 1935, the *Heimatfront* was not only faced with the possibility of success; it also confronted an existence crisis of sorts. The threat of dissolution at the hands of the government was still an ever present danger despite Spina's protection and there was much pressure on the government to force the *Heimatfront* to disband. Compounding this was the related threat that the Front might be forbidden to take part in the elections at all — a ban which would in fact have gone into force but for the last minute intervention of President Masaryk himself²⁵. Had the ban gone into effect, Henlein would have been in an impossible dilemma. Forbidden from taking part in the political process, Henlein would have either had to commit himself entirely to a radical and at this point hopeless course of defying the authority of the state or he would have had to accept the disintegration of his political movement. The tension arising out of this situation was scarcely alleviated when the Henlein movement finally was allowed to put up candidates for the election: for permission was given on condition that Henlein change the name of his organization from „Home Front“ to „Party“. This necessitated a great deal of expense in redoing campaign literature and posters already prepared²⁶. Thus, it was at a time of insecurity and adversity, not one of impending triumph that the first great influx into the Henlein party came²⁷.

²³ See Bruegel: Tschechen 182, 233; also Černý / César: Politika II, 42—43, 61, 267. For a contemporary account see Foustka, R. N.: Konrad Henlein: neoficiální historie jeho strany. Prague 1937, p. 36—37. See also Heimatfront Hauptleitungssitzung of October 23, 1934, where it was proposed that Rosche be coopted eventually into the directorship or Hauptrat of the party. SUA, Prague, 2 KKH://: 6.

²⁴ See Koch to Auswärtiges Amt, April 17, 1935, PA, Pol. II/Politik 5/vol. 9, Innere Politik, Parlaments- und Parteiwesen; also Heimatfront memo, „Verhandlungsausschuß mit dem BdL“, February 19, 1935, SUA, Prague, 40 K://: 68.

²⁵ On Masaryk's decision to permit Henlein's party to take part in the elections, see Koch to Auswärtiges Amt, April 6, 1935, NA, T-120/3523.

²⁶ The forced name change of Henlein's party only generated more sympathy among Sudeten Germans. Koch to Auswärtiges Amt, May 2, 1935, PA, Pol. II/Politik 5/vol. 9, innere Politik, Parlaments- und Parteiwesen.

²⁷ As the German Minister to Prague, Koch, reported to the Auswärtiges Amt: „As before, the Henlein movement finds itself not only in the vicissitudes of German-Czech animosities, but also in the perhaps more dangerous confusion of intramural Czech power politics“, April 11, 1935, NA, T-120/3523.

The Henlein Front leadership functioned well as political tacticians during these months, both exploiting the decline of the German respectable Right and capitalizing upon the intermittent Czech persecution. In February 1935, for example, during negotiations between the Heimatfront and the German Agrarian Party, Henlein suddenly brought up a proposal for the merger of both parties into one organization. The Agrarians knew that given the much larger membership of the *Heimatfront*, such a merger would mean the political demise of their party. Of course they brusquely rejected Henlein's offer. All this was then made public by Henlein which put the Agrarians in the uncomfortable position of appearing to be against ethnic unity. The result, undoubtedly foreseen by Henlein's people, was a continued erosion of support for the Agrarians and a further exodus of members from their party²⁸. Meanwhile, the Henlein leadership also succeeded in turning its difficulties with the Czechs to a political advantage. Appealing to the individual voter's resentment toward the Czechs for the at times very real economic discrimination against the Sudeten German population, the Henlein movement created just the right image needed to rally the Sudeten populace: an aura of intrepidity in the face of Czech persecution. Henlein's stance toward the state, measured hostility combined with reluctant reasonability, was just the right combination to win him the maximum popular support without goading the Czechs into ending his political career.

In the end, the election results — far from being a clear mandate for irredenta — are rather symptomatic of a wavering and flux on the part of all sides in the Czechoslovakian political scene at this point. The respectable German Right, caught amid its commitment to „activism“ and increasing public disillusionment with that policy, struggled between the contradictory demands of republican loyalty and militant *völkisch* allegiance. The Czechs, unable to decide whether to tolerate Henlein's movement or destroy it, vacillated between complete acceptance and total repression. Henlein himself placed the Sudeten German Party expediently if uncomfortably in a political stance somewhere between resistance to and collaboration with the ongoing regime: with a program vague enough in content not to bring down the wrath of the Czechs, yet militant enough in tone to attract the most disillusioned voter. For its part, the Sudeten German electorate cast its lot with an uncompromised new political movement which was outspoken in expressing popular grievances and feelings of ethnic exclusivity, yet not so radical as to break totally with the ongoing political system. In light of Sudeten party membership figures in 1935, it seems likely that it was primarily this combination of domestic factors which help explain the Henlein victory at the polls on May 19th — not any overwhelming support for irredenta, Hitler, or even Henlein himself. After all, while over a million voters sided with the Sudeten German Party in the election, only 370,000 had actually felt strongly enough about Henlein and his movement by this point to actually join the party itself.

²⁸ Koch to Auswärtiges Amt, February 28, 1935, *ibidem*. Also Koch reports of March 15 and March 26, 1935, *ibidem*, for general flight from German Agrarian Party to Heimatfront at the grass roots level.

With the growth spurt in 1938, on the other hand, it seems more certain that it was foreign and not primarily domestic concerns which lay at the root of the Sudeten German Party success: for by 1938 the Sudeten problem had ceased to be essentially a Czech internal matter and had evolved into the object of international concern²⁹. During late 1935 and throughout 1936, membership in the Sudeten German Party tended to stagnate, at least when measured against the explosive growth of early 1935 — by December 1936 it had reached only 460,000. This steady but hardly spectacular growth continued during 1937 with membership approaching 550,000 in December³⁰. In the more than two years since the elections of 1935, only 180,000 names had been added to the Sudeten German Party rolls — a stark contrast to the growth spurt of over 200,000 in just several months during the pre-election period of 1935. In January 1938 membership actually decreased slightly, by about 10,000, so that the total members enrolled stood at 541,681. Then suddenly between February and June 1938 membership shot into the sky, reaching a total of 1,347,903, an increase of nearly 150 percent in four months³¹! Allowing for those excluded from politics because of age and the small but dedicated minority of Sudeten Germans who remained loyal to other parties, the Henlein movement seems to have come very close to realizing the claims of totality implicit in the movement from its inception. By July 1938 nearly 40 percent of the Sudeten population had officially enrolled in the Henlein party³².

Sometime between the growth spurt of 1935 and the one in 1938, a dramatic change appears to have taken place in the political climate in the Sudetenland. If the sudden growth of the party in 1935 had seemed dramatic, that of 1938 appears volcanic by comparison and would seem to indicate not simply wholesale discontent but a genuine radicalization of the population. The smoldering discontent — dissatisfaction which contributed to the gradual growth of the Henlein movement between 1935 and the end of 1937 — had been exacerbated by the continuing impression on the part of the Sudeten Germans that they were not being accepted by the Czechs as equal partners in the state. Although the unrest may have been tempered somewhat by more favorable economic conditions in the German population areas, the slow pace of improvement, the perceived reluctance of the Czechs to permit visceral change, and of course the drama and prosperity of the Third Reich kept the pot boiling until outside events helped bring the by

²⁹ On the internationalization of the Sudeten question, see S m e l s e r : *Sudeten Problem*, chapter VII.

³⁰ The source for these and the following party membership statistics are Sudeten German Party documents: „Hauptstelle Eger, Standesführung“; „Kreiszusammenstellung, 1937“; „Kreiszusammenstellung, 1938“; and „Hauptorganisationsamt, Abt. Mitgliederkartei“, all four in SUA, Prague, 11-HS-STF/://: 24.

³¹ Sudeten German Party, „Hauptorganisationsamt, Abt. Mitgliederkartei“, SUA, Prague, 11-HS-STF/://: 24.

³² The exact percentage is 38.70, using population totals for the Sudetenland calculated during a census made just after *Anschluß* in 1938. According to this survey, the Sudeten German population was 3,408,449. Bundesanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumforschung, *Sudetendeutsches Ortsnamenverzeichnis*. Bad Godesberg 1965, p. 48.

now widespread distrust within the Sudeten population to the explosive point — to a mass appeal for irredenta³³. The decisive point came in March 1938 when Austria joined the Third Reich. As a result, Germany was richer by eight million people, Czechoslovakia poorer by one indefensible frontier and the Sudeten Germans elated by what looked like an immediate solution to the grievances and resentments they had nursed for so many years. It was in the ensuing months that Sudeten German Party membership shot over the million mark.

By June 1938 the second huge surge of Henlein party growth once again slowed somewhat: „only“ 30,295 new members joined the Sudeten movement in June³⁴. This tapering off probably indicates that party membership was reaching the saturation point by this time. But here again the membership pattern also seems directly linked to outside developments. By summer a kind of reaction apparently set in as a result of general disappointment that the Sudeten *Anschluß* did not come immediately upon the heels of the Austrian one. At the same time there was some alarm about the Czech mobilization during the „weekend crisis“ of May 30th³⁵.

Yet even in 1938 — given the massive impact of internationalization and the effects of the Austrian *Anschluß* — domestic factors continued, if in a subdued manner, to play a role in the way Henlein's party expanded. One indication of this is the nature of the party membership losses during this period. Alongside the enormous influx into the party, the number of Sudeten Germans who left the party seems miniscule indeed. From the beginning of 1937 to the period of great influx in March 1938 (the period for which such membership loss statistics are available), a total of 38,000 individuals left the Henlein party. Yet it is not the total number but rather the social composition of these members which is important here. As Table 1 shows, the largest number of those leaving the Sudeten German Party were either workers or women. It should be noted that these loss figures are somewhat misleading in that without statistics pinpointing the total number or percentage of workers in the Henlein movement, it is impossible to ascertain to what extent the higher worker losses merely reflect a higher total percentage of workers in the party. Henlein's party did in fact appear to have a rather strong working class as well as a middle and lower-middle class base³⁶. However, the exodus of workers from the party during the period of doldrums in late 1937 and early 1938 does seem more meaningful in light of other evidence that discontented grass roots labor elements within the Henlein movement were constantly at variance with the more bourgeois leadership of the party³⁷. This deep seated social cleavage within the Sudeten German Party is one which was

³³ On the somewhat improved economic situation, see Č e r n ý / C é s a r : *Politika II*, 422 footnote 31.

³⁴ Sudeten German Party, „Hauptstelle Eger, Standesführung“, SUA, Prague, 11-HS-STF/://: 24.

³⁵ Eisenlohr (the German Minister to Prague who succeeded Koch in 1935) to Auswärtiges Amt, March 31, 1938, PA, Kult A/Inland IIg/226/vol. 7.

³⁶ For a discussion of the working class membership within the Henlein movement, see S m e l s e r : *Sudetenproblem* 136 f.

³⁷ *Ibidem* 374—375.

present in Sudeten Right wing politics as far back as the early days of the Sudeten National Socialist Party right after World War I³⁸. As for the loss in women members, as a newly politicized group in society it is not surprising that they should also be among the first to become disenchanted when conditions were not propitious for party expansion. Together, the exodus of both groups suggest that until the Austrian Anschluß of March 1938 gave new, outside impetus to stimulate growth of the Henlein movement, the Sudeten German Party to the extent that it relied on domestic conditions was unable to rouse itself from a period of stagnation in its expansion.

The importance of domestic factors even so close to ultimate Anschluß also emerges in an analysis of the geographic distribution patterns of Henlein party membership in 1938. The Sudeten German Party, in its membership records, divided the Sudetenland into fourteen districts. It was on the basis of these districts that the party, in 1938, attempted to pinpoint percentage membership (Table 2). As one looks at the percentages for the various areas, one thing becomes clear: the percentage membership of the Sudeten German Party is by no means uniform — it varies considerably from a high of 32.68 percent in District IV to a low of 12.87 in District XI. The average percentage membership for the Sudetenland as a whole in March 1938, before the big growth spurt had ended, is 25.4 percent³⁹. The economic and social characteristics of these districts, as well as the proximity of the various areas to the Reich, all appear to have played a role in these differences in party growth.

Five of the districts were clearly above average in their percentage Sudeten German Party membership in March 1938: Gablonz (32.68 percent), Karlsbad (30.56), Böhmisches-Leipa (28.85), Böhmisches-Krumau (26.72), and Trautenau (26.30). Four of these five (the exception is Böhmisches-Krumau) bordered directly on Germany; the three with the highest membership ratios also had a very close historical proximity to Germany. As western and northern Bohemian areas, the orientation of Gablonz, Karlsbad, and Böhmisches-Leipa had been traditionally toward Germany rather than toward Prague or Vienna. All three had been cen-

³⁸ For details on the working class basis of the Sudeten German National Socialist Party, see the text of the original party program in Ciller, Alois: *Vorläufer des Nationalsozialismus: Geschichte und Entwicklung der nationalen Arbeiterbewegung im deutschen Grenzland*. Vienna 1932, p. 140—145; see also Whiteside, Andrew Gladding: *Austrian National Socialism before 1918*. The Hague 1962, p. 165 and 185.

³⁹ This figure is radically different from the July 1938 per capita figure of 38.70 used elsewhere in this study for a number of reasons: first, because the party did grow greatly between the time the Sudeten party made these calculations and the end of the 1938 growth spurt in July; also because the Henlein statisticians computed their percentages on a smaller population base than the census figures used for July (3,408,449). The Henlein figures eliminate those Germans who lived in Slovakia who officially belonged not to the Sudeten German Party, but to the *Karpathendeutsche Partei*. Thus, the Sudeten German Party figure for total „Sudeten“ population is only 2,984,210. If one calculates the per capita Henlein party membership in July 1938 using the Sudeten German Party population figures — i. e. totals for only those parts of Czechoslovakia where the party was officially active — rather than the total German population of the country, as I have here in this study, then the resulting percentage is 45.16!

ters of rabid German nationalism for decades⁴⁰. With Trautenau this had not been the case although it bordered physically on Germany, and as a result, its membership figures — although above average — are only slightly so. At the opposite end of the scale, the two Sudeten districts with the lowest percentage membership were Znaim (15.25 percent) and Brünn (12.87 percent): two areas which were geographically and historically furthest from Germany. Both regions bordered on Austria and had traditionally been oriented toward Vienna, rather than the Reich.

Statistics would seem to indicate, then, that one factor influencing membership in the Sudeten German Party was relative proximity of the election districts to Germany. The closer to Germany a district lay, or the closer its historic ties were, the more likely was the chance it would produce a higher percentage of Sudeten German Party members. Proximity to the Reich does not seem to be the only factor affecting party membership ratios, however. For if we consider those districts hovering at or around the overall average we found that of the four regions somewhat *below* average in party membership percentages, *all four bordered directly on Germany*: Jägerndorf (24.59 percent), Teplitz (23.94), Marienbad (22.90), and Mährisch-Schönberg (19.27). While geographic and historic proximity to Germany was one important factor in Sudeten German Party membership growth, it was far from an exclusive determinant of party expansion.

Another conditioning factor in Sudeten German Party membership growth seems to have the relative ferocity of the Czech-German ethnic conflict in the various districts. Here it is more difficult to provide any conclusive quantitative evidence, since national hatreds scarcely lend themselves to such rational measurement. The Sudeten Germans kept a very close watch on what they felt were the shifting „fronts“ which marked the borders between Czech and German settlement areas and attempted to classify those areas likely to fall most easily to the enemy⁴¹. The ethnic conflict appears to have been fiercest in those areas where the two ethnic groups were mixed, as for example in the coal mining towns of northern Bohemia, as well as along the language border itself. Moreover, an analysis of Sudeten party membership figures suggests that a correlation existed between the intensity of the ethnic struggle in any given area and the percentage of the Sudeten population that was drawn to the Henlein movement. For example, the Sudeten Germans felt that „The districts of Reichenberg and Gablonz [were] biologically the weakest area of Sudeten Germandom“⁴². In this formerly exclusively German speaking area the Czechs had, as part of a general exodus into industrial areas, become a significant minority. The Karlsbad district

⁴⁰ Wiskemann, Elizabeth: *Czechs and Germans. A Study of the Struggle in the Historic Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia*. 2nd ed. New York 1967, p. 137, 100—102, 99.

⁴¹ An excellent example of this biological-military mind set is to be found in Walter, Gustav: *Die Volksgrenze in den Sudetenländern*. In: Heiss, Friedrich (ed.): *Die Wunde Europas. Das Schicksal der Tschechoslowakei*. Berlin 1938, p. 195—229.

⁴² *Ibidem* 203.

was also considered a hotly contested area: two of its cities, Karlsbad and Falkenau, had the largest Czech minorities of any Sudeten German cities⁴³. It is in these areas of intense ethnic competition — the Gablonz and Karlsbad districts — that there was the highest proportion of Sudeten German Party members, which would seem to support the theory that the intensity of the ethnic struggle was a stimulus to party growth.

Again, however, ethnic hostility cannot be ruled an exclusive determinant. Böhmisches-Krumau was above average in party membership, although the German birth rate was highest in this area and Czech „infiltration“ negligible⁴⁴. At the same time, the Teplitz district — with a slightly below average membership — was a hotly contested settlement area. In fact, two of the cities in the Teplitz area, Brüx and Dux in the coal mining region, came very close to having Czech majorities⁴⁵. Znaim district with the second lowest party membership percentage of any district was considered by the Germans as a contested „front“ in the ethnic struggle, while Brünn (the urban component of which had been „Czechified“ by the annexation of surrounding Czech villages) had the lowest membership percentage of all⁴⁶.

Party membership statistics suggest that a further factor influencing the growth of the Henlein movement was the disastrous economic situation. Those areas which were most highly industrialized were those hardest hit by the depression and it was precisely in these areas of the Sudetenland where the growth of the Henlein movement was most pronounced. Gablonz district, with the city of Reichenberg, had always been the center of the north Bohemian „luxury“ industry, especially glassware and textiles. This area, particularly hard hit economically, had the highest percentage membership of any district⁴⁷. The same pattern applies for the areas with the next highest percentage Sudeten party membership, Karlsbad and Böhmisches-Leipa. Karlsbad had an overall unemployment rate of 35 to 40 percent; it was in this district where 5 of the 12 Sudeten cities with the highest rates of unemployment were located⁴⁸. Böhmisches-Leipa with its depressed brown coal mining and textile industry sustained an unemployment rate of 45 percent⁴⁹. By the same token, several districts with relatively low unemployment also show lower membership rates. Marienbad (22.90 percent membership) had an overall unemployment rate of 15 to 20 percent, while Znaim with its fertile farmland and rural contours, only suffered from 5 to 20 percent un-

⁴³ *Ibidem* 205.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem* 208.

⁴⁵ Wiskemann: *Czechs* 100.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem* 229.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem* 165—170.

⁴⁸ Schürer, Adrian: *Die Zerstörung des sudetendeutschen Volkswohlstandes*. In: Heiss, Friedrich (ed.): *Die Wunde Europas. Das Schicksal der Tschechoslowakei*. Berlin 1938, p. 246—263, especially 255.

⁴⁹ See Schürer: *Zerstörung* 257, for this and subsequent unemployment figures. Although the work is a polemic, which would tend to make the statistics suspect, it does give an indication of what the Sudeten Germans perceived their economic condition to be.

employment. Znaim, as we have seen, had close to the lowest proportion of its population in the Sudeten German Party.

There is evidence, then, that relative proximity to Germany, relative ferocity of ethnic antagonism and relative economic decline all appear to have influenced growth of the Henlein party. The three factors seem to have worked together and seem to have been mutually reinforcing. Those districts with the highest membership rate (Gablonz, Karlsbad and Böhmisches-Leipa) were all close to Germany, all suffered relatively worse economically than the rest of the Sudetenland during the industrial depression, and all were the scenes of intense ethnic conflicts. By the same token, the absence of one or two of these factors usually meant a significantly lower membership rate. In Znaim, with its close proximity to Austria and a rural profile relatively less affected by the depression, the percentage Sudeten German Party membership was quite low — despite relatively fierce ethnic antagonisms in the area.

The Sudeten Germans themselves saw a connection between these factors. Unfortunately, they tended to see the relationship between the factors as causal, not merely reciprocal. It appeared to many Sudeten Germans that the Czechs were exacerbating the economic crisis as a weapon in the ethnic struggle against the Sudeten German population. Feelings of identification historically with the Reich and physical proximity to Germany only helped to strengthen this impression of being persecuted. If the Reich Germans had found a new prosperity under Hitler, then why could not the Sudeten Germans do as well were it not for the Czechs? Thus, the Sudeten German's perception of the problem itself added to the air of resentment pervading Czechoslovakian politics.

But party statistics themselves undermine both such „Czech conspiracy“ theories and contentions that the rise of Henlein's party was simply a function of Hitlerian success. On the one hand, the relationship of economic-geographic-ethnic factors seems to have been reciprocal and not the result of Czech malevolence as many Sudeten Germans maintained; on the other hand, only one of the three factors — geographic proximity — is directly related to Germany itself, suggesting that domestic considerations played a more important role in Sudeten discontent than many observers have been willing to admit. A closer examination of party membership patterns points even more to the validity of the more balanced interpretation: particularly if all three factors — geographic, economic and ethnic — are taken into account and related to the percentage membership in the various districts.

Although no one of the three factors appears of overwhelming importance, one of the three seems to be somewhat more important than the other two: the economic situation. In all areas of Czechoslovakia but one where Sudeten German Party membership was average or above, the only consistent factor was severe economic dislocation. Where the other two factors — ethnic competition and proximity to the Reich — appeared influential, the difference between average and above average membership in any district seemed to hinge upon the relative percentage of agrarian and industrial concentration. The more agriculturally oriented a district was, i. e. the less the effect of the depression was perceptible,

the lower the percentage Sudeten party membership. The only exception to this was the district of Böhmisches Krumau, with a slightly above average Sudeten German Party membership although the area bordered on Austria and although it was almost entirely agricultural economically. This apparent exception may be explained in part by the fact that the agriculture here was extremely primitive and low yielding and the conditions in some areas of the district virtually feudal. The German peasants in Böhmisches Krumau, in contrast to Znaim for example, were scarcely able to eke out a living⁵⁰. In short, in the case of Böhmisches Krumau, the agricultural economic base was not an indicator of relative prosperity as it was in the other districts.

Still other evidence suggests that economic factors initially outweighed either the impact of ethnic competition or proximity to the Reich in the growth of the Henlein movement. Although both Marienbad and Mährisch-Schönberg bordered on Germany, both had a below average membership in the Sudeten German Party. It is significant that both were relatively better off economically than other parts of the Sudetenland⁵¹. In the case of Mährisch-Schönberg, with the third lowest percentage membership, the ethnic animosities were less pronounced than elsewhere as well.

To scholars interested in the complex tangle of Czech-German relations in the 1930s and the development of the Henlein movement, then, Sudeten German Party membership statistics would seem to point to a number of conclusions: 1) that initially domestic considerations rather than international events seem to have been more important in the growth of Henlein's support, particularly during the elections of 1935; and 2) that even later, during the massive influx into the party in 1938 when Hitler's successes were of such overwhelming importance to political developments within Czechoslovakia, domestic conditions still played a far from negligible role in the growth of Henlein's movement. Finally, considering the domestic factors involved, there is evidence that economic conditions tended to outweigh both feelings generated by geographic proximity to the Reich and ethnic hostility toward Czechs as factors luring Sudeten Germans into the Henlein movement.

But more than this, the Sudeten party's growth patterns can be of significance in understanding the appeal and nature of political mass movements in general. Particularly striking is that second massive growth wave of the Sudeten German Party which by the end of July 1938 brought membership totals to 1,347,903. Given the fact that the total Sudeten German population at this time was around 3.5 million, this meant that by mid — 1938 virtually all the Sudeten Germans — apart from die-hard Democrats and Socialists and those too young or too old to be involved in politics — who could have joined Henlein's movement had done so. The percentage is staggering. Something on the order of 40 percent of

⁵⁰ Walter: Volksgrenze. In: Heiss: Wunde 208.

⁵¹ This was apparently the case in spite of the fact that Marienbad had several cities with extremely high rates of unemployment. Evidently, the relatively affluent rural population in the area counterbalanced the urban economic dislocation. Wiske mann: Czechs 102.

the entire Sudeten German population was officially enrolled as members of the Sudeten German Party. The Nazi Party in Germany never even remotely approached enrolling this high a percentage of the population in the ranks of the party⁵².

The explanation for this astoundingly high percentage of party membership goes far beyond our immediate consideration of the relative weight of domestic Czech and international circumstances in the growth of the Henlein movement: it points unmistakably to the diversified nature of modern mass parties, despite the similarities which often characterize them. Although the Henlein party was „German“, despite the fact that it functioned on territory in immediate proximity to Germany, and although it had many contacts with the Third Reich and borrowed a great deal of the style of the Hitlerian movement, the Sudeten German Party nonetheless — in terms of its function and self-conceptualization — was far from being a filial of the Reich National Socialist Party.

The National Socialist Party in Germany called itself and to some extent was a mass movement. One of Hitler's goals in forming the party was ostensibly to bridge the social antagonisms which beset the German nation state — as seen in the name which he chose for his movement, the National Socialist German Workers Party. The party was intended as a rallying point for precisely those social groups and aspirations which were at greatest variance with one another: middle class nationalism and working class socialism. Eventually the party was to try, albeit unsuccessfully, to end those conflicts by seizing power and imposing the total power of the state on German society. But despite this attempt at appealing to a broad popular base, the National Socialist Party always had a very strong elitist thrust. Before 1933 the party essentially saw itself as an organization of „political soldiers“ geared to seizing political power; after the *Machtergreifung* the party's self-image was that of cadres aimed at exercising power⁵³. The key to this elitist thrust lies to a great extent in the fact that for the National Socialist party the road to political power in Germany lay open, but only in ways not conducive to *Volk* unity. In its struggle for power, whatever its ultimate intentions might have been, the National Socialist party had to temporarily exacerbate conflicts within German society and found itself at variance with large segments of that society. As a consequence, the Nazi party tended to keep its ranks limited to politically committed fanatics, to „political soldiers“ who were in a position to

⁵² In 1935 the national correlation of NSDAP members to population was 1:24.4, or 3.78 percent of the population. Orlow, Dietrich: *History of the Nazi Party: 1933—1945*. Pittsburgh 1973, p. 137.

⁵³ *Ibidem* 3—17; also Bracher, Karl Dietrich: *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*. Trans. Jean Steinberg. New York 1970, p. 149—150, 181, 272—286. — Schoenbaum, David: *Hitler's Social Revolution. Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933—1939*. New York 1966, p. 125, 281 ff., 291. — Lerner, Daniel: *The Nazi Elite*. Stanford 1951; and most recently Struve, Walter: *The Sources of National Socialist Elitism*. In: *Elites against Democracy. Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890—1933*. Princetown 1973, p. 463; also Neumann, Sigmund: *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*. New York 1966, p. 365—398.

assure the party of its ultimate goal. The party regarded itself as the vanguard, the embryo of a future greater *Volksgemeinschaft* or community, and cultivated an atmosphere of exclusivity, of belonging, on behalf of the initiated. When the party had actually seized power, the focus changed somewhat. Still elitist in thrust, the party turned its energies to exercising power in the pursuit of goals once again not totally acceptable to the entire German populace. Despite an influx of „Me-too“ members into the party, the so-called „March violets“, the Reich National Socialist party remained not a macrocosmic, but a microcosmic folk community — an elitist function vis-a-vis a partly hostile, partly politically uncommitted population. The party also consciously cultivated elite formations within the party structure itself, elites within the larger elite, to preserve the ideological purity and inner dynamism of the movement. Here, of course, the *Sicherheitsdienst* and the SS are prime examples⁵⁴.

The Sudeten German Party, on the other hand, never exhibited this kind of elitist self-image vis-a-vis the rest of the population. It put no limits on the size of its membership. On the contrary, it opened its ranks to all and sundry. It tried to be the folk community or *Volksgemeinschaft* not in microcosm as the National Socialist Party had in the Reich, but macrocosmically by becoming as nearly contiguous with the whole Sudeten population as it could. The reason for this difference apparently lies in the very different context in which the two parties had to operate during their respective „years of struggle“. Regardless of its claims on folk unity and its attempts to pull together disparate classes in society, the German Nazi party had to ultimately fight sizeable segments of the German populace in order to seize and hold power, which militated against mass folk unity and led to an elitist party stance. For its part, the struggle of the Henlein movement was not primarily within the *Volk* community itself. Rather, the party confronted an alien ethnic group which formed the majority in the state. In this position the Sudeten German movement attempted to stress unity of the entire Sudeten population as a means of winning maximum political leverage in the state — hence the name eventually chosen for the movement, *the* Sudeten German Party. Although social bifurcation within the Sudeten community was very real, Henlein attempted to ignore these signs of dissention in his belief that the need to emphasize unity was so great that it would have been folly to indulge in selective membership recruitment. So the Sudeten German Party recruited indiscriminately and on a truly mass scale.

This is not to say that the Sudeten German Party was entirely egalitarian in its thrust: much of the top leadership of the party did adhere to an elitist philosophy, that of the Viennese sociologist Othmar Spann⁵⁵. Spann had preached to a whole generation of young Sudeten Germans the glories of a restored German medieval imperium presided over by a neo-Platonic intellectual elite, presumably

⁵⁴ See, for example, Buchheim, Hans: *Anatomie des SS-Staates*. 2 vols. Freiburg 1965; and Höhne, Heinz: *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf*. Gütersloh 1967.

⁵⁵ For a summary of work on Spann, see Smelser: *Sudeten Problem* 60—65; also, most recently, Haag, John: 'Knights of the Spirit': The Kameradschaftsbund. *Journal of Contemporary History* 8 (July 1973) 133—154.

composed of his students. But several factors came into play which denied the Sudeten Spannist elite any semblance of success which the Nazi elite had enjoyed. The relatively large Nazi elite operated within a movement which was circumscribed in size and composition and from this base was able to effectively manipulate the masses. The Spann circle within the Sudeten German Party, by contrast, was a comparatively tiny, self-styled elite operating clandestinely within a mass movement so large and unwieldy, so uncontrolled in size and composition, as to defy manipulation. Indeed, the history of the Sudeten German Party more often than not is a case of the tail wagging the dog⁵⁶. Moreover, the role of the Spann circle as a popularly acceptable elite was greatly diminished by the fact that the mass of Sudeten Germans who comprised the movement tended to see themselves as a kind of „mass elite“ vis-a-vis the culturally „inferior“ Czech majority of the population. Hence the Sudeten population had a kind of coherency not present in Reich German society during the time prior to the Nazi *Machtergreifung*. Finally, the Nazi elite was rewarded with so much success because in spite of the fact that it was an elite, it thought in terms of the mass — in an age of mass politics. The National Socialist party leadership always was a political elite of power brokers. The Spann elite in the Sudeten German Party, on the other hand, tended to be an intellectual elite, more used to manipulating ideas than people; indeed, Henlein and his closest circle of advisors never got into the habit of thinking in terms of mass politics. As a result, whereas the Nazi elite rather skillfully used the masses, the Spann elite more often than not found itself buffeted to and fro by grass roots pressure from within the Sudeten movement itself.

But even had the Spann elite been larger and politically more astute, there is some doubt whether it would have been possible to steer the massive political force which this elite had helped set in motion. The ultimate difference between the Sudeten German movement and the National Socialist movement in the Reich lay not merely in the self-images of the two parties, but in the relationship of the two movements to state power. The German National Socialist Party — although frequently at odds with sizeable, if not hostile then at least indifferent, segments of the populace — was able to seize and hold political power. It is almost axiomatic in politics that the less chance any political group has to hold or share power, the more likely it will be to dissipate its energies in hairsplitting ideological debate over often esoteric questions. The old Social Democratic Party in Wilhelminian Germany is one case in point. And so it was with the Sudeten German Party. Its stance for the most part was primarily negative and defensive, since there was no real chance of seizing total power in the Republic and since the party leadership had little desire to share power with the Czechs. Henlein tried to straddle the fence — professing loyalty to the *Volksgemeinschaft* but denying the only way he could really have created and steered such a movement effectively, by the use of state power.

⁵⁶ Smelser, Ronald: Reich National Socialist and Sudeten German Party Elites: a Collective Biographical Approach. ZfO 23 (1974) Heft 4.

This was the stalemate in which his party had become mired during 1937 and early 1938, when the influx into the Sudeten German Party largely abated. The stagnation of membership growth bears witness to the failure of the Henlein movement to become anything on its own terms, to really achieve anything concrete. It was also during this period of mounting frustration and tension that Henlein gradually found himself unable to successfully cope with the exercise of political power within his own party and he began to turn increasingly to the Reich for aid in keeping dissidents within his movement in line. Unlike the pre-election period in early 1935, this time the Henlein party had lost its drawing power in time of adversity. Finally, by November 1937, Henlein seems to have capitulated totally to Hitler in a desperate attempt to maintain his leadership role within the Sudeten movement⁵⁷. The key to the future of the *Volksgemeinschaft* now lay with Hitlerian Germany. It is significant that only with Hitler's success in annexing Austria did Sudeten German Party membership again begin to climb dramatically. In October 1938, with the annexation of the Sudetenland itself, the use of state power — something Henlein had attempted to bypass — came into play, but from outside and not from within Czechoslovakia.

The German minister in Prague at one point offered this most perceptive assessment of Henlein's plight⁵⁸: „Condemned in practice to be without influence, [the Sudeten movement] could offer its adherents — who are after all not just composed of idealists — little more than inflammatory speeches. Since an uprising against the overpowerful government was pointless, a seizure of power like [that of] the NSDAP in the Reich categorically impossible for a minority, the only hope left for excited and radicalized masses, who could see no concrete successes and no prospect for winning power, was an armed intervention by Germany.“

Modern political parties, by their very nature and origin, must direct themselves toward state power as their primary *raison d'être*. Without accepting the state there is no framework within which and no tool with which to exercise power. Henlein's movement did not accept the Czechoslovakian state and discovered eventually that without a state there could not be a politicized *Volksgemeinschaft* either. It was partly that realization that prompted Henlein in the end to turn to the only other state left to him: that of the Greater German Reich. It was something the expatriate Sudeten National Socialists had already done years before.

But in turning to the Reich for access to state power, the Sudeten German movement found itself cheated once again. For even inside the Third Reich, it could not be the *Volksgemeinschaft* it had aspired to become. It found itself merged with a far larger community with interests often unlike its own — conflicting interests which were to take precedence over the needs of the Sudeten community. Nor could the Henlein movement really share power effectively

⁵⁷ In a letter of capitulation written to Hitler on November 19, 1937, Henlein literally put his future and that of the Sudeten Germans in the dictator's hands. *Akten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik*, Series D (Baden-Baden, 1949), II, document 23.

⁵⁸ Eisenlohr to Auswärtiges Amt, February 4, 1938, *ibidem* document 53.

after *Anschluss*. Its nature as a true *mass* movement — which, in terms of percentage membership at least it succeeded in becoming to a far greater extent than the German National Socialist Party — left it in no position to compete even on its own home ground with the power elite which directed Nazi Germany. The Sudeten leadership had already been manipulated by that elite during the crisis in 1938 which led up to *Anschluss*⁵⁹. Now after 1938 the Sudeten German Party personnel — from Henlein on down — had to content themselves with honors and crumbs from the table of power. Henlein became a relatively powerless provincial *Gauleiter*. Many of his colleagues disappeared into obscurity; some were even persecuted. The Sudeten German Party itself was merged with the German National Socialist Party and disappeared as a separate entity⁶⁰.

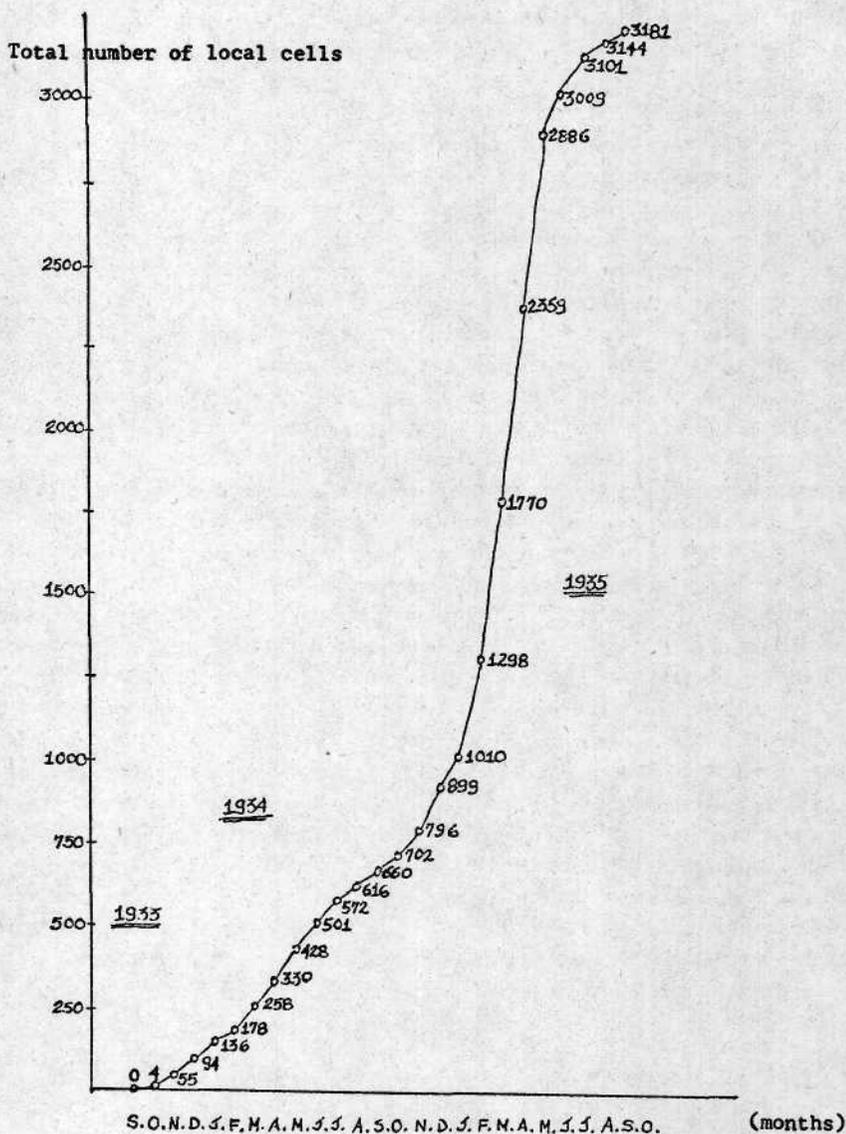
One can perhaps conclude from the example of the Sudeten German Party that for „mass movements“ to be politically viable, they must in reality include an elitist component whose task it is to steer the mass membership in a politically coherent direction. Although it appears important for this elite to continue to stress the „mass“ nature of the movement to secure the political power base, at the same time the masses cannot be allowed to stream indiscriminately into the movement itself. In a genuine „movement of the masses“, finding and pursuing a common political goal becomes difficult and militates against what must be the ultimate aim of any political movement — gaining access to state power. Henlein failed to perceive this need⁶¹. Even if he had recognized the problem, the difficulty of combining the strong Sudeten demands for an elitist *Volksgemeinschaft* and the realities of limited access to state power may have made his venture an impossible one. In any case, the lack of political acumen on Henlein's part cannot and should not be mistaken for malevolent complicity with the Hitlerian regime; nor should the fact that Henlein at times attempted to imitate some of the flamboyant outward characteristics of the Hitlerian regime be construed as proof positive that the Sudeten German Party and the National Socialist parties of Germany and the Sudetenland were all one and the same. Henlein's successful appeal to a broad mass of the Sudeten population — at once a potential strength and, ironically, the ultimate downfall of the movement — argues dramatically for the uniqueness of the Sudeten party as a genuine „mass“ movement and for Henlein's failure to understand the nature either of that movement or the deceptively similar movement across the border. In the end it was this very uniqueness which was to lead the movement into Hitler's hands: to make Henlein's „mass“ movement susceptible to manipulation by the „mass-elite“ party in Hitlerian Germany.

⁵⁹ Smelser, Ronald: The Betrayal of a Myth: National Socialism and the Financing of Middle Class Socialism in the Sudetenland. *Central European History* 5 (September 1972) 256—277.

⁶⁰ See Höller, Franz (ed.): *Von der SdP zur NSDAP*. Reichenberg 1939.

⁶¹ The Nazis found themselves temporarily in this dilemma as well for a few months after the seizure of power in 1933, as radicals like Ley and Röhm attempted to turn the party into a mass organization to a far greater degree: a step which would have had a deleterious effect on the ability of the leadership to exercise power effectively. Hitler solved the problem, in part, by the ruthless suppression of radicals in the party. See Orlow: *Nazi Party* 48—61.

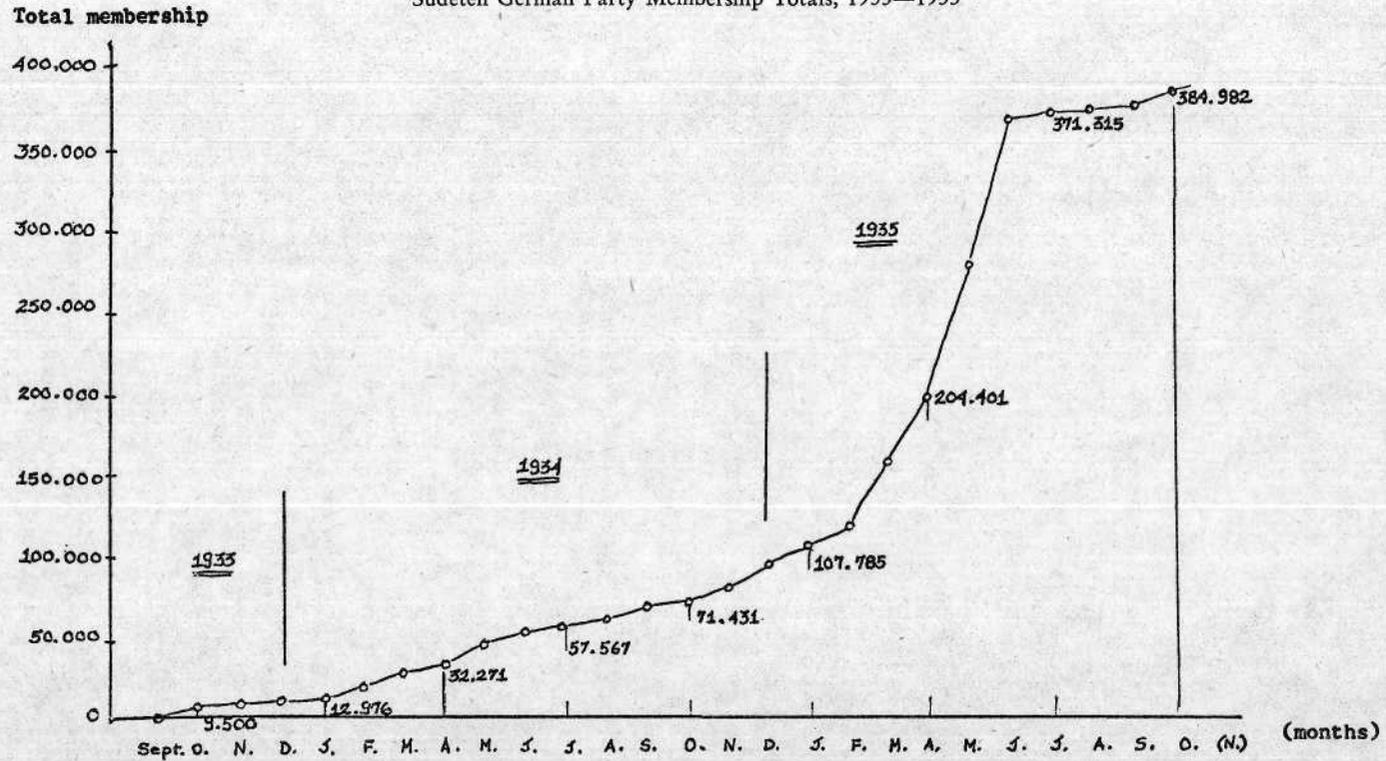
Chart 1
Sudeten German Party Ortsgruppen Formation, 1933—1935



Source: Sudeten German Party, Statistische Abteilung des Werbeamtes, SUA, Prague, 5-HS-OA/://: 14.

Chart 2

Sudeten German Party Membership Totals, 1933—1935



Source: Sudeten German Party, Statistische Abteilung des Werbeamtes, SUA, Prague, 5-HS-OA/://: 14.

Table 1

Sudeten German Party Membership Losses, 1937—1938
Voluntary Cancellations, Expellees, Others Dropped

Month	Total Membership Lost, by Profession						Total Losses	Total Membership
	Workers	Civil Servants	Agrarian	Artisans, Trades	Professions	Women		
Nov. 1937	942	136	142	..... 215 .....	.....	799	2,234	533,260
Dec. 1937	1,051	130	136	..... 289 .....	.....	874	2,480	537,520
Jan. 1938	1,374	195	293	627	100	1,486	4,075	530,699
Feb. 1938	1,344	186	183	304	79	1,281	3,377	548,633
Mar. 1938	734	92	78	117	36	598	1,655	759,384
Apr. 1938	405	57	51	76	16	327	932	1,047,178
May 1938	382	65	69	105	147	334	1,102	1,309,389
June 1938	360	92	91	90	17	364	1,014	1,337,020
July 1938	570	127	180	109	23	498	1,507	1,347,903
Total	7,162	1,080	1,223	2,350		6,561	18,376	1,347,903

Source: Sudeten German Party, „Hauptstelle Eger, Abteilung Standesführung“, SUA, Prague, 11-HS-STF/://: 24. Losses from charts labeled, „Streichungen: Einteilung nach Berufsgruppen“. Total membership from „Standesführung“ reports, by month.

Table 2

Percentage Membership of the Sudeten German Population
in the Sudeten German Party, by District
March 1938

District	Total Membership	Population German-speaking	Percent
III (Trautenau)	36,248	138,042	26.30
IV (Gablonz)	81,234	248,505	32.68
V (Böhmisch-Leipa)	140,796	489,904	28.85
VI (Teplitz)	86,928	363,302	23.94
VII (Karlsbad)	160,435	524,837	30.56
VIII (Marienbad)	59,294	257,908	22.90
IX (Böhmisch-Krumau)	39,588	148,151	26.72
X (Znaim)	19,766	129,631	15.25
XI (Brünn)	18,052	140,237	12.87
XII (Mährisch-Schönberg)	64,014	332,174	19.27
XIV (Jägerndorf)	52,495	213,447	24.59
Total	758,904	2,984,210	25.43

Source: Sudeten German Party, „Hauptstelle Eger, Standesführung“, SUA, Prague, 11-HS-STF/://: 24. Report titled „Mitgliederstand mit Ende März 1938 errechnet nach den Bezirksberichten für Monat März 1938“. Note: no information was given in party records on districts I, II and XIII.

AN DEN GRENZEN EINER MASSENBEWEGUNG:
DER FALL DER SUDETENDEUTSCHEN PARTEI
1933 BIS 1938

Die Entwicklung der Henlein-Bewegung gibt uns die Möglichkeit, eine politische Massenbewegung in einem kleinen Lande zu untersuchen und die Bedeutung ihrer eigenständigen Natur angesichts des machtvollen Einflusses auf sie, durch eine ähnliche, aber größere Bewegung in einer nachbarlichen Großmacht, zu illustrieren. Sicherlich ahmte die 1933 gegründete Henlein-Bewegung in weitem Umfang den triumphalen Nationalsozialismus Hitlers auf der anderen Seite der Grenze nach und trat schließlich auch in seine Fußstapfen. Dies zu übersehen würde bedeuten, die Sudetendeutschen gänzlich aus dem Zusammenhang Mitteleuropas zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen lösen zu wollen. Aber bei allen Einflüssen und Bezügen von Deutschland bleibt doch das kurze, meteorhafte Leben der Sudetendeutschen Partei unverstänlich, wenn wir ihre böhmischen Zusammenhänge, in denen sie wirkte, ignorieren. Der kurzfristige Zugang zu Quellen in tschechischen Archiven machte Untersuchungen in diesem Zusammenhang möglich.

Eine Analyse der Wachstumszahlen der Sudetendeutschen Partei (anfänglich Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront genannt), sowohl in bezug auf die Mitgliederzahlen als auch auf die Zahl der Ortsgruppen, ermöglicht Schlüsse auf die Anfänge und auf Gründe der Expansion. So zeigt ein Vergleich des plötzlichen Mitgliederwachstums unmittelbar nach Gründung der Bewegung im Oktober 1933 mit dem relativ langsamen Wachstum der Ortsgruppen, selbst über die folgenden Jahre hinaus, daß die organisatorische Basis der Partei nicht rasch genug der plötzlichen Popularität der Bewegung gerecht zu werden vermochte. Dieser Sachverhalt läßt Zweifel an der Meinung aufkommen, es hätten enge organisatorische Bindungen zwischen der alten DNSAP und ihrem gut ausgebauten Organisationsnetz und der nach der Auflösung gegründeten Sudetendeutschen Heimatfront bestanden.

Einen weiteren Ansatzpunkt für eine Analyse bietet der Sachverhalt des plötzlichen Mitgliederanstiegs sowohl im Frühjahr 1935 als auch im Frühjahr 1938. Trotz der jahreszeitlichen Übereinstimmung erweist sich die Mitgliederexpansion von 1938 überwiegend als eine Auswirkung der internationalen Entwicklungen, speziell des Anschlusses von Österreich an Deutschland, während der plötzliche Mitgliederanstieg des Jahres 1935 weitgehend auf inländische Faktoren zurückzuführen ist: Eine allgemeine Enttäuschung über die Mißerfolge der deutschen aktivistischen Parteien bei der Überwindung der sich verstärkenden Wirtschaftskrise, die zu einer Schwächung der gemäßigten Rechten (Agrarier, Gewerbetypen, Christlich Soziale) führte, die Belebung der organisatorischen Aktivitäten der Henlein-Partei und ein allgemeiner Protest gegen alle Maßnahmen, die als eine Verfolgung durch die Tschechen empfunden wurden.

Diese Faktoren illustrieren die Bedeutung der einheimischen Ursachen bei dem Wachstum der Henlein-Bewegung im Jahre 1935. Aber selbst im Jahre 1938, als das Emporschnellen der Mitgliederzahl deutlich als Ergebnis der internationalen Erfolge Hitlers zu werten ist, übten heimische Ursachen weiterhin einen wichtigen, wenngleich sicher nicht mehr entscheidenden Einfluß aus. Einen wichtigen Nachweis für diese Situation bietet eine Analyse der ansteigenden Mitgliederzahlen in den 14 Wahlbezirken des Sudetenlandes. Obwohl die relative Nähe zu Deutschland, und zwar sowohl geographisch wie historisch, für jeden Distrikt ein wichtiger, die internationale Lage widerspiegelnder Einflußfaktor ist, zeigt sich doch, daß auch der Grad des tschechisch-deutschen Volkstumskampfes und die unterschiedliche Intensität der Wirtschaftskrise in diesen Distrikten von großer Bedeutung gewesen sein mußte. Tatsächlich erweist sich von den drei Faktoren die wirtschaftliche Bedrängung als ein Schlüsselfaktor für die unterschiedlichen Prozentsätze der Mitgliedschaften bei der Sudetendeutschen Partei in den verschiedenen Gebieten.

Schließlich zeigt eine Analyse der Expansion der Partei neben der Bedeutung der einheimischen Ursachen für das Wachstum der Henlein-Bewegung auch viel über die grundsätzliche, vielgestaltige Struktur und äußere Erscheinung dieser Massenbewegung. Hier wird erneut das eigenständige Gefüge der Sudetendeutschen Partei deutlich. Trotz äußerlicher Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Henleins SdP und der NSDAP während der Jahre ihres Kampfes in Deutschland, sind einige grundlegende Unterschiedlichkeiten nicht zu übersehen.

Da die NSDAP während ihrer Kampfzeit nicht sicher sein konnte, eine Massenbewegung zu sein, die die vielen unterschiedlichen Elemente der deutschen Gesellschaft einschließt, war das Ziel der ihren Kern bildenden verschiedenen, ineinandergreifenden Eliten darauf gerichtet, die Massenbasis einzuengen, zu kontrollieren und zu manipulieren. Auf diese Weise konnte die NSDAP gut fundiert und koordinierend wirken. Im Gegensatz dazu wurde die Sudetendeutsche Partei durch verschiedene widerspenstige und streitsüchtige, cliquenhafte Gruppierungen geleitet. Hier fehlte ein dynamischer Führer, der imstande gewesen wäre, die leitende Hierarchie zu koordinieren. So tendierte die Sudetendeutsche Partei einerseits dazu, sich auf einer viel breiteren Basis und letztlich viel weniger diskriminierend zu ergänzen als dies bei der NSDAP der Fall war. Andererseits bewirkte dies aber, daß keine dynamisch geführte Partei entstehen konnte, sondern vielmehr eine Partei, in der die Führerschaft durch geringsten Druck hin und her gerissen wurde. Im Gegensatz zu der NSDAP, die sich als eine kleine Avantgarde der kommenden Volksgemeinschaft empfand, versuchte die SdP mit ihrer verhältnismäßig viel größeren Mitgliederzahl eine Volksgemeinschaft im Großen zu schaffen, indem ihre Gefüge möglichst mit der Bevölkerung übereinstimmen sollte, die sie repräsentierte. Diese Pluralität der Henlein-Bewegung machte es den erfahrenen Machtvertretern des Dritten Reiches viel leichter, die sudetendeutsche Massenbewegung schließlich zu manipulieren und für ihre Zwecke zu mißbrauchen, als dies bei einer andersgearteten Struktur möglich gewesen wäre.