

Kameradschaftsbund. Contribution to the history of Czech-German relationship¹

(Part one)

Lukáš Novotný

Othmar Spann and his ideological influence

Othmar Spann (1878–1950), an Austrian philosopher, economist and sociologist, studied in Vienna, Zurich, Bern and Tübingen. In 1903 he finished a doctorate in political economy and eight years later he started to teach at the Brno Technical University.² During the war he worked at the statistic department of the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of War. In 1919 he was appointed professor of political economy and sociology at the University in Vienna.

His philosophy expressed one of the Austrian anti-democratic concepts of the 1920's. Spann's lectures given at the University of Vienna and the work of his students and friends who joined the so-called Spann's Circle, created ideological assumptions for the later Austrian chancellors and leaders of the "Estates' State" – Engelbert Dollfuss³ and Kurt Schuschnigg. Othmar Spann expressed his ideas about a "real state" in his work *Der wahre Staat*.⁴ The work was based on "*the analysis of metaphysical terms – idealism and universalism opposed against positivist materialism and historicism with spiritual values*".⁵

The critique of liberalism and democracy was one of the elements of Spann's philosophy. His concept of "real state" also rejected the parliamentary

¹ This article has been published as a part of the research project MSM 0021620827 *The Czech Lands in the Midst of Europe in the Past and Today* at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague.

² There he also encountered national disputes between Czechs and Germans, later leading him to write up several papers on national consciousness and nationality. There was a rumor that his political ideas were determined by the "*anti Czech mentality of Czech Germans and Lower Austrians who felt economically threatened*". K. BALLESTREM, H. OTTMAN, *Politická filozofie 20. století*, Praha 1993, p. 92.

³ Othmar Spann, who made "*den größten und nachhaltigsten Eindruck auf den Studenten Engelbert Dollfuß*". G. WALTERSKIRCHEN, *Engelbert Dollfuß. Arbeitermörder oder Heldenkanzler*, Wien 2004, p. 66.

⁴ O. SPANN, *Der wahre Staat*, Leipzig 1921.

⁵ M. JEŘÁBEK, *Konec demokracie v Rakousku, 1932–1938. Politické, hospodářské a ideologické příčiny pádu demokracie*, Praha 2004, p. 37.

form of government or the sovereignty of people defined within natural law.⁶ According to Spann a crisis of individualism had begun. He perceived it in two levels – 1) political one, when democracy was opposed by ideas aiming towards dictatorship or, at least, towards the creation of “special rights” and 2) economic one, when socialism and communism started to endanger capitalism seriously.

Spann criticized liberalism and democracy as ideologies⁷ expressing, in political level, individualism of natural law but at the same time differing from each other. He perceived liberalism as a moderate representation of the ideas of natural law which can develop into a constitutional form of a state; according to him democracy on the other hand expresses the government of people in the least mediated form, most it represents the ideas of a state treaty and popular sovereignty.⁸ The theory of state from the viewpoint of enlightened individualism prefers individuals to a whole. Accordingly, a state is then based on a treaty of autonomous individuals about the social contract and the government.⁹ Spann saw the basic mistake of individualism in the fact that an individual is considered as something primary and original.¹⁰

Othmar Spann came to the conclusion that democracy is the only logically correct political form of natural law individualism that is even most elaborated in theory. As he mistakenly perceived it only within this perspective (the decision of majority instead of pragmatic decision, buying votes, demagoguery etc.), he refused it.¹¹ According to Spann, democracy is based on several elementary theses – equal members concluded a contract (Staatsbürger) and have an equal right to vote; the government execution is

⁶ H. WOHNOUT, *Regierungsdiktatur oder Ständeparlament? Gesetzgebung im autoritären Österreich*, Wien, Köln, Graz 1993, p. 22.

⁷ A. DIAMANT, *Austrian Catholics and the First Republic, 1918–1934: A Study in Anti-Democratic Thought*. The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 10, 1957, No. 3, p. 623.

⁸ SPANN, p. 104. Compare DIAMANT, p. 625.

⁹ Compare O. FRAUSCHER, *Othmar Spanns universalistische Gesellschafts- und Staatslehre und der Einfluss der Romantik*, Salzburg 2001, p. 66; O. HAUSMANN, *Othmar Spann und seine Schule*, Wien 1962, pp. 243–244.

¹⁰ Compare B. LANDHEER, *Othmar Spanns Social Theories*. The Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 39, 1931, No. 2, p. 240; FRAUSCHER, p. 67.

¹¹ W. BECHER, *Der Blick aufs Ganze. Das Weltbild Othmar Spanns*, München 1988, p. 134. For Spann “bleibt Demokratie jene unheilvolle Kraft der gesellschaftlichen Nivellierung und Gleichmacherei, die jeden organischen, ständischen Aufbau des Staates verhindert”. K. SONTHEIMER, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, München 1962, p. 169.

carried out collegiately. The constitutional liberalism eventually the enlightenment absolutism violated the mentioned theses in Spann's eyes.¹²

However Spann did not consider the democratic system as suitable. He concluded that such a form of a state had the character of a non-viable utopia.¹³ He criticized the fact that the form of government, which enabled all to take part in the execution, would end up as a mechanical rule of the decision of majority.¹⁴ Another point of his criticism was the situation when every vote has the same weight and importance, which means that the majority governs.¹⁵ Spann as even more ruthless expression of equality regarded the rule of eligibility proved already by antic democracies. Thus masses become unstable (party and government changes). If all votes have the same importance, none can have a greater inner value. It means that in democracy it is not a value but a mechanical majority that governs. Similarly to Plato, Spann rejected democracy as ochlocracy and was afraid of the beginning of the "mass era" which could suppress everything noble and spectacular.¹⁶

From the viewpoint of universalism the substance of a society is not an individual but the supra-individual spirituality (überindividuelles Geistes). The organization – "state" expresses the spiritual unity and not the random will derived from the majority opinion. Spann thus rejected the principle of voting. According to him individual votes should not be counted but weighed. It should not be the majority taking decisions through voting that governs but the best (from the society; "das Beste").¹⁷

According to Spann the important principles should not be changed according to the opinion of the randomly chosen majority; they should be applied because of one simple reason – i.e. because "the best" want them to be applied. On the contrary, democracy wants to vote on the truth. One of the main points of Spann's criticism of democracy obviously aimed to the

¹² SPANN, p. 108. Compare J. H. PICHLER, *Othmar Spann oder Die Welt als Ganzes*, Wien, Köln, Graz 1988, pp. 75–76.

¹³ Compare P. KAMPITS, *Malé dějiny rakouské filozofie. Mezi zdáním a skutečností*, Praha 1995, p. 152.

¹⁴ *It does not have to be truth either. Democratic leaders are said to vote themselves. Parties' voting lists are compiled by narrow groups of people who control the others. The result is "eine Herrschaft der Minderheit".* BECHER, p. 133.

¹⁵ "Majority rule, the method for deciding issues in a democracy, robbed the individual of his intrinsic value by equating the value of his vote mechanically with that of every other individual." DIAMANT, p. 625.

¹⁶ SPANN, p. 109. "Demokratie bedeutet auf die Dauer Kulturtod." M. SCHNELLER, *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus. Der Beitrag Othmar Spanns zum Konservativismus in der Weimarer Republik*, Stuttgart, 1970, p. 42.

¹⁷ Nevertheless, Spann did not say who the best are, how to define or select them.

fact that it refuses to acknowledge the spiritual values as given and votes on the truth.¹⁸ Spann considered the voting principle itself as infeasible. The truth cannot be voted on, "*it has to establish itself by its own weight*".¹⁹ According to him the democratic system is: "*A mechanisation of a state organization and at the same time a liquidation of a value base by voting, by the government of majority*."²⁰

Othmar Spann concluded, that the political organization of a democratic system consisted of leaders and the led people and that the political will of the organized people (masses) is formed by the leaders themselves. This fact results in the definite conclusion – a mass is predestined to the political unimportance. This thesis confirms it is necessary to prefer the universalistic form of state. Obviously, it is not feasible to form the will mechanically through the majority. On the contrary, a spiritual power, the leader's will, gains ground and takes the position of the passive mass lacking any will. If democracy itself says it had enabled the execution of political power to the mass, it is a basic mistake because even in democracy the mass has no power. According to Spann this applies even more than in an absolutist state.²¹

As another great deficiency Spann denoted the choice of leaders. His vision of the best choice of candidates was represented by the hierarchical system, which can ensure the performance of power from the highest leaders to the lowest ones.²² "*The ideas of estates were as a whole subordinated to an elitist vision which used the category of leadership principle*."²³ The most competent should become the leader. In compliance with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Spann denoted as the outstanding characters those who made history (*Geschäftsführer des Weltgeistes*); who looked into the world of ideas and realized them in the history. In Spann's concept the leaders had independent positions in the sphere of state, religion and

¹⁸ JEŘÁBEK, p. 38.

¹⁹ Compare J., HAAG *Knights of the Spirit: The Kameradschaftsbund*. The Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 8, 1973, No. 3, p. 135.

²⁰ SPANN, p. 110.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 113.

²² Spann suggested the society should have been controlled by a system of leaders, where the lower was responsible to the higher. He also spoke about so called educated leadership and warned "*against uneducated parties' leaders which are not ranked*". BALLESTREM, OTTMAN, p. 90.

²³ SONTHEIMER, pp. 200–201.

culture. They draw their power and wisdom from the objective spirituality and therefore they should be released from any criticism and supervision.²⁴ Othmar Spann based his criticism of liberalism and democracy on the theoretical scope of his universalistic studies of society. He perceived these studies as a higher spiritual reality, which should face the endangerment of the society's civil system, which he saw in the rise of working-class movement. Spann also justified the subordination of an individual to the community²⁵ and therefore he put the term "individualism", which absolutized an individual and rejected the existence of community, as the antithesis to "universalism". Spann's criticism of democracy consists mainly in perceiving the democratic system as the performance of individualist principles as he understood them. He considered the primary position of an individual against the whole and the equality of people as a dangerous potential symbol of destroying the existing social system.²⁶

In Spann's universalism, as well as in other anti-democratic concepts of interwar period, there are conformities with National Socialism. They include the refusal of liberalism and individualism, the fight against Marxism, and mainly the emphasis of anti-democratic attitude, which is one of the pillars of these ideologies. Universalism, alike National Socialism, refuses the right for individual freedom, it demands the subordination of an individual to the society which it perceives as an objective fact and which is built hierarchically on the leadership principle and provides the state with a right to intervene with almost all spheres of human life. *"Both ideologies are based on the principle of inequality of people which however Spann did not stress as racial and biological one, but spiritual."*²⁷

On the other hand one should admit that Spann's ideas differed from National Socialism in some fundamental issues. Universalism is a close, logically structured and obligatory system in which religion has an important position as the highest principle, in contrast to National Socialism which consists of different world-view elements, does not incline to theory, lacks definite outlines and the main issue of its doctrine is to conform to the Führer's will. Spann's concept of decentralized state was a direct

²⁴ SCHNELLER, p. 49. According to Schneller the thinking and acts of leaders take on "a unearthly consecration" (überweltliche Weihe).

²⁵ For him an individual has "no other meaning than to serve as an accidental carrier of the national spirit". E. RÁDL, *O německé revoluci. K politické ideologii sudetských Němců*, Praha 2003, p. 106.

²⁶ Spann regarded individualism as a big mistake. HAUSMANN, p. 260.

²⁷ J. K. HOENSCH, *Othmar Spann, Kameradschaftsbund a Sudetoněmecká vlastenecká fronta. Dějiny a současnost*, 1999, No. 5, p. 32.

contradiction to the idea of a centralist totalitarian state in the conception of National Socialism.²⁸ Spann presumed some autonomy of estates in the matters, which would concern them. He attributed the role of arbiter in case of disputes among particular estates to the Party, which was in his opinion also one of the “estates”. Nevertheless, National Socialism considered the politics as the most important sphere and therefore in this conception the Party had the role of the creator of the worldview “*deren Anforderungen sich die einzelnen Lebensgebiete zu “unterwerfen” hatten*”.²⁹

Spann’s universalistic doctrine was publicized by his public activities in the 1920’s. Spann was able to influence the political situation in Austria by his opinions; his lectures were directed against the parliamentary state. Spann’s ideas “*reverberated in different groups of Austrian society as well as in nationalist Germans*”,³⁰ which was not a good sign for the Austrian Republic, or for the whole Europe.

The Situation after First World War

The Year 1918 had brought the end of World War One and the so-called “long 19th century” was buried in its fires. Europe needed to have recovered from the bloodiest conflict in its history. Ten millions men had died in trenches and on battlefields. The old European order had collapsed; the results of the fights meant the beginning of a new epoch. With the exceptions of large battlefields the old continent looked almost the same. The big cities were standing, railroads were existing. However, the four years of war shattered “*the haughty self-confidence which had led Europe to the world’s supremacy ... The war threw down governments, lowered the powerful and turned upside down whole societies*”.³¹ As a result of the war

²⁸ Before Adolf Hitler seized power, Spann’s ideas were not in conflict with the National Socialism of the German Reich; but everything changed after the January 1933. Compare J. KUČERA, *Mezi Wilhelmstrafse a Thunovskou. Finanční podpora Německé říše Sudetoněmecké straně v letech 1935–1938*, Český časopis historický 95, 1997, No. 2, p. 391. Protagonists of the thesis about ideological rivalry between Kameradschaftsbund and National Socialism were for example Friedrich Prinz or Ronald M. Smelser. Compare F., PRINZ., *Geschichte Böhmens 1848–1948*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin 1991; R. M. SMELSER, *Das Sudetenproblem und das Dritte Reich. Von der Volkstumspolitik zur nationalsozialistischen Aussenpolitik*, München 1980.

²⁹ Ch. BOYER, J. KUČERA, *Alte Argumente im neuen Licht. Bohemia. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder*, hrsg. im Auftrag des Collegium Carolinum von F. SEIBT, und H. LEMBERG, Band 38, 1997, p. 363.

³⁰ JERÁBEK, p. 43.

³¹ M. MACMILLANOVÁ, *Mírotvorci. Pařížská mírová konference 1919*, Praha 2004, p. 14.

conflict the map of Europe was thoroughly changed - the old "established" monarchies ceased to exist and new, so called "succession states" were established.³²

The young Sudeten Germans returning from the front or imprisonment found themselves in a rather difficult situation. Before the war these young people had been trained in the Union of German scouts (Deutscher Wandervogelbund) aiming to cultivate the national awareness in the young generation and "*strengthen the feeling of fellowship of all Germans*".³³ These people perceived the war conflict not only as a solution of generation conflicts but also saw the possibility to realize the union of all supporters of the Great Germany. After they returned home, however, they met a new political and social situation. The disappointment and frustration from defeat and the dissatisfaction with difficult material life conditions combined with another unfortunate fact they had to cope with – as the members of national minority in a new nation state – they felt dispossessed of their rights and saw no chance of any social progression or possibility to participate in the new political arrangement.³⁴ Their only life certainty based on the priority of being German inhabitants was shaken. No wonder some of them expressed their strong hatred and negated the new state and was willing to listen to suggestions calling for extreme, idealist solutions.³⁵ One may therefore agree with an opinion that "*the political feeling of young generation was dominated by dissatisfaction and despair*".³⁶

Not a small part of young generation therefore did not identify themselves with the democratic system of the Czechoslovak Republic, refused political membership and saw the chance for better future after World War I in the inclination towards romantic and mythic ideals of the nationalistic

³² Václav Kural writes about the particularization of Central European region to number of "small, so called succession states. In size they were unequal, quite equipotent but not very powerful, formally national but determined by their structure as in fact racial". V. KURAL, *Konflikt místo společenství? Češi a Němci v československém státě (1918–1938)*, Praha 1993, p. 7.

³³ V. OLIVOVÁ, *Kameradschaftsbund. Z českých dějin. Sborník prací in memoriam prof. Dr. Václava Husy*, Praha 1966, p. 238. The young Germans from the Bohemian lands expected the war to fulfil their goal – to unite all the Germans.

³⁴ Compare M. ALEXANDER, *Phasen der Identitätsfindung der Deutschen in der Tschechoslowakei, 1918–1945*. Nation – Nationalismus – Postnation. Beiträge zur Identitätsfindung der Deutschen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, hrsg. von H. KLUETING, Köln, Weimar, Wien 1992, pp. 125, 127.

³⁵ Compare K. G. ROBBINS, *Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten Question and British Foreign Policy*. The Historical Journal 12, 1969, Vol. 4, p. 677.

³⁶ HOENSCH, p. 31. Compare J. HARNÁ, *Krise evropské demokracie a Československo 30. let 20. století (Srovnávací sonda)*, Praha 2006, pp. 62–63; M. VYMAZALOVÁ, *Sudetoněmecká strana 1935–1936* (unpublished thesis), Praha 1999, pp. 9–11.

movement of the Sudeten Germans; after some time they started to seek more effective forms for the youth movement.

This new trend in organization was characterized by elitism; strict organizational structure built on a military model and based on discipline and leadership principle. The common objective of these unions was to *"form national community of the Sudeten Germans which would be led by personalities and not parties and which would be the result of wide spiritual recovery of the state and society"*.³⁷ The not exactly clear ideals of "national fellowship" (Volksgemeinschaft) had the main role in these organizations from the very beginning.

Thus various clubs and associations started to appear, being nearer to everyday life than political parties. Their members paid regular fees, presented gifts, took care of fellow members who were in need. They had a chance, which corresponded to their ideas of national objectives.³⁸ To a certain extent the associations substituted for the weakened party system. To be a member of an association was considered a greater honor than a political mandate.³⁹

In August 1918 the representatives of the Wandervogelbund met in Krumlov to discuss further steps. At the beginning of 1919 a program (so called Schreckensteiner Leitsätze) was established aiming to cope with the new political situation and at the same time restricted to *"raise and strengthen the awareness of unity of German youth inside Czechoslovakia and nourish the feeling of national fellowship within the young people in Germany and Austria"*.⁴⁰ In January 1919 a gathering of the German nationalist youth took place in the Knights' Hall of the Střekov Castle to discuss the possibilities of the restoration of pre-war youth movement.⁴¹ Heinz Rutha was one of the gatherers. The result of the discussions was a commitment to endeavour the recovery of "Germanship". According to the

³⁷ HOESNCH, p. 31.

³⁸ Compare E. WOLFGRAHM, *O počátcích henleinovského hnutí*. Československý časopis historický 12, 1964, No. 1, p. 30.

³⁹ Compare R. JAWORSKI, *Na stráži německví nebo v postavení menšiny? Sudetonočecký národnostní boj ve vztazích výmarské republiky a ČSR*, Praha 2004, p. 66.

⁴⁰ OLIVOVÁ, p. 239. The national movement spread also to universities. For example the Bund der böhmnerländischer Freischarre was founded in Prague. The goals were similar - to strengthen the nationalist attitudes of university students.

⁴¹ There were talks about the tendency to "revive Germanship". J. CESAR, B. ČERNÝ, *Politika německých buržoazních stran v Československu v letech 1918-1938*. Díl II. (1930-1938), Praha 1962, p. 202.

organizers of the meeting this objective was to be achieved by devoted co-operation of young people in the recovery of public life.⁴²

The German youth was not only influenced by the thoughts of national fellowship of all Germans based on the old roots of German nationalism and Pangermanism. New ideological streams appeared. Young people looked for answers related to the problems of the society and its new organizations. The philosophy of history by the German thinker Oswald Spengler and the ideas of Othmar Spann, the professor at the University in Vienna, appeared as the most influential. "*Spann's ideas gave the most significant features to the German intelligence in the Czech lands and influenced it from the point of ideas as well as politics.*"⁴³

The Viennese philosopher and sociologist offered an alternative to ideologies, which destroyed the idea of Germanship, as his listeners perceived it. His "universal realm" overcame social antagonisms; it was a return to the idea of recovery of the Holy Roman Empire, which was to be organized on the basis of the estate-related thinking.⁴⁴ The society would be divided into estates and on the top of an imaginary pyramid there would be the so-called highest estate (staatsführende Schicht). Spann's "universal realm" would govern over Central Europe and touch the Balkans as well.⁴⁵ This idea reverberated in the great part of young generation. Spann defined the Germanship in the sense of a spiritual community. In his conception the Germanship was defined by "*thinking of individuals, by their feelings and actions rather than by blood or race*".⁴⁶

Spann conducted a private seminar in his apartment and used to invite his best students. There were several Sudeten Germans among them. The

⁴² S. BIMAN, J. MALÍŘ, *Kariéra učitele tělocviku*, Ústí nad Labem 1983, p. 27.

⁴³ OLIVOVÁ, p. 240. More on Spann's ideology compare above. His ideology "*bildet nämlich nichts anderes als eine idealistische Variante des Führerstaats...*" F., SEIBT, *Unterwegs nach München. Zur Formierung nationalsozialistischer Perspektiven unter den Deutschen in der Tschechoslowakei 1930–1938*. Der Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft, hrsg. von W. BENZ, H. BUCHHEIM, H. MOMMSEN, Frankfurt am Main 1993, p. 140.

⁴⁴ S. DOLEZEL, *Základy říšskoněmecké politiky vůči Československu v letech 1933–1938 se zvláštním zřetelem k sudetským Němcům*. J. K. HOENSCH, D. KOVÁČ, (eds.), *Ztroskotání spoluziti. Češi, Němci a Slováci v první republice 1918–1939*, Prague 1993, p. 107; J. PETZOLD, *Wegbereiter des deutschen Faschismus. Die Jungkonservativen in der Weimarer Republik*, Köln 1978, pp. 255, 257. The idea of the Holy German Roman Empire was to wake up the spirit of faded German glory. Germans were supposed to become the ruling class in Central Europe; this Spann's conception of integrating this region was unacceptable for all the German nations. Compare KURAL, pp. 119–120.

⁴⁵ Compare O. NOVÁK, *Henleinovci proti Československu. Z historie sudetoněmeckého fašismu v letech 1933–1938*, Praha 1987, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁶ HAAG, p. 135.

participants were rather enthusiastic about their teacher's opinion on the definition of nationality. Spann understood it as a spiritual community, which the young Sudeten Germans liked more than the not very theoretically elaborated racial theories. "*Young intellectuals who used to meet in Spann's apartment arrived to an idea that his ideology could again enhance the Germanship, particularly in the Czech Republic* [understood Czechoslovakia – L. N.]".⁴⁷

Walter Heinrich was the brightest of Spann's students. He read Plato, mediaeval German mystics and German romantics and searched for the essence of the Germanship. The experience from the Wandervogel movement and the influence of Spann's lectures persuaded him that only an elite consisting of spiritually connected men could save the Germanship.⁴⁸

The enthusiasm over Othmar Spann drew Heinrich to the cooperation with Heinz Rutha. Although Rutha did not reach Heinrich's intellectual level,⁴⁹ he shared the opinion that it was necessary to free the Sudetenland from Western materialism and Slavonic supremacy.⁵⁰ Both the men were not satisfied with the unclear romanticism and political naivety of youth movements and therefore in 1923 they established a small study group for political education aiming to educate young males in fellowship and thus forming an elite circle of friends, which would be able to unite the Sudeten Germans.⁵¹ Members of the group spent time discussing Othmar Spann's work and at the same time studying elitist organizations, knight orders or even the Jesuits.⁵²

Kameradschaftsbund

In 1926 Spann's students and supporters founded an organization called *Arbeitskreis für Gesellschaftswissenschaften* (Working Circle for

⁴⁷ Ibidem, pp. 135–136.

⁴⁸ Ernst von Salomon wrote that Heinrich was "*the Peter among Spann's apostles, his closest colleague, friend, and confident, a pale, thin, fanatical man, incredibly learned, a wild and deadly intellectual.*" E. SALOMON, *Fragebogen. The Questionnaire*, Garden City, New York 1955, p. 95.

⁴⁹ He was an architect.

⁵⁰ Compare R. GOLDMANN, *Von der Böhmerlandbewegung zur Sudetendeutschen Jungenschaft*. P. NASARSKI, (hrsg.), *Deutsche Jugendbewegung in Europa. Versuch einer Bilanz*, Köln 1967, pp. 136–137.

⁵¹ Compare WOLFGANG, pp. 35–36.

⁵² HAAG, p. 136.

Social Sciences).⁵³ Spann's close colleague and senior lecturer at the University of Vienna, Walter Heinrich, took an important part in its establishment; other important members were Walter Brand, Heinz Rutha, Wilhelm Sebekowsky etc.⁵⁴ The prime task of the circle was to elaborate and spread Spann's ideas.

It was a closed movement of German national intelligence formed by 200 to 300 members. Most of them were the Sudeten Germans but the Kameradschaftsbund had its "subsidiaries" also in Austria, Germany and Transylvania. The structure of the organization was a strict hierarchy;⁵⁵ the power was executed by a leading group (an executive committee of 15 members).⁵⁶ *"The exclusivity and supremacy of people aware of their own price and the seriousness of their future objective"* flourished among the members.⁵⁷ In compliance with Spann's philosophy, these people considered themselves as the supreme estate,⁵⁸ which in future should take over the control over the politics in the Sudetenland and stand in the head of the fight against the old rule represented by political parties. Their objective was *"jene Menschen zu suchen und zu sammeln, die als Erzieher und künftige Politiker geeignet sind, in strenger Formung einen staatstragenden Stand zu entwickeln"*.⁵⁹ This was later the basis for *"the formation of a unified "Sudeten German" tribe and the transformation of Czechoslovakia into a federalist multinational state"*.⁶⁰

The Kameradschaftsbund perceived the existence of the Czechoslovak state as a given fact which, despite all reservations, must be coped with.

⁵³ The members of the association privately addressed themselves as *Kameradschaft*. According to the federal jurisdiction the organization was legally transformed and renamed to *Kameradschaftsbund, Bund für volks- und sozialpolitische Bildung* in 1930. Věra Olivová writes about Kameradschaftsbund für gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Bildung. OLIVOVÁ, p. 241.

⁵⁴ For details about members see NOVÁK, p. 20; CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 203.

⁵⁵ On the top there were the "informed" surrounded by the "uninformed" crowd

⁵⁶ Mr. Hadow (Prague) to Mr. O' Malley, 9th June, 1936, The National Archives, London, Kew, FO 371/20374, R 3417/32/12. It is a detailed report from the British embassy in Prague concerning the Sudeten German party and Kameradschaftsbund. The author of this paper describes in detail the evolution of both subjects in question and their current situation.

⁵⁷ OLIVOVÁ, p. 241. Ronald M. Smelser writes about *"Netz persönlicher Kontakte."* Compare 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. 103.

⁵⁸ They presented themselves as "the most mature core".

⁵⁹ GOLDMANN, p. 139.

⁶⁰ HOENSCH, p. 33.

Even in the future they counted that Czechoslovakia should form a state frame within which the Sudeten Germans should try to achieve their national and political goals.

The members of the Kameradschaftsbund (KB) started to infiltrate in political parties and tried to achieve important positions in German national organizations (e.g. scientific and geographical associations or sports clubs). Some of them joined the German Agrarian Party,⁶¹ some joined other German political parties (National Socialist or Christian-Social parties).⁶² The economical sphere was not left out either; the members of the KB took positions of consultants and secretaries.⁶³

Despite the success of the KB in the sphere of organization, Walter Heinrich was not entirely satisfied. In his opinion the KB successfully bore all the signs of the governing estate but it was not enough. Should not it all ended with academic discussions of intellectuals, those people had to join the political fight actively to influence the course of social events and thus build a "real state" in Central Europe.⁶⁴ It was necessary to end the period of "theoretical" preparations and initiate the move towards the performance of practical tasks and political objectives.

The representatives of the KB gained the decisive position in the German Sports Union⁶⁵ (Deutscher Turnverband, DTV), an important Sudeten German youth organization. Although the representatives of the DTV publicly proclaimed they wanted to be above parties, in fact the DTV was a pan-German and anti-democratic institution. Rutha, Brand and Sebekowsky concentrated there. The organizational chief of the union was Konrad Henlein, a supporter of the KB.⁶⁶ They aimed to change the Union

⁶¹ The Party was officially called Bund der Landwirte.

⁶² Deutsche nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei; Deutsche christlich-soziale Volkspartei.

⁶³ There was a theory of so called "second man". The KB members did not have to take the most important post, it was sufficient for them to be "only" advisors, secretaries, etc. Compare E. FRANZEL, *Sudetendeutsche Geschichte: eine volkstümliche Darstellung*, Mannheim, Würzburg 1990, p. 362. CESAR, ČERNÝ, pp. 208–209.

⁶⁴ To the public these people were meant to be ordinary members of organizations they joined, but secretly they were supposed to act as a group designated to change the political life of the German minority in Czechoslovakia. W. JESSER, "Bereitschaft", "Kameradschaft" und "Aufbruch" in den Sudetenländern. P. NASARSKI, (hrsg.), *Deutsche Jugendbewegung in Europa. Versuch einer Bilanz*, Köln 1967, pp. 367–368.

⁶⁵ You can even see a translation "Svaz německých turnerů". Compare M. BURIAN, *Deutscher Turnverband a československý stát v letech 1918–1933*. M., WAIC, (hg.), *Češi a Němci ve světě tělovýchovy a sportu*, Praha 2004, p. 53.

⁶⁶ The former bank clerk had been active in the turner movement since 1925, when he became the gym teacher in Aš. He was reelected to the union counsel three years later, this time as the leader of the whole union. Compare BIMAN, MALÍŘ, pp. 35–44; BURIAN, pp. 62–63.

into a half-military organization based on the leadership principle. The German Sports Union "became a natural centre of the whole Kameradschaftsbund group".⁶⁷ Its members understood that the DTV is a rather important organization and decided to strengthen their influence there. Walter Brand, the treasurer of the KB, was given the task to assist Henlein.⁶⁸ His "abilities of an organizer were supported by Henlein's administration skills and those two men created a close work relationship".⁶⁹

The German Sports Union maintained contacts not only with the group of Othmar Spann in Austria but its members intensively met the representatives of German minorities in all states of Central Europe, particularly in the areas of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. There, too, was a generation which had to cope with the new situation after 1918; its representatives studied at the University of Vienna and often knew the members of the KB. They annually visited German minorities in surrounding states and maintained friendly relations with them.⁷⁰

Since summer 1930 KB had been publishing its own magazine called *Die junge Front*.⁷¹ It mediated "the elitist thoughts to the young Sudeten German intellectuals and served as an ideological forum for the KB members". *Die junge Front* offered its readers sophisticated conservative revolutionary ideas. The KB hoped this educational activity would help to recruit new members and bring a financial support from political and economical leaders.⁷²

The KB leaders set a strategy, which they wanted to use to enforce their political and national interests. It consists in the gradual enhancement of the influence in that organization into which the KB members infiltrated

⁶⁷ OLIVOVÁ, p. 241. DTV became "fast völlig unter den Einfluß des engeren KB-Kreises und wurde zum Essen eigentlicher Machtbasis und zum Ausgangspunkt der Realisierung der vom KB bestimmten politischen Konzeption". JILGE, p. 103.

⁶⁸ Walter Brand (1907–1980) was a typical person of his generation. During his high school studies he was devoted to the national youth movements – the complex "turnership" or the "Wandervögel" movement with its walking trips, camping and singing strongly encouraged ties to nature and accented the friendship, solidarity to the group and team. He started to study social sciences in Vienna in 1927, soon he became the member of professor Spann's circle and he got his philosophy doctorate in 1931. He became the DTV ideological leader in 1932.

⁶⁹ HAAG, p. 140.

⁷⁰ Compare OLIVOVÁ, p. 242. Rudolf Jaworski pointed out the significance of the pan-German aspect contained within the Sudeten German politics. Compare JAWORSKI, p. 41.

⁷¹ The journal was published between 1930 and 1938, thus in years "in denen sich die deutsch-tschechische Katastrophe anbahnte". SEIBT, p. 138.

⁷² HAAG, p. 138.

and in waiting for “the” right day when everything should be successfully completed.

On the turn of the 1920's and 1930's an economical crisis hit Europe. The Czechoslovak industry, which was concentrated mainly on export suffered seriously; the unemployment had grown extremely in the Sudetenland.⁷³ The attitudes of local people started to be more radical. *“The conciliating mood of the 1920's was replaced by an aggressive, radical attitude which was even more apparent after Hitler seized the power in 1933.”*⁷⁴

Also the KB had to cope with the new political situation. Its leaders, influenced by Othmar Spann's ideas, were faced with an elementary task – to find a *modus vivendi* with the Nazi ideology. Spann movement was based on the condition of the weak Austrian Republic and to reach its objective it would use rather long-term political and educational work based on a scientifically approved program then strength. Its leaders were educated people; they looked upon socialism with disdain and perceived it as something with no scientific roots.⁷⁵ The Nazis, on the other hand, considered the representatives of Spann movement as “university politicians and intellectuals” which are not able to act.⁷⁶

When Hitler seized the power many states neighbouring with Germany prohibited National Socialist parties. In the connection to this development a question arose about what subject should protect and enforce the objectives of the Sudeten Germans. Both so called negativist parties (DNSAP and DNP – Deutsche Nationalpartei) found them endangered by an

⁷³ Václav Kural sees the structure of the Sudeten German industry as unfortunate. The structure *“which grew obsolete even in the end of the Austro-Hungarian era, which was not rebuilt during the 10 year period of ČSR, and which in fact as a result of its nature was able to survive during crisis much worse than the Czech industry structure”*. KURAL, p. 104.

⁷⁴ HAAG, p. 140. Till 1933 there was a majority of activist orientation in the Sudeten German politics, *“then the new type of negativism spread”*. KURAL, p. 116.

⁷⁵ In fall 1933 Henlein talked to the Spann's student Ernst von Salomon in Vienna saying that *“the Sudeten Germans should form an organization which ... would be sufficiently solid and representative to withstand the pressure from the Czech majority within the country and to force the state to grant at least a considerably greater degree of autonomy than at present. In case of future incorporation into Germany ... this organisation should be strong and well-established to be able to resist the political tendencies of National Socialism”*. ROBBINS, p. 678.

⁷⁶ Compare OLIVOVÁ, p. 243.

official prohibition.⁷⁷ The representatives of endangered parties saw the only way out in *"the formation of a uniform national front merging DNSAP and DNP with other German bourgeois parties targeted against Marxism. The only thing left was to find a saver not too politically skillful but influential enough"*.⁷⁸ More and more, Konrad Henlein seemed to be the person.

The KB also tried to unite the Sudeten Germans. It tried to form the Sudeten German National Council (Volksrat), which would govern, and control the activities of all non-Marxist parties and prepared their unification. The issue came out as an initiative of the German political work office (Deutsch-politisches Arbeitsamt) where it was in the care of the office secretary and the KB member Ernst Kundt.

In March 1933 an annual meeting of the German Political Work Office was held in Liberec (Reichenberg); the main speaker was Walter Brand. Many promises, wishes and preliminary approvals of the idea of the Sudeten German National Council were proclaimed in the discussion. However the factual results were none; a uniform Sudeten German organization was not established. Brand and his Spann-based conception of society controlled by estates did not succeed.⁷⁹

During the first half of 1933 it was more and more obvious that the negativist parties would not be successful with their attempt to form a uniform national front. After the failure from March 1933 when Brand did not succeed to enforce his suggestion in Liberec the group of German intelligence gathered around the KB again got in the foreground of all efforts.

In July 1933 a meeting of the German Sports Union was held in Žatec (Saaz) and for the first time Konrad Henlein was introduced to the public as

⁷⁷ That finally happened in October 1933. But before that the Czechoslovak authorities were forced to step in against the DNSAP politics. Compare Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag. Innenpolitik und Minderheitenprobleme in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik (further Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte), Teil IV. Vom Vorabend der Machtergreifung in Deutschland bis zum Rücktritt von Präsident 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. Die tschechischen Maßnahmen gegen die DNSAP, deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, den 16. April 1933, Nr. 13, pp. 38–39. To the dissolution of the party compare ibidem, Selbstauflösung der D.N.S.A.P., den 5. Oktober 1933, Nr. 31, pp. 73–74.

⁷⁸ VYMAZALOVÁ, p. 19. The task to create a new, unified political organization of the Sudeten Germans *"was imposed upon a new man, not a politician, but gym teacher Henlein"* KURAL, p. 117.

⁷⁹ BIMAN, MALÍŘ, pp. 52–53.

the leader of the Union.⁸⁰ In his speech addressed to young people he expressed the idea of “national fellowship” (Volksgemeinschaft) based on “German principles”, namely on leadership and discipline. He proclaimed that the DTV would be able to serve as a model for a “new spirit of national unity”. Great applause and a euphoric proclamation of Henlein as the leader of young generation was the answer.⁸¹

The demonstration of unity and the determination of these people were important political moments in the instable environment of the Sudetenland. Until the meeting in Žatec nobody had expressed similar ideas. Now the DTV through the person of Konrad Henlein declared itself as a main representative of the united Sudeten German nation.⁸²

The proposal of Hans Krebs presented to Henlein in Žatec provoked a stormy reaction inside the KB. Its members claimed independent control over the Sudeten Germans and were not willing to share the position, moreover with national socialists whom they looked upon with disdain from the very beginning.

However, the position of the KB was not strong enough to afford a refusal of such an offer. The basic question for the nearest future was - if any form of unification occurs, is the small core of the KB representatives able to maintain primacy over much more numerous groups of the nationalistic Sudeten Germans? And who would be the leader of the new organization?⁸³

Although the KB refused Krebs's proposals the whole discussion did not end. Konrad Henlein understood the offered position of a leader of all the Sudeten Germans as a chance for a long jump ahead in his political career. He negotiated not only with Krebs and Kallina,⁸⁴ who insisted he became the leader of the new party, but also with Brand and Rutha who probably discouraged him.⁸⁵ When Henlein told them he had decided to undertake the new task they decided to follow him into the new political subject.⁸⁶ Brand and Rutha both realized that if they did not support

⁸⁰ CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 197. He officially quit the Kameradschaftsbund in May 1933.

⁸¹ HAAG, p. 141. Also one of the DNSAP leaders Hans Krebs came to Žatec trying to persuade Henlein to lead and organize the German national front, which would have the support of nationally sentimental Germans. Compare FRANZEL, p. 365.

⁸² HAAG, p. 141.

⁸³ Konrad Henlein became the designated leader. He was a good spokesman and organizer, which allowed him to get to the DTV leadership, but the KB leadership considered him “unable of independent thinking and decision-making” OLIVOVÁ, p. 247.

⁸⁴ Othmar Kallina, a member of parliament for DNP.

⁸⁵ Henlein met with them in Aš upon his invitation. They agreed, that it is a tempting offer, but in their opinion coming too early. Compare VYMAZALOVÁ, pp. 20–21.

⁸⁶ FRANZEL, p. 366.

Henlein in his activities, another chance to strengthen the role and importance of the Sudeten Germans would not come again soon. The position that the KB had established was endangered and therefore they decided to support Henlein fully.⁸⁷

On September 23, 1933 an important meeting of Henlein, Brand, Krebs and Rudolf Kasper took place in Ústí nad Labem. The participants agreed the DNSAP would be disbanded in the nearest days and they would prepare the move of the members over a new subject only after Henlein would present the declaration of the new organization. Henlein also refused to guarantee Krebs he would appoint some of his colleagues (Ing. Haider or Ing. Fischer) into the future leadership.⁸⁸

At the end of September and beginning of October 1933 a situation arose in the Sudeten German political environment that the negativist parties were isolated not only towards the Czechoslovak Republic but also towards the German activist parties. Two results were obvious from previous discussions – Konrad Henlein would be the leader of the new organization; DNSAP would be disbanded and the members would be moved over the new political subject.⁸⁹

On October 1, 1933⁹⁰ Henlein published a proclamation whose author was Walter Brand and which has obvious traces of the KB's influence: *"I call hereof all parties and estates to unite all the Sudeten German force and I shall be in the lead."*⁹¹ Thus the Sudeten German Patriotic Front (Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront – SHF) was formed. The new subject did not have any strict political program and its only goal was to unite all the Sudeten Germans.⁹²

The SHF structure and articles corresponded to the contemporary political situation – the leading positions were occupied by the members of KB who had the main say in the political, ideological and personal areas; the former national socialists had not seized the power so far.

⁸⁷ HAAG, p. 142.

⁸⁸ According to Henlein, the individuals were too famous and unsuitable. Compare BIMAN, MALÍŘ, p. 59; CESAR, ČERNÝ, p. 198.

⁸⁹ DNP was not disbanded and after its prohibition in fact dissolved.

⁹⁰ Jörg Hoensch writes down, that the proclamation was on the September 30, 1933. Compare HOENSCH, p. 34.

⁹¹ OLIVOVÁ, p. 248.

⁹² But 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 BURIAN, pp. 65–66; CESAR, ČERNÝ, pp. 196–202.

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 Social 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.⁹³

Conclusion

Disbanding the Sudeten national socialist parties and establishing the SHF meant the end of the first period of development of the movement of German national intelligentsia formed in an association called since 1930 Kameradschaftsbund. From the beginning its first members proposed the unification of “the Sudeten German tribe” and the reformation of Czechoslovakia into a federalist multinational state.

The leaders of the KB chose the policy of co-operation with official representatives of the Czechoslovak Republic and hoped they would manage to enforce its intention on the basis of a positive approach to the state elites. The course of event dramatically changed after Adolf Hitler seized the power in January 1933.

Also the leaders of the KB had to cope with the new political situation. When Walter Brand had not succeed with his conception of the unification of the Sudeten Germans based on the theory of the Austrian philosopher and sociologist Othmar Spann, the leaders of the KB had no other possibility but to find a man under whose leadership the Sudeten movement would get united. They found such a man in Konrad Henlein. He saw the offered position of the new party leader as an opportunity, which would not have to repeat, and therefore he decided to accept the position of the leader of a new organization covering the Sudeten Germans.

The most important positions in the new subject (SHF) were occupied by the members of Kameradschaftsbund who had the main say in the political and ideological areas. The membership consisted of the members of prohibited political parties; their leaders (so far) did not seize the power. The SHF structure with the leadership and membership based on different

⁹³ Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte, Situation des Sudetendeutschtums, Deutsche Gesandtschaft an das Auswärtige Amt, den 10. Oktober 1933, Nr. 33, pp. 75–77.

ideological roots on one hand enabled Henlein to perform flexible politics but on the other hand did not foreshadow anything good for the future development of the SHF, nor for the Kameradschaftsbund.