"Satisfaction Is Domestic Happiness": Mass Working-Class Sex Reform Organizations in the Weimar Republic

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Girls! Is your fiance's income adequate for marriage? - No? So protect both of you so that you don't have any children before you can afford to feed them.

Women! Are you willing to once again serve as voluntary birth machines providing the state with cannon fodder for a new war and industry with new unemployed who can lower wages even further? - No? So let yourself be counseled and avoid abortions that can destroy your bodies....

Proletarians! The more you love your children, the more you should think about their welfare and your responsibility!

Come to us! We will help you prevent unhappiness!

(leaflet distributed by Reichsleague for Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene, c. 1930.)

Working-class lay sex reform organizations in the Weimar Republic began as a capitalist scheme in the early 1920s—an advertising gimmick by clever birth control manufacturers seeking a guaranteed market for their mysterious, highly profitable, and often unreliable products. By 1932, shortly before their wholesale destruction by the National Socialists, the organizations had developed into a genuine mass movement for social change, claiming over 150,000 members and espousing simultaneously neo-Malthusian and socialist politics. They fulfilled a manifest need for a proletariat reeling under the pressures of mass unemployment and drastic cutbacks in social welfare services—a proletariat already relying on quack birth control remedies, coitus interruptus, and illegal abortions in its desperate attempts at family limitation.
The practical success of these lay organizations in providing their membership with safe, inexpensive contraceptives and sexual and family counseling contrasted sharply with their political failure. They were unable to unite into a nationwide organization strong enough to overturn the Weimar Republic's repressive sex crimes code, which criminalized abortion and the publicizing of contraception. Nor were they able to withstand the Nazis's onslaught on sexual self-determination and family planning.

The tortured twists and turns of their development reflect the history of Weimar working-class politics and culture as a whole. Their success reflects the strength of working-class social organization in Germany; their failure the fate of a working-class movement that was fragmented into political impotence.

Lay sex reform groups, with their illustrated journals filled with advice on sexual technique, contraception, eugenic hygiene, health, and the protection of mothers; their centers for the distribution of contraceptives; and their many therapeutic question-and-answer lectures, were an integral and crucial part of the working-class subculture of the Weimar Republic. Relying on the traditions of self-help and folk medicine, the various leagues for birth control and sexual hygiene (or similar sounding names) provided material aid and psychological guidance for a society in transition—a society dissolving the customary ties to church and extended families and slowly adjusting to professional medicalization and economic rationalization.

Working-class groups attempted to apply the insights of "enlightened, nonjudgemental, modern" medical science and psychoanalysis to "modern" problems such as overly large families and sexual dysfunction. Ironically, this was often done against the anxious protest of the very groups—doctors and populationists—whose knowledge and techniques they were appropriating and popularizing. In the absence of a national health-care network that included family planning and mental health, working-class men and women began to demand such services at the same time as they generated lay self-help organizations to meet their immediate needs in an era of economic, political, social and population crisis.

Proletarian sex reform must be considered in the context of the changed economic and political circumstances of the Republic. "Population crisis," the "new woman" and the "new family" were central and explosive themes in Weimar political discourse and activity. Although the birth rate in Germany had been declining since the middle of the nineteenth century, the trend towards smaller families did not appear as a mass phenomenon among the proletariat until after the First World War. Only then did it begin to arouse public and governmental concern about the survival of the Volk and the labor and military potential of the coming generations. The traditional birth rate differential between
rich and poor had become ominously narrow. Although women were continuing to get married—indeed in greater proportion than ever before—and to bear children, families became distinctly and intentionally smaller. According to the 1925 census, working-class families averaged only 3.9 persons per household.

The "new woman" was not only the intellectual with Haemmerschmitt or the young white-collar worker in flapper outfit so familiar to us from the eroticized products of the Weimar mass media, but also the young married factory worker who now cut her hair short into a practical Bubikopf, no longer baked and canned, only cooked one warm meal a day, and tried by all available means to keep her family small. This represented a rationalized reproductive strategy in a modernizing society faced with an acute housing shortage and a significant proportion of married women engaged in wage labor. By 1930, with all of these trends intensified by the depression, it was estimated that there were 1 million abortions with 10,000 to 12,000 fatalities annually. Abortions exceeded the number of live births and averaged out to at least two abortions over a lifetime for every woman in Germany.

In analyzing this situation, population experts differed according to their political orientations. Leftists were able to present definite proposals for practical solutions, while government experts found themselves in a paralyzing double bind. The latter bemoaned the lack of three-children families considered necessary for maintaining adequate population levels, but simultaneously recognized that large families, given the reality of female wage labor and decreasing social services, would probably only be poverty-stricken and "degenerate." Such families could not therefore provide the sturdy base required for an efficient technologized economy and a secure national defense.

On the other hand, Communist "sex doctors" like Max Hodann and Wilhelm Reich called for mass response to the "sexual misery of the proletariat." Working-class sex reformers, both doctors and lay people, insisted that proletarian sexuality was severely inhibited by social conditions such as the lack of privacy, sanitary facilities, and leisure time. They painted a dismal picture of couples forced to make love half-clothed in constant fear of being disturbed, the need to share rooms and sometimes beds with relatives and boarders, the early exposure of children to quick and brutal sex, lack of access to medical care or sex education, the double burden of wage labor and housework for many women, and the constant tensions of worrying about material survival. In short, they asserted that psychic-sexual conflict and the living conditions endured by the proletariat were inextricably connected. The supposedly "natural" working class was actually sexually more deprived than a bourgeoisie with its access to medical contraception and safe abortions.

Lay sex reform leagues therefore mobilized class hatred and
working-class resentment of its assigned role of carrying the burden of reproducing the next generation without the resources for a decent standard of living. The leagues aimed to help families manage the pressures of economic need by providing affordable, easily available birth-control remedies that neither involved resorting to hazardous and/or costly abortions nor necessitated techniques such as withdrawal or douching immediately after intercourse, with hindered sexual gratification. The subversive premise of working-class sex reform was that sexual enjoyment without the punitive consequences of continual pregnancies, should no longer be a privilege of the bourgeoisie.

The sex reform movement intervened on two levels to facilitate, channel, and control social developments that were occurring in any case. On a practical level, lay groups, often connected to business interests in the burgeoning birth control industry, offered the working class—and particularly the "new woman"—quick solutions to its need for fertility control. And on a political level, organizations like the communist party and parts of the Social Democratic party attempted to discipline and unite the mass lay movement. In association with medical sex reformers, they tried to add a social class analysis to the single-issue, neo-Malthusian focus of local groups and to introduce medical controls and expertise. The working-class parties provided one of the few arenas where socially committed physicians gathered. In a sense, therefore, the sex reform/political organizations affiliated with the KPD and SPD acted as mediators between medical and lay sex reform activists.

The pre-World War I sex reform movement had been initiated by liberal and socialist intellectuals advocating reform of the sex crimes code and a new ethic of sexual morality. The first postwar birth-control leagues were established on an entirely different basis in 1922 by the Bund der Taetigen in Bavaria, Silesia, and Saxony. They were basically covers for business interests, but were already adorned with anticapitalist, neo-Malthusian rhetoric that attracted working-class people in areas where access to medical birth control was very difficult. By 1923-24, commercial groups began to lose power, as the first independent working-class organizations were established.

Two groups based in Saxony (Chemnitz and Dresden) united to form an Association for Sexual Hygiene and Life-Style Reform (Vereine für Sexual-Hygiene und Lebensreform, VSL). They quickly gained a combined membership of thirteen thousand. The Saxon union set the tone for future proletarian leagues by clearly distancing itself from the tactics of commercial groups. In order to eliminate profiteering, each local purchased birth control products that were distributed at the membership at cost. Activity was no longer limited to distribution and sale of contraceptives but also encompassed political and sex education, sexual counseling for members, and the struggle for legal reform.
Manufacturers continued to try to exploit the growth of the movement by expropriating its names and styles. For example, a manufacturer named Hofbauer also established a VSL. The pharmacist Heisser formed the Workers Leagues for Birth Control (Arbeiter-Vereine für Geburtenregelung, AfG) in 1924-25 to sell his own special brand of contraceptive paste. By 1925, working-class groups, all at least vaguely committed to socialism, solidly controlled sex reform. The Silesian groups in the Saxony based VSL split off in 1925 to form their own People’s Association for the Protection of Mothers, (Volksbund für Mutterschutz), centered near Goerlitz and Leignitz. They quickly produced their own journal, Weckruhr, which served nineteen thousand subscribers. In 1927, Hofbauer’s association revolted against his profiteering and joined the original autonomous VSL, bringing in ten thousand members.

The lay working-class organizations were now numerically the strongest segment of a broad Weimar sex reform movement, which also included an elite scientific and medical wing with international connections, gathered together in organizations such as the World League for Sex Reform (WLSR). In addition, there were certain municipal health insurance systems and health departments in large cities, frequently staffed by Socialist and Communist doctors, including many women and the social welfare associations of the SPD and KPD. Competing and overlapping as the groups were, they shared a commitment to reform of a bourgeois legal code that institutionalized the subordination of women within marriage and criminalized abortion and sex education. The common slogan was "better to prevent than to abort," and they all asserted women’s right to sexual enjoyment and the importance of the responsible conception of healthy offspring.

The various groups continually fought among themselves about general political allegiances as well as about which devices were safest and cheapest. Medically directed groups, aspiring to the latest in scientific correctness, tended to provide women with the approved mechanical/chemical combination of diaphragm plus spermicide. More militant lay groups simply distributed suppositories or creams on the theory that couples would be more likely to use the least complicated method requiring no medical intervention. Doctors and other experts associated with the WLSR wanted to ensure that the entire complex of birth control, eugenics, and sexology remained in the hands of the trained and competent, safe from both unscrupulous businessmen and excessive politicization. KPD- and SPD-affiliated groups demanded both medical control and politicization—a difficult goal in a society with an extremely conservative medical establishment.

The various wings of the movement, both lay and professional, joined, influenced, and pressured each other. Again and again,
the experts were shocked and inspired to fight for reform by their experiences in the health centers located in working-class neighborhoods. The existence of such centers themselves was a response to the pressures of the lay movement. Doctors and social workers were daily witnesses to the fierce determination of proletarian women to prevent pregnancies. Dr. Alice Vollnhals-Goldmann, director of the Maternal Care Program of the Berlin Municipal Health Insurance System, reported in 1927:

On the basis of our experience, we must say, if a woman regards her pregnancy as unwanted and wants to be freed from it, she will know how to free herself of the pregnancy by all means, even at the cost of her life. All legal threats of punishment are illusory against the terrible state of need and prevent no one from having an abortion.19

For their part, the mass lay organizations slowly abandoned their mistrust of science and academic medicine. Working-class parties began to preach the dangers of quack abortions and overpriced patent medicines. The idea of lay self-help became less a matter of principle than an unfortunate necessity blamed on the lack of social responsibility demonstrated by the vast majority of German physicians. The lay leagues were painfully aware of the damage to their reputations due to association with commercial outfits and the disadvantage of not having access to the latest developments in contraceptive research. And some doctors were willing to establish closer links, partly in the hope of gaining influence over a grassroots movement that seemed to have grown dangerously large and out of control.

The establishment of the Reichsleague for Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene (Reichsverband für Geburtenregelung und Sexualhygiene, RV) in 1923, the first truly nationwide umbrella sex reform organization was an example of this potentially fruitful symbiosis. The RV was founded by several smaller lay organizations trying to liberate themselves completely from ties to birth-control manufacturers, in cooperation with the Society for Sexual Reform (Gesellschaft für Sexualreform, GESEX). The GESEX, with its predominantly medical membership, provided the RV with scientific information and credibility, also affording some protection from police harassment.20 The RV grew rapidly. From 136 locals in 1928, it expanded to 192 by 1930, with 15,526 subscribers to the new central journal Sexualhygiene (Sh).21 Edited by a former GESEX board member, it carried simply written and attractively laid out educational articles and was nationally distributed for free or for 20 pfennigs.

The journal also featured a regular advice column by the well-known Communist sex reformer, Dr. Max Hodann. It is indicative of the degree of cooperation between sex reform groups that a committed Communist doctor could write and agitate for an
organization loosely identified with the SPD. Indeed, one is struck again and again by the many connections between sex-reform physicians of differing political persuasions, particularly at a time when Communists and Social Democrats were otherwise actively fighting each other. The circle of doctors willing to fight for birth control and abortion reform was so small that mutual respect and commitment to the cause overrode political differences. This tolerance most definitely did not apply to the lay functionaries, which raises interesting questions about the relationship between a doctor's professional and political identification.

The RV/GESEX Counseling Center in a proletarian district in Berlin was run on a volunteer basis by two GESEX doctors. A storefront, it was jointly financed by contributions from trade unions, leftist Social Democrats and anarcho-syndicalists. Donated samples of diaphragms and cervical caps were fitted and distributed. Both married and unmarried women were treated, in accordance with what were perceived as socialist principles.

Meanwhile, the Hamburg RV local reported in 1931 that it had organized fifteen hundred members in less than two years. They met every fourth Tuesday of the month for lectures on such themes as "Introduction to Population Politics"; "Anatomy and Physiology of the Sex Organs"; "Theory and Technique of Contraception"; "Race Theory, Eugenics and Sterilization"; and "The Extermination of Unfit Life." The stress on eugenics and racial hygiene was typical of sex-reform groups and suggests the complex ambivalent relationship between right-wing nationalist population policy and leftist sex reform. This relationship cannot be fully developed here, but it is certainly true that a belief in the necessity of establishing "scientific" norms for the healthy and the unfit, the wholesome and the degenerate, was common to both groups.

The Hamburg branch in a traditionally liberal and international port city, had good and close connections with the local SPD. Two SPD members of the City Council sat on the RV's board, assuring police cooperation, and the medical director, Dr. Edward Elkan, was also a SPD member and committed Socialist. Dr. Elkan recalled that his insurance and welfare gynecological practice in a working-class housing settlement on the outskirts of Hamburg quickly developed into an official RV counseling center when the word spread that he was willing to provide condoms, diaphragms, and cervical caps.

Unlike Berlin, the Hamburg RV had no clinic of its own. Dr. Elkan's office served as the medical center, and contraceptive distribution took place in a private apartment. The RV's major activity encompassed lectures with blackboards, slides, and exhibitions of contraceptive devices. The use of birth control was explained in great detail by doctors at mass meetings; women
were given the address of the distribution center and invited to examine the exhibition samples. Thus, it was possible to reach many more people at one time than would have been feasible in a doctor's office.

This mass approach was necessary because on the whole, the medical profession remained "opposed and apathetic." As Dr. Elkan recalled, "German doctors were no socialists; sex reform really did not come from the medical profession, it was a popular movement." Indeed, physicians like Edward Elkan and Max Uodann were very rare. Most established German doctors, while familiar with surgical abortion techniques, were blissfully ignorant of birth control.

Even the RV, which attracted the most support from physicians, was forced to set up "flying counseling centers" (fliegende Beratungsstellen), where a single doctor accompanied by a traveling league functionary, visited outlying areas in Saxony and Thuringia at regular intervals. Franz Gampe, the former Nuremberg carpenter who was the head of the RV, complained in 1931:

It is a regrettable disadvantage for the proletarian class struggle that those leagues for birth control which have an undeniable class struggle character and are under scientific medical control in all questions relating to contraception, are still thrown into one pot with shady profiteering organizations by the broad masses.

That a worker such as Gampe was chief of the RV indicates that even medically influenced lay organizations retained their "lay" character insofar as medical personnel served as resources and performed a service, usually on a volunteer basis, but did not determine political or organizational policy. But many lay organizations were eager to establish their medical reliability by insisting that only medical doctors be allowed to examine women and fit contraceptive devices. With the exception of in large cities, however, the "your doctor knows best" policy was difficult to enforce, because of the shortage of trained doctors willing to engage in activities so poorly remunerated and so suspect to their colleagues. Medical services were still often provided by nonmedically trained folk healers and homeopaths.

Although the lay and scientific factions were moving closer to each other, there were still strong separatist currents. In response to the continuing opposition of the medical establishment and as a direct competitor to the socialist medical RV, the lay League for the Protection of Mothers and Social Family Hygiene (Liga für Mutterschutz und soziale Familienhygiene, Liga) was established in 1929, only one year after the successful unification of the RV. The Liga, which became the largest lay group in
Germany, was determinedly apolitical and insisted that all of its radical elements had been purged.

The Liga captured the attention of rightist population groups and government experts in a way that the SPD-connected RV had not. Police monitored the Liga as being strongest in very poor industrialized regions like the Mansfeld area of Thuringia, but also in Catholic areas such as Bavaria, Suertemberg, and Rhineland-Westphalia. A report to the Ministry of Health (Reichsgesundheitsamt, RGA) in 1923 from a member of the League for Large Families (Bund der Kinderreichen, BKR), which encouraged the official state policy of increasing the birth rate, described the popular response to a Liga/Bund meeting in Elberfeld:

Hundreds signed up to join the organization just to acquire the contraceptive offered, for the mass of oppressed women are clamoring for birth control remedies and one can only get them through the Bund. You should have seen the faces of these working-class women, who hung on every word of the lecture as if hypnotized . . . What will we come to if these products are distributed in such a mass way?26

The BKR complained that the Liga contraceptives were harmful to health, manufactured in uncontrolled fashion according to secret formulas, and overpriced. The Ministry of the Interior, sharing the concern about sex reform's resonance among working-class women, noted that birth-control leagues could not be prosecuted under Paragraph 184.3 a law prohibiting the public advertising of contraceptives because the products were only offered to members, and admitted to frustration because it was so easy to gain membership by paying a minimal fee.29 The RGA worried helplessly:

These groups which hide behind many different names have because of their extremely disturbing efforts against population policies and health regulations frequently come to the attention of police and also given cause for court investigations. However, the latter have only in very exceptional cases led to convictions because those involved are highly skilled in getting around legal regulations.30

The Liga continued to function and finally set up its own medical clinic in Berlin in 1931. It retained its unsavory reputation, and the clinic's medical director, Siegfried Levy-Lenz, is remembered unfavorably by his colleagues as an abortionist.31 In contrast, however, to the avowedly socialist RV/GESEX clinics, where all women were provided with birth control without personal questioning, the Liga required indications for contraception. The questions, interestingly, were phrased in such a way as to be addressed to the husband and not the woman herself:
Can I without decidedly lowering my standard of living, bring up my children so that they will have a certain chance of getting on in life? Will the health of my wife suffer from pregnancy and confinement? Will the future child be healthy?

The Elbersfeld meeting was probably more typical of the work of lay working-class, sex reform organizations than either the RV or Liga clinics.

That the lines between public service, business, and politics were not always tightly drawn is illustrated by the following trial transcript. A 1930 court case in Bochum, in the heavily industrialized and Catholic Ruhr region, offers us an unusual insight into the labyrinthine and ambivalent workings of a lay sex reform league caught between commercial considerations, the need to supply political education and contraceptive services to its membership, and the pressures inflicted by state legal authorities. The three defendants were members of an organization functioning under the name of Verband für Sexualhygiene und Mutterschutz and numerous similar sounding titles, presumably designed to complicate police surveillance. The organization was contractually obligated to distribute the products of the firm Dr. Willing and Theves, which carried the peculiar name of Drei Mönchs (Three Monks) Antispermin and had formerly been marketed as "Zufriedenheit ist hüsliches Glück" (Satisfaction is domestic happiness)!

According to the terms of the contract, the company sold the tubes to the league at the wholesale price of 1.25 mark to be resold to the organization middlemen for 1.50 mark who in turn sold to the members for 2 marks. This system offered particularly active members an opportunity to earn some extra income on commission and was undoubtedly also an attraction for proletarian and/or unemployed men. The regular sales price was supposedly 4 marks, so that members received the tubes at half the drugstore price.

The defendant, Mr. F. was accused of holding a series of birth-control meetings in the region for which he received travel expenses plus an honorarium of 3 to 5 marks for each lecture. The mechanics of birth control were explained and demonstrated with the aid of a slide show, and the speaker insisted that the blessings of many children should be reserved for the ruling class. He also remembered to add that Three Monks offered excellent protection against venereal disease. The audience comprised about 30 to 100 people with free admission for members and a 20 to 40 pfennigs charge for guests. Two women members, including Mr. F's wife, also spoke. One slide demonstrated the insertion of the tube into the vagina, and in another, a pregnant woman was shown on her knees before a nurse (begging for an abortion?) while the nurse held a tube of Antispermin in her
hand, with a caption that read, "And why don't you use Three Monks?"

The defendants all admitted that the facts as presented by the prosecution were correct but insisted that they were not in violation of Paragraph 184.3 because the visitors at the closed meeting had already become members of a private society by signing up and paying their dues, thereby obviating any claim of "public" advertising. They furthermore claimed that their actions were legal under the provisions of the Law to Combat Venereal Disease, which allowed publicizing of products serving to prevent VD, a loophole commonly used by birth-control advocates. The court was not impressed, deciding that the defense arguments were invalid because Three Monks was not primarily intended to serve as an anti-VD product. Having disposed of the VD-law defense, the court also ruled that the defendants had violated Paragraph 184.3 because the meeting had been publicly advertised and because admittedly, guests were allowed to withdraw from their "membership" after the lecture.

The references to the unjustness of Paragraph 213 and the organization's orientation toward married couples (who presumably would have no cause to fear VD?) further indicated that the product was intended as a contraceptive. If the speaker had alluded to anti-VD properties, he had assuredly only done so to mislead the inevitable police spy. And finally, disregarding the previous argument about the appeal to married couples, the court judged the product as "useful for indecent purposes" because it could be used and acquired by unmarried as well as married people. In conclusion, it was noted that the manufacturer had furnished the league office space in his company headquarters, supplied leaflets, and that a firm employee handled the league's business matters—all the privilege of contracting to exclusively distribute Three Monks Antispermin. Mr. F was judged guilty of violating Paragraph 184.3, and the two women were convicted of aiding and abetting the violation.33 Quite ignored in the legal judgment was the interesting and for the residents of the Ruhr region particularly crucial revelation that the league's products had been certified safe and effective as birth control by a medical expert!

By 1930, with the economic crisis starting to have a debilitating effect on the sex reform movement, the need for unity and consolidation became even more apparent. Membership and dues were suffering as people withdrew from organizational burdens in the financial crunch, while at the same time, the need for delayed marriages and family limitation became more urgent.34 A preparatory unity conference was convened in Berlin in January 1930.35 Representatives from the RV, the Liga, and several smaller groups from all over the country, as well as from medical committees for birth control36 and the WLSR established a Working Group of Sex Reform Leagues (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Verbände für Sexualreform). They pledged to coordinate events, exchange
speakers and information, jointly pressure manufacturers to lower
their prices and improve safety, fight against commercial
competition, establish a common press office and journal, and
provide aid to victims of sex laws. Wisely sensing the multiple
problems attending such a centralization project, they also
suggested setting up an arbitration court to regulate conflicts
among the various squabbling groups. The RV clearly took the
lead in demanding a supra-party-politics (Überparteilich)
organization based on "socialist principles."

The actual unity congress originally scheduled for April was
postponed numerous times until it was finally held in Berlin on
June 20 and 21, 1931. Fifty-five delegates representing over
55,000 members from the Liga, RV, and six other smaller groups
were present. After one and a half days of continual haggling
and frustration, it finally collapsed into what one of its most
dedicated and disappointed participants termed a "fiasco."
Although the central questions related to the complexities of
joining the two big rivals, RV and Liga, the congress was
dominated by the unexpected and disruptive appearance of an entirely
new group—the Communist Unity League for Proletarian Protection
of Mothers and Sex Reform (Einheits-Verband für proletarischer
Mutterschutz und Sexualreform, EpS). The EpS had been formally
established only one week before the conference precisely for
the purpose of unifying all proletarian sex-reform organizations
under disciplined class-conscious leadership.

The EpS claimed to represent ten thousand members in the lower
Rhine and Ruhr regions and was outraged that only three of their
delegates were recognized. The other groups were furious that a
brand-new upstart organization, which according to them had no more
than three thousand members, could march into their conference
and demand the dissolution of groups with over fifty thousand
members into a new organization dominated by Communists. The
conference response offers a good example of the kind of anger
and resentment KPD politicization tactics often provoked.

The EpS in turn asserted that only Communist leadership could
guarantee a class-struggle perspective, firmly rejecting any
connections with capitalist interests and petty bourgeois neo-
Malthusianism. EpS delegates complained that the participants
were too concerned with petty organizational rivalries and not
enough with the needs of the proletarian masses. They charged
that the congress failed because of "horse-trading" among the
groups and that unity was impossible to achieve among the "petty-
bourgeois, reformist and anarcho-syndicalist leadership cliques."
They denounced the other groups for being willing to "sacrifice
sex reform demands on the altar of coalition politics with Brüning's
Catholic Center government." From the point of view of the
other groups, the EpS was sabotaging years of hard, practical
work, with which it had not been involved, for the sake of
abstract political rhetoric.
The Congress finally fell apart on the trivial issue of whether the local groups should pay dues of 10, 13, or 15 pfennigs monthly to the central organization—in reality of course, not merely a financial, but a local control issue. When the congress decided on the higher levy, the RV walked out, leaving behind an impotent rump and an accusatory EpS. The GESEX continued to press for unity at least among the remaining smaller groups. It finally split from the RV in protest and joined with the smaller AfG, an outgrowth of the league established by Neiser in 1925. The conference thus resulted not only in the failure to unify, but in the breakup of the RV/GESEX, which had been the most organized and sophisticated of the national groups.

The Communist party, rather than continuing the struggle for unity, cried "SPD betrayal" and charged the other groups with being nothing more than fronts for birth-control manufacturers and indiscriminate dispensers of contraceptives in a situation where "pills alone could not cure." In accordance with its general strategy, the KPD withdrew from the mass base of the movement and created its own separate opposition organization, just as it was withdrawing from the SPD-dominated trade unions and establishing its own RGO.

The KPD proceeded to attempt to build the small local EpS organization into a national grouping that would attract workers away from the other reformist groups and towards the party according to the "United Front from below" tactic. In fact however, the immediate EpS demands, based on the Soviet model, were not so different from the RV program:

1. decriminalization of abortion.
2. procedure to be performed during the first trimester by a doctor, funded by health insurance.
3. medical prescriptions for contraceptives to be paid for by health insurance and municipal welfare.
4. establishment of sex-counseling clinics by insurance systems and local authorities.
5. doctors to be trained in the techniques of birth control and safe abortions.
6. state control and production of contraceptives in the interests of working people's health and to eliminate commercial competition.

But the long-range program was indeed different and more far-reaching. Explicitly class-struggle oriented, it posited sexuality as one of the few pleasures the working class could claim for itself and therefore supported the right to sexual expression. As stated in the EpS pamphlet Liebe Verboten, the demands furthermore included:

fight pimps and sexual abuse, not prostitutes; abolish all bourgeois marriage and divorce laws; aid for
collective childrearing; abolish all punishment
for sexual deviations . . . commissions of specialists to
develop perspectives on how to avoid sexual neuroses and
dysfunction; free treatment for sexual disturbances
due to capitalism and the bourgeois family(!)\textsuperscript{42}

This was indeed a radical vision for a transformed society—very
much the vision of Wilhelm Reich's Sex-Pol theories which
attempted to make psychoanalysis palatable to orthodox Marxism.

Nevertheless, by raising the demand for state control of the
contraception industry, the Communist party had moved a long
way from its position against state intervention into the lives
of the proletariat, a position sharply articulated as recently
as the 1927 Reichstag debates on the passage of the VD Law. Then
the KPD had argued that limiting the right to treatment of the
sex organs to licensed medical doctors would paralyze the
proletariat's possibilities for self-help and only extend the
colonial powers of the state into workers' personal lives. By
demanding state financing and supervision of sex reform, by
attacking the other lay organizations as being not only
insufficiently political but also dangerously unscientific,
by positing the medical model of sexual deviance, and by insisting
on medical control of their own Eps sponsored clinics, the
Communist party was indicating a major step toward approving
the medicalization of the human body, as well as condoning an
abstract principle of state intervention.\textsuperscript{43}

It is impossible to determine the impact the ideological analysis
had on the women who came to the clinics for immediate aid.\textsuperscript{44}
Possibly there was a distinction made between the appeal to women
who could be reached for further political education, and other
clinic clients who might just be subjected to some waiting-room
propaganda.\textsuperscript{45} There are, however, indications that most of the
Eps clients were women who were already members or closely
connected to the party mass organizations.\textsuperscript{46}

The Eps was unquestionably organizationally successful in the
heavily industrialized and Catholic Ruhr. In January 1932, the
police counted 32 local groups with 3,350 members. By April 15,
there were already 6,010 members.\textsuperscript{47} The authorities concluded
resignedly that "considering the bad economic situation of the
working population, we must expect an increase in membership."\textsuperscript{48}

The Berlin Eps functioned as part of Wilhelm Reich's Sex-Pol
activity, the only moment in the history of German working-class
sex reform where Reich appears to have had much of an impact.
Reich lectured on the politics of sexuality at the Marxist
Evening School (NASCH), spoke at numerous meetings on "The
Sexual Question in Bourgeois Society,"\textsuperscript{49} and ran the Berlin
clinic. In general, Sex-Pol was more of a theoretical idea than
an organization; the Eps was its organizational expression.

Unlike his other sex reform colleagues, Reich applied psychoanalytic
principles and peer-counseling techniques oriented towards working-class youth in his clinic. Young workers, while expressly instructed to refer all questions about abortion and VD to the doctor himself, were free to advise clients about birth control and masturbation, handing out "mountains" of free prophylactics and vaginal jellies.50 They reassured clients that everyone, even Wilhelm Reich himself, had masturbated and that it was nothing to worry about, provided it did not make you lazy or become a substitute for "normal" sexual relations.51

The Communist party and its mass organizations like the ARSO and the IAH constantly debated the political contradictions of providing alternative service networks for the working class while simultaneously demanding that a state beset by economic and political crisis take responsibility for publicly run and funded centers. They recognized the limitations of their practical work and the relatively small number of people who could be served in their storefronts. The best they could hope for was that women patients would assimilate a little political education about the inhumanity of capitalism, along with learning how to use a diaphragm.52

The EpS had been established at a very late date in Weimar history, and the very necessity of its creation was an indication of the KPD's isolation from much of the mass base of the sex reform movement. The EpS was an attempt to capitalize on the general mass strength of the lay organizations and to maintain the momentum of a coalition established in the dramatic winter 1931 campaign against Paragraph 213 and for the release of two doctors arrested for having performed illegal abortions.53 By May of 1932, however, after the fall of the Brüning regime, the police were breaking up and closing down EpS meetings at the very moment that other lay groups were attempting a unified comeback.54

Both the RV and the Liga joined medical sex reformers in a central working committee for birth control on January 23, 1932.55 A last-ditch effort finally reunited the GESEX, RV, and AFG into an enlarged RV, based in Berlin-Brandenburg, in March of 1932.56 At the very last minute, in the shadow of mounting National Socialist strength, 1932 and the early months of 1933 were filled with urgent frenzied activity, including joint meetings of the Liga, IAH, and EpS.57 Dr. Hans Lehfeldt estimated the 1932 circulation of the three most important lay organization journals at Liebe und Leben (Liga), sixty thousand; Weckrf (Volksbund für Mutterschaft und Sexualhygiene), thirty thousand; and Sexualhygiene (RV), twenty-one thousand. He added that, "these figures prove that the lay organizations had a membership of way over one hundred thousand, especially when one considers that generally every household only received one copy."58

A unified sex reform movement that brought together doctors,
Towards the Holocaust

intellectuals, and working-class lay members was just beginning to succeed at the height of the Depression and at the end of the Weimar Republic. We cannot know how it might have developed. It was a painfully brief period of momentum and experimentation, abruptly and brutally cut off by the National Socialist seizure of power. The irony of the situation of course was that the various groups had much more in common than they were willing to admit. Doctors like Lehfeldt noted that the actual practice in an EpS or an RV center was hardly very different—they all distributed and fitted contraceptives, and offered sexual counseling. As someone asked Wilhelm Reich at an EpS meeting in February 1932, "can you tell me the difference between a Social Democratic and a Communist uterus?" Certainly the Nazis made no such fine distinctions when they systematically dissolved all sex reform groups and arrested whatever leadership they could find in May of 1933.

In conclusion, it seems that the members of the working-class sex-reform leagues were decidedly less interested in ideological or organizational struggle than they were attracted by being able to obtain inexpensive and convenient access to contraceptive information and products, with a minimal membership fee and journal subscription. It appears that regional variations may have been at least as important as political lines in determining the strength of the various groups. The EpS was very successful in the industrial, well-organized Ruhr; the RV in the eastern provinces of Saxony and Thuringia as well as in Hamburg and Bremen in the north; other smaller groups in Kassel and Hannover.

The lay leagues were often most successful in small towns and rural areas, where direct medical aid was not easily available and women were forced to abort themselves or to rely on the often exploitative practices of local quack abortionists or on those few local medical practitioners who were willing to perform abortions. Indeed, doctors often preferred to continually subject women to D and Cs rather than offer them the possibility of controlling their own bodies by educating them in the use of contraceptives. Furthermore, the provisions of Paragraph 184.3 outlawing advertising tended to be more rigidly enforced in smaller towns than in larger cities. While the penal code did not expressly forbid the sale or use of contraceptives, it did create a situation in which anyone wanting to buy the expensive, commercially sold item had to go to the pharmacy, overcome all embarrassment, and demand by brand name precisely the specific product wanted—an even more demanding endeavor particularly, of course, for women in a small town or village where neighbors tended to know each other very well.

It is also no accident that membership rose, and the sex reform movement flourished most dramatically during the depression years just before the Nazis came to power. The lay movement represented another side of trade unionism for many working-class families. It
offered them the possibility of deploying reproductive strategies to insure family survival at a time when collective struggle for employment and a decent living wage was becoming increasingly fragmented and difficult. With the Communists and the Social Democratic movements battling each other, unemployment causing a shift in the political arena of struggle from the workplace to the home and within the community, and women fulfilling an even more critical role in assuring economic survival and family stability, the individual "reformist" solution to birth control became an important weapon in the class struggle.

Dr. Elkan noted in Volksgesundheit, a proletarian people's health journal, that the "Individual contemporary head of the family understands the limitation of his family as an act of self-defense against his environment." This notion of birth control as an act of self-defense in the context of a class struggle for economic survival may help to explain why men were so much in the forefront and leadership of these sex reform organizations, whose major reason for existence after all was to distribute contraceptive devices for women and to educate men in sexual techniques that were supposed to satisfy women. As the ostensible breadwinners for their families, men felt responsible to limit these families and therefore saw contraception in the first instance not as a sexual but as an economic problem. However, their main interest was to discover methods of achieving that goal without resorting to abstinence or other birth-control methods, such as withdrawal, which were considered particularly uncomfortable for the male.

The lay organizations offered the possibility of alleviating economic distress by limiting the number of mouths to feed, but they also helped to stabilize and harmonize male/female relations within the working-class family. If sex reform aimed to reduce an economic burden, it also intended to increase the pleasure quotient in proletarian daily existence—in a responsible, rational fashion. Just as trade unionism and party organization imposed a certain political discipline on the working class, so the sex reform leagues also facilitated the internalization of "bourgeois" sexual self-discipline. In that sense, it is significant that much of the leadership of the leagues was composed of skilled, though often unemployed, workers. At least in terms of their consciousness, they were concerned not only with economic survival, but with the possibilities for upward mobility, education, and training for the limited number of children they would have. They themselves did not want to fit into the mold of the "degenerate kinderreiche" (rich in children) family; they wanted to share in the bourgeois privilege of small, healthy, and well-cared-for families. Perhaps that vision of respectability, domestic happiness, and stability is what prompted the Communist groups to criticize other lay organizations as being "petty-bourgeois." Certainly such consciousness would be the analogue to Lenin's definition of "trade-union reformism"
The lay sex reform leagues primarily fulfilled a necessary service function in a society that despite the myth of the socially well-provided-for German working class, could not meet the needs of its people. The lay organizations also had an important education and therapeutic function. Lectures and meetings offered access to general health information and care for poorer families who did not have much contact with the medical profession. The lay movement not only provided birth-control information and remedies, but also supplied information on natural healing, common health problems such as whether or not an operation was advisable, sports, gymnastics, nutrition, and body care, as well as potential connections to sympathetic and inexpensive, even free, doctors. Communist physicians, for example, were well known for their willingness to perform illegal abortions safely and at a reasonable fee.

The sex reform leagues offered possibilities for serious experimentation with alternative life-styles. The term "Lebensreform" in some of the league titles implied a commitment to a people's health movement that included nudism, natural healing, organic diet, vegetarianism, and abstinence from tobacco and alcohol—simultaneously a radicalized life-style vision and a means of enforcing discipline and respectability. Some observers spoke of the lay movement as a kind of "ersatz religion," but it could also be termed "ersatz therapy." Some of the meetings rather resembled modern encounter groups or group therapy—a place to share problems in a nonjudgmental atmosphere while receiving concrete help. Indeed, the movement did serve to popularize the tenets of psychoanalysis; that repression is unhealthy and that better sex has the potential of creating better people, better families, and better children.

The fact that birth control and sex-education were so clearly class and not "merely" women's issues represented the simultaneous strength and weakness of the sex reform movement. The great advantage was that the class emphasis offered the possibility of unity with men within a mass and highly organized working-class movement, with access to party apparatus, journals, propaganda, funds—an entire infrastructure. It was possible to locate sex reform with a general social analysis pointing towards the necessity of revolutionary change. The glaring disadvantage, of course, was the lack of an authentic powerful feminist perspective.

It is extremely difficult, indeed impossible, to determine women's quantitative and qualitative participation in the sex reform movement. Lehfeldt's comprehensive 1932 survey of lay sex reform organizations spoke of a total membership of 113,000 but noted:

The actual number is considerably higher, first of
all because several splinter organizations have been overlooked but most importantly because in various leagues, the wives of the members who are often especially active in the movement have been overlooked.65

The difficulties of uncovering women's quantitative role in the movement reflect the hierarchy of men's and women's participation. Men were visible in the movement; their names appeared as bylines in the journals, they were speakers at lectures and conferences; they were listed as directors and business managers of the various organizations. Women's work was once again more in the nature of "invisible housework." They may very well have attended the lectures, urged their men to join, avidly read the journals that were subscribed to under their husband's or father's name, but the documents rarely recorded that activity.

It is clear that the discourse and activity around sexual reform, about sexuality, and eugenics, about chosen motherhood and population policy, about orgasm and its multiple functions as a stabilizing measure for family and state, were centered around a male-defined and male-oriented heterosexuality. Ironically, given the preoccupation with female sexual function and enjoyment, it was directed more towards men than women. Women were assigned the major responsibility for contraception because it was still believed that men's commitment to birth control could not be trusted. The traditional belief prevailed that female sexual passivity assured that women would "maintain their head" during lovemaking, whereas the man might be carried away by passion and raging hormones. But on the other hand, the very fact that so many men were active, suggests how very central the questions of sex reform and contraception were to the daily lives of the working class; how much they were not merely a secondary social-welfare or women's issue, but absolutely critical to the economic survival of the proletarian family. Indeed, one might say that family limitation was such an important issue that men were not only involved, but dominant.

The medicalization and politicization characterizing the sex reform movement had contradictory effects for women. It surely represented an advance in health terms, but was in a certain sense a setback for women's autonomy in controlling fertility and sexual behavior. Working-class women may well have feared the spread of contraception because it would deny them their one good reason for refusing sexual advances from brutal, drunken, or simply insensitive mates.66 The attempt to reduce quack or self-induced abortions by the introduction of more sophisticated contraception as the diaphragm, cervical cap, and in some cases even the IUD, meant that men were involved in the persons of doctors, lay functionaries, or salesmen.

Female sexuality was recognized and encouraged by the sex reform
leagues, but on male heterosexual terms—in defense of the family. The contradictions are not simple. It does seem to be true that women did benefit from this new recognition of the need for female as well as male sexual satisfaction; that heterosexual couples' lives did improve with the availability of sex advice and contraceptives. But women were never really given the chance to try and begin to define, envision, and experience their own sexuality. Furthermore, the rationalization of sexuality by the sex reform movement, lay as well as medical, meant that the right to birth control, abortion, and sexual pleasure was not defined in terms of woman's individual right to control her own body and life, but rather in terms of general class, state, and social welfare. As noted earlier, eugenics questions were central to the entire movement. There was indeed a certain motherhood/Eugenics consensus that transcended customary left/right, progressive/conservative distinctions. It posited that motherhood was a natural desire for all women, simply repressed by economic necessity; and conversely also identified certain people, categorized by pseudoscientific norms of hereditary disease—including TB, VD, alcoholism, epilepsy, schizophrenia—who should under no circumstances reproduce, and who were hence targets for sterilization.

Therefore, the way was left open, ideologically if not organizationally, for an overlap and confusion between reproductive rights—never defined as such—and population control. While the National Socialists proclaimed the virtues of health, eugenics, and racial hygiene, birth control in Germany was forced to go underground and illegal abortions continued to be performed at even greater risk than before. The GESEX/RV was dissolved by police order in May 1933 as the works of sexologists and psychoanalysts were being burned on public pyres.67 As a Gestapo report from August 1933 noted:

It is especially important to demonstrate the connections between the Jewish-Marxist spirit and the signs of decay so present under the previous system in the areas of sexual science (sex reform such as campaigns against Paragraph 218, pornography, communist workers sexual journals plus modern art and pedagogy).68

And yet, even as the National Socialist terror brutally repressed sex reform groups, confiscating all sexual literature, arresting the leadership or forcing it to flee, persecuting with particular vengeance the many Jewish doctors involved in the socialist and sex reform movement,69 birth control counseling centers were retooled into racial hygiene clinics carrying out forced sterilizations and fulfilling in grotesquely distorted and horrific form, some of the sex reform movement's eugenic goals.70
I am greatful to Renate Bridenthal, Erika Busse Grossmann, Marion Kaplan, and Harold Poor for much discussion, criticism, and logistical support.

1 Generally accepted figure, cited in Proletarische Sozialpolitik (hereafter PS) 5, no. 8, p. 254.

2 For example, "the urban proletariat has relinquished its function as the strata of population increase." Hans Harmsen, Praktische Bevölkerungspolitik (Berlin: Junker & Dumnhaupt, 1931), p. 22. The Prussian minister of the interior, Severing, complained in the first session of the Reichsausschuss für Bevölkerungsfragen on January 20, 1930, that "The rejection of childbearing has virtually become a public movement... a national problem that is closely connected to the future organization of the labor market and Germany's position as an industrial state." Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BA), Reichsgesundheitsamt (hereafter RB6) 2369(2), p. 34.

3 In 1909, the affluent Tiergarten area of Berlin registered a birth rate of 15.2 per 1,000 population compared to 31.8 in the working-class Wedding. By 1923, the figures were 9.5 for the Wedding and 6.7 in the Tiergarten. Annemarie Niemeyer, Zur Struktur der Familie, Statistische Materialien (Deutsche Akademie fuer soziale und pädagogische Frauenarbeit, Forschungen über Bestand und Erschütterung der Familie in der Gegenwart, Berlin, 1931), p. 36. Metropolitan Berlin boasted a birth rate of 43.1 in the years 1371 to 1380; by 1923 the figures had drastically decreased to 9.4, making "sterile Berlin" the city with the lowest birth rate in Europe. Harmsen, Praktische, p. 22.

4 In 1907, 34.7 percent of the female population was married,


6 Dora Hansen-Blancke, Die hauswirtschaftlichen- und Mutterschaftsleistung der Fabrikarbeiterin (Berlin: R. Muller, 1933), pp. 19-30. See also the studies in Marie Baum and Alix Westerkamp, Rhythmus des Familienlebens, Das von einer Familie taglich zu leistende Arbeitspensum, Vol. 5, Deutsche Akademie für soziale und pädagogische Frauenarbeit, (Berlin, 1931) and the first-person reports in Deutscher Textilarbeiterverband, Mein Arbeitstag—mein Wochenende, 150 Berichte von Textilarbeiterinnen (Berlin: Textilpraxis, 1930).

7 The term "rationalization," meaning the application of birth control and sexual technique, was applied not only to industry and housework, but also to fertility behavior and sexuality. This is exemplified by the statement, "There can be no doubt that the limitation of birth is willed. Sexual relations are rationalized at least for the majority of the population," in "Denkschrift: Der Geburtenrückgang, seine Folgen und seine Bekämpfung," Preussisches Ministerium für Volkswohlfahrt, September 14, 1928. BA Reichskanzlei (hereafter R36) Vol. I/1978, p. 12. See my forthcoming article in Snitow, Stansell, Thompson, eds., The Politics of Sexuality (New York, 1982) for further discussion of the discourse around rationalization of sexuality and population.

8 Of all women industrial workers, 43.3 percent were married. Statistik des Deutschen Reiches, Vol. 408, Volks-, Berufs- und Betriebszählung vom 16. Juni 1925, p. 189. In 1907, 25.8 percent of all working women were married, 31.9 percent single, and 40.8 percent widowed and divorced. By 1925 23.7 percent were married, 41.2 percent single and only 34.5 percent widowed and divorced. Niemeyer, Zur Struktur, p. 109.

9 Statistics on illegal abortions were hotly disputed, but these figures represent a general consensus, both among those for and against Paragraph 213. Frauenwelt, no. 9 (May 3, 1930) p. 201, and Niemeyer, Zur Struktur, p. 95. For further discussion of the debate around abortion, see Atina Grossmann, "Abortion and Economic Crisis: the 1931 Campaign Against Paragraph 213 in Germany," New German Critique, (Spring 1978), pp. 119-37. See also BA R36/2379 on Schwangerschafts-Unterbrechung and 2330 on Fehlgeburtenstatistik. Also

10 See BA R86/2369-2374, files on Bevölkerungspolitik, Vererbungsforschung Rassenhygiene, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, Eugenik; Gesundheitszeugnisse fuer Ehebewerber; Bevölkerungspolitik, Eheberatung; Unfruchtbarmachung geistig Minderwertiger.


13 In his May 1927 trial, Heisser admitted to having successfully performed eleven thousand abortions in four years by use of a secret technique apparently comparable to the modern vacuum method and superior in safety to the usual medical D and C. A Berlin jury found him technically guilty but delivered a very mild verdict on the grounds of his "fanatical idealism" and the fact that he was not operating out of perversity or profit-seeking motives. BA R86/2373(2).

14 The precise reasons for this transition are not clear. Perhaps it was aided by the economic stabilization and the Bolshevization of the KPD. The new KPD slogan "Hieran an die Massen" (Go
to the Masse) articulated by Ernst Thälmann at the 1925 Party Congress in Frankfurt, while it stressed workplace organizing, did free many members to work in community groups. Or alternatively, the Bolshevization of the party may have prompted disillusioned members to seek other organizing outlets, such as in the lay sex reform movement. Police reports indicate that many Communists were members of the early lay groups. A Reichssicherheitshauptamt (hereafter RSH / 323, police report Berlin, August 3, 1936.

15 Data on the historical development of the lay leagues in Lehfeldt, "Die Laienorganisationen," pp. 5-7, 63-69. Also, Mitteilungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundung, no. 17 (August 20, 1932) in RSH/2369 (2).


18 The SPD social welfare organization was the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (ARWO). See report on the Bevölkerungspolitische Tagung der ARWO, Jena, September 25-26, 1926, BA RSH/2369(1). See Lotte Neisser-Schroetter, Enquête über die Ehe und Sexualberatungsstellen in Deutschland mit Berücksichtigung der Geburtenregelung (Berlin: Neue Generation, 1929) reports on ARWO Counseling Centers, pp. 22-33. The KPD mass welfare
organizations were the Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialpolitischer Organisationen (ARSO), Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe (IAH) and Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur (IFA). See Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ), 1925/25-1932, Proletarische Sozialpolitik (ARSO organ), 1923-1932; and Der Weg der Frau, 1931-1933.


22 Personal Interviews: Dr. Edward Elkan, London, January 27, 1981; Dr. Hans Harmsen, Bendendorf near Hamburg, April 17-18, 1979; Dr. Hans Lehfeldt, New York City, September 14, 1977 and October 1, 1980; Dr. Hertha Hathorff, New York City, June 16, 1980 and September 25, 1980; and Elfriede Nemitz (about her companion, Dr. Julius Moses), West Berlin, March 23, 1979. They all stressed the large degree of social and professional contact among sex reform physicians along a broad spectrum of political affiliation. Hans Harmsen, for example, was nationalistically inclined, worked for the Innere Mission of the Protestant Church, opposed abortions but was nevertheless an advocate of rationalized birth control and considered part of the general sex reform movement. The notable exception to this mutual admiration society was Wilhelm Reich, who was universally disliked and considered weird by his colleagues. When told that Reich had supposedly gone insane towards the end of his life, Elkan retorted, "Well, he always was." Elkan interview.

23 Lehfeldt interviews.

24 Lehfeldt, "Die Laienorganisationen," p. 66. Interestingly, when Dr. Elkan was questioned about the topic "Die Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens," he said, "That meant sterilization and of course abortion. But the Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens was also carried on by the Nazis. I can't very well imagine that we would have a meeting under that flag because of the way it was interpreted... well... under the Weimar Republic, these things were in the air." Elkan interview.

25 Elkan interview.

26 Provincial health authorities reported to the Ministry of Health in 1926-27 that the declining rate of abortion fatalities despite the continuing rise in abortions was due to improved instruments and techniques used by women and quack practitioners, rather than to any increased willingness by physicians to perform the procedure. BA R36/931(12).
situation for well-connected women in larger cities was of course different. Lehfeldt remembered that it was not so difficult to get doctors to provide the necessary medical certificate. Interview. Dr. Hertha Nathoff remembered, "I worked at the gynecological clinics in Heidelberg and Freiburg and I never, never heard the word birth control. I knew nothing about the diaphragm." Interview.

27 SH, Vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1931), p. 42.
28 Bund der Kinderreichen (BKR) to Reichsgesundheitsamt (RGA), October 24, 1923. BA R36/2379(5).
29 Reichsministerium des Innern (RHI) to RGA and Preussisches Ministerium für Volkswohlfahrt. June 1929. BA R36/2379(5).
30 RGA to RHI, June 1929. BA R36/2379(5).
31 Lehfeldt interview.
34 The RV estimated in 1931 that 70 percent of its members were unemployed. SH, Vol. 3, no. 3 (August 1931), p. 57.
36 The German Committee for Birth Control, (Komitee für Geburtenregelung) supported by Margaret Sanger and led by Helene Stöcker had sponsored doctors courses in birth control in 1923 and 1930. Medical birth control experts were also organized in the Deutsche Arbeitszentrale für Geburtenregelung (research and not activist oriented).
37 Lehfeldt interview, September 14, 1977.
38 Lehfeldt, "Die Laienorganisationen," p. 80. Data on unification process from Lehfeldt, pp. 73-85, reports in SH and PS.
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44 Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz Dahlem (hereafter GSTA) Rep. 219/37 pp. 61-64.

45 "In the Ruhr and Upper Silesia, the KPD faced a strong, continuous religious tradition among Catholic women, which divided the families along lines at once of sex, religion and politics. These Catholic women were the exception to the rule that wives usually voted for the same parties as their husbands," Brian Peterson, "The Politics of Working-Class Women in the Weimar Republic," Central European History, vol. X, no. 2 (June 1977), pp. 37-111, p. 133.

46 GSTA Rep. 219/37, p. 77.


48 BA R58/757/4, p. 126.


52 The IAH journal Vormarsch, Vol. 2, no. 2 (January 1933) wrote, "The IAH must make clear that with its own distribution of contraception, it can only show the possibility of birth control, but that it does not think of taking over any state responsibilities." BA R58/649/ Beiheft 44.


BA R58/540/6, BA R58/757, R58/336, have extensive reports on EpS and Liga meetings with lectures by physicians. It must of course be taken into consideration that the police in these months may have been particularly conscientious in monitoring meetings, thus offering somewhat of an exaggerated picture.

Lehfeldt, "Die Laienorganisationen," p. 35.

Lehfeldt interview, September 14, 1977.


See Alfred Grotjahn, Eine Kartothek zu Par. 218, Ärztliche Berichte aus einer Kleinstadtpraxis Über 426 künstliche Aborte in einem Jahr, (Berlin: A. Metzner, 1932) for the shattering report of a small-town doctor who claimed to perform as many as seven abortions a day for "humanitarian reasons" because he claimed that abortion (die Auskratzung) offered women sexual pleasure and because he had no faith in women's ability to manage any sort of contraception on their own. Margaret Sanger quoted German physicians as saying, "We will never give over the control of our numbers to the women themselves. What, let them control the future of the human race? With abortions it is in our hands; we make the decisions and they must come to us." Sanger, An Autobiography, p. 284.

Volksgesundheit Vol. 42, no. 12, p. 82.

Nathorff interview.

Harmsen interview.

Die Warte, Kampforgan für proletarische Sexualreform und Mutterschutz (January 1932), p. 60.


68 BA R50/328, Police rept. August 1933.

69 Dr. Elkan of the RV in Hamburg was almost beaten to death in his consultation room at the beginning of 1933 by a gang of Nazi thugs who attacked him as a Jew, Socialist, and birth-control advocate. He was dragged from prison to prison and finally, his arm still in a sling, allowed to emigrate to London. Elkan interview. Dr. Lehfeldt of the Berlin GESEX clinic fled to the United States, smuggling out his precious clinic records, lest they be used to denounce patients and colleagues. Lehfeldt interview. Many of the emigré physicians continued to be active in sex reform and scattered as refugees throughout the globe became leaders of the postwar International Planned Parenthood Movement. Elkan, Harmsen, Lehfeldt interviews.