

sentatives introduced demands into the Reichstag for the legalisation of abortion. Despite the opposition of the Catholic Centre Party and a number of nationalist groups, in May 1926, a Reichstag majority voted for the consolidation of Paragraphs 218–220 of the Penal Code into a single paragraph, Paragraph 218. The severity of the sentences was reduced. Detention for a period of between one day and five years was prescribed for a woman who induced her own abortion or allowed it to be carried out by a practitioner. The same punishment applied to the practitioner. If an abortion was carried out for profit or without the consent of the woman, a prison sentence of between one and fifteen years was meted out to the practitioner.

On 26 May 1933, the National Socialist government tightened up the abortion laws once again. Paragraphs 219 and 220 were reintroduced.⁶⁰ Paragraph 219 stated that any person who advertised, exhibited or recommended articles or procedures for abortion could be fined or imprisoned for up to two years. Paragraph 220 prescribed the same punishment for any person publicly offering his or her services, or those of a third party to carry out an abortion. Abortion on eugenic grounds, however, was permissible, and in some cases, even mandatory.⁶¹

Illegal abortionists were increasingly punished by imprisonment, rather than by fines. In 1936, Himmler created the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion, headed by Josef Meisinger, to deal with matters of 'public morality'.⁶² Abortion and homosexuality were conceptually linked, as both implied individual choice. In 1937, the anti-abortion campaign led by the *Gestapo* intensified, with nine times as many abortionists facing legal charges as in the previous year.⁶³ During the war, measures against abortion became increasingly stringent. It was made almost impossible to have an application for a legal abortion approved, which led to an increase in the number of illegal abortions. On 9 March 1943, a new sub-paragraph was added to Paragraph 218, which stated that the death penalty could be imposed upon any person who continuously impaired 'the vitality of the German *Volk*' by carrying out abortions.⁶⁴

Women and Work

In terms of employment, the National Socialists did not aim to remove women completely from the labour market, although they did continue Brüning's policies against *Doppelverdiener* or 'double-earners'. *Doppelverdiener* were married women who had a job, thereby adding extra income to the family, whilst simultaneously

60. On what follows, see 'Gesetz zur Änderung strafrechtlicher Vorschriften vom 26. Mai 1933', *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1933, 1, pp. 295–6.

61. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, pp. 122–3.

62. Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, p. 191.

63. David, Fleischhacker and Höhn, 'Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany', p. 94.

64. See Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, p. 69, and *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1943, 1, pp. 140–1.

between the programmatic desire to uphold the family and the regime's drive to exploit modern technology in industry, business and war, especially as women were mobilised for labour.³ This apparent contradiction between traditional family values and the increasing role of women in work and industry exemplifies the National Socialists' 'reactionary modernism'.⁴ Thirdly, the desire to increase the birth rate meant that certain prominent members of the Nazi leadership elite, for example Himmler and Bormann, promoted ideas that did not correspond to the Nazi ideal of the solid, rural *kinderreich* family. They wanted to raise the status of illegitimate children and promote polygamy, whilst Rosenberg advanced the idea of the *Männerbund* over that of the family. However, the majority of Nazi leaders and population policy experts favoured a more traditional concept of family over any of these notions. They remained concerned with both the quality and quantity of progeny, and the establishment of the *Lebensborn* homes in order to enable unmarried mothers to have a discreet pregnancy was arguably the most outlandish example of 'positive' population policy.

Familial issues formed a substantial part of National Socialist education, socialisation and propaganda. An analysis of the content of school textbooks of the period has demonstrated the lengths to which the regime was prepared to go in order to instil its ideals into German youth. The activities of the Party's youth groups and the women's formations were geared towards similar imperatives. The *HJ* and the *BDM* socialised German youth in a gender-specific manner, stressing the differences in boys' and girls' future roles in the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The various 'educational' activities of the *NSF* and *DFW* were also intended, *inter alia*, to encourage women to have large families and to instruct them in the correct manner of rearing children and managing the household.

The Nazi regime categorised families into different types and treated them accordingly. This aspect of policy was consistent with Nazi racial ideology. The family, as the 'germ cell of the nation', had to be 'Aryan' and 'hereditarily healthy', as well as politically reliable and 'socially fit'. The National Socialists extended the nascent welfare measures of the Weimar Republic for those families that met these criteria, with both one-off and continuous child benefits being made to them. Marriage loans were also made available to couples who met the Nazis' racial requirements, in order to encourage young 'Aryans' to marry and have families. Such benefits were denied to both the 'racially inferior' and the 'asocial'. In addition, increasingly harsh measures introduced for abortion, including the death penalty in 1943, were aimed only at 'valuable' members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*,

3. J. Stephenson, 'Modernization, Emancipation, Mobilization: Nazi Society Reconsidered', in L. Jones and J. Retallack (eds), *Elections, Mass Politics and Political Change in Germany, 1880–1945* (Washington D.C., 1992), p. 230.

4. On this, see J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1–2.

Conclusion

whilst abortion on eugenic grounds was permissible from 1935 onwards and Jewish women were free to terminate their pregnancies without question from 1938 onwards.

The *kinderreich* family was the Nazi ideal, and, rhetorically at least, such families were accorded paramount importance in the National Socialist state. The Cross of Honour of the German Mother and the Honour Books awarded to large families provide the best examples of their symbolic significance. However, the Nazi regime did not go much beyond propaganda initiatives and piecemeal measures in terms of policies designed to increase the number of *kinderreich* families. The actual decrease in the number of such families during the Nazi era demonstrates that German couples were not persuaded by the regime to change the extant trend towards smaller families. Much to the displeasure of the regime, the 'two-child family' trend was perpetuated throughout the Third Reich. Although the Nazi government did manage to achieve an increase in the number of marriages, it generally failed in its attempts to raise the number of children per marriage.

Families that did not fulfil the regime's racial and social criteria were excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The failure of such families to conform to Nazi requirements meant that they were excluded from welfare benefits, discriminated against, persecuted, and ultimately 'weeded out' and 'eliminated'. The destruction of the 'hereditary properties' of 'Communists' and 'asocials' in Hamburg in 1934–5, the creation of *ad hoc* camps for 'gypsies' and the establishment of the 'asocial colony', Hashude, in Bremen, exemplify the kind of measures to which such families were subjected. The perceived 'congenital' nature of 'asociality' justified measures not only against individuals, but against entire families, which were labelled as 'asocial clans'. Hence, as Gisela Bock puts it: 'With respect to the inferior, National Socialism pursued a policy not of family welfare, but of family destruction.'⁵ In addition, the discriminatory and increasingly draconian measures applied to Jewish families throughout the Nazi period, even before the 'Final Solution', demonstrate the consequences of failure to conform to Nazi racial criteria.

In the final analysis, the National Socialists recognised the family to be important, but as a vehicle for their own aims, rather than as a social unit *per se*. Their expressed intention of honouring the family was not for its own sake and in reality the Nazi regime utilised the family for its own ends. Marriage and childbirth became racial obligations rather than personal decisions, as the National Socialists systematically reduced the functions of the family to the single task of reproduction. They aimed

5. G. Bock, 'Antinatalism, Maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism', in G. Bock and P. Thane (eds), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (London and New York, 1994), p. 247.