

Hannelore Cyrus. *Die Fackel weitertragen! Der Deutsche Frauenbund für alkoholfreie Kultur von 1900 in Bremen* [Passing the Torch! The German Women's Federation for Alcohol-Free Culture in Bremen]. Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006.

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The author of this book, born in 1935, was engaged in women's suffrage and temperance work in the city of Bremen. She has two doctorates, one in politics and one in philosophy. Even so, this book is not a scholarly study but a sort of biographical sampler. The hefty tome was privately published and it requires an audience which is already

familiar with the ramifications of the history of the German temperance movement in general and with the Women's Federation for Alcohol-Free Culture in particular.

In 1900 this temperance society was founded under the name of "German Federation of Abstinent Women". It formed the German chapter of the Women's World Christian Temperance Union, although its social activities were chiefly limited to the city of Bremen. The leading figure was the prominent suffragette Otilie Hoffmann. Long before she died in 1925 at the age of 90, this charismatic lady was made an object of cultic veneration among teetotal temperance activists. This is still the case: her likeness is displayed on the book's cover. However, it is not about the founding mother but, rather, her successors, in particular, the life and work of Anna Klara Fischer who headed the Frauenbund from 1921 until 1967. The four directors who followed suit since 1967 are also portrayed, but altogether these parts make only some ten percent of the book. In other words: it is more or less a biography of Anna Klara Fischer.

What does the author tell us about the 46 years during which the female branch of the German temperance movement was directed by this woman? I frankly admit that reviewing memorial books of this kind is not a very pleasant task. The book is based on an impressive study of archive material but no references were given (instead it is mentioned that they have been deposited in the archive). Neither is there a hypothesis, nor a conclusion, not to speak of a summary. No wonder that the author failed in separating the wheat from the chaff – all the more since she has been personally involved in the topic. And so the reader has to crawl through pages filled with extensive citations of articles, pamphlets and letters, to struggle through endless descriptions of personal tensions and institutional rivalries, and to undergo hymns of praise of women whose role in the course of temperance history was not really outstanding. Nonetheless, the book has its merits; among the approximately 40 chapters some jewels are hidden.

The author provides the reader with vivid insights into the inner quarrels and the habitus of the female teetotal movement from the interwar to the post-war period. On the one hand this habitus was typical for the educated (Protestant) bourgeoisie; on the other hand there were specific traits. Firstly, Cyrus' descriptions lead to the impression that the Frauenbund tended to form a counter world in which the interpersonal relations and conflicts were principally limited to like-minded members of the same sex: women's world, women's empire. Secondly, the story of the association is presented as a story of permanent attacks from outside, a chain of problems and quarrels: lack of money, conflicts with other (male) temperance organizations and defence against governmental interventions.

However, in contrast to most other temperance societies, during the interwar period the membership of the Frauenbund grew and so did its influence within the anti-alcohol movement. It expanded its sphere into the whole of Germany, new "alcohol-free" restaurants were opened, and finally it became one of the seven institutional members of the Nazi central organisation "against the dangers of alcohol and tobacco". This sort of steering committee was founded in 1939 by the "Reichs health leader" Leonardo Conti. Conti was – according to Cyrus – Fischer's "preferred candidate" for this job; and indeed he protected the small Frauenbund against claims of rival organizations. Cyrus blames in particular the Good Templars for their attempts to incorporate the Frauenbund. What she does not mention is that Conti was a mastermind of the euthanasia programme. After the war the Frauenbund "continued the work" under Fischer's leadership without public discussions of the past. Its influence declined, its membership dropped. The association still exists but meanwhile has virtually sunk into oblivion. In 1983 its last alcohol-free restaurant was closed down.

Frankly speaking, the role of Anna Klara Fischer during the Third Reich was ambivalent. Ideologically she converted herself from conservative-nationalist attitudes to National Socialism. As in so many other cases, this does not mean that she did not have disputes with other Nazis, be it party officials or be it leaders of rival temperance organizations. One might say: in the first place Fischer was a fighter for the organization, in the second place a Nazi. Thus, after the war she could allege that she was not part of the system, but defended the Frauenbund against the system. Luckily, Cyrus has avoided writing a hagiography of Anna Klara Fischer. Her authoritarian leadership is – cautiously – criticized and her nationalistic and partly racist inclinations are not concealed. In particular Fischer's view of the Germans as "victims" after 1945 is condemned. However, the over-all picture of the Frauenbund given here is all but critical: a heroic mission carried out by an organization and by protagonists which may have made several mistakes. But both the idea and the organization are principally good and infallible – a picture that reminds us of *festschriften*.<sup>1</sup>

In a nutshell: for a broader audience this book is indigestible; even the reviewer, though not entirely unfamiliar with the main developments, had problems coping with all the details. On the other hand the book lacks scholarly standards so that it is also of questionable scientific value. For experts, at least, it may serve as a source of insider information.

#### NOTES

1. The website of the Frauenbund reads: "Anna Klara Fischer steered the association with much bravery, energy and skill through the Nazi period... successfully it was protected from Nazi assaults." <http://www.deutscher-frauenbund.de>.