

***No God, no heimat, no home – urban welfare policies in Berlin and the work of the Innere Mission (1848-1914) 1***

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In November 1904, Berlin's Lord Mayor Kirschner issued an invitation to a discussion round in the City Hall – the sole point on the agenda was how Berlin, a major metropolis, ought to deal with the ever-increasing numbers of beggars and homeless standing, evening after evening, in long lines in front of the city's Asylum for the Houseless Poor waiting for the doors to open. Participants at the discussion round included Emil Münsterberg, Director of the Poor Board (*Armendirektion*), city councillor Fischbeck responsible for the city's shelter for the homeless, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, initiator of the Protestant system of wayfarer welfare (*Wandererfürsorge*), and Paul Singer, social democratic city councillor and head of the private Berlin shelter for the homeless.<sup>2</sup>

These participants had decidedly conflicting views on the issue under debate. While Kirschner and Fischbeck complained about the numbers of those looking for work from outside Berlin misusing the homeless Asylum as free accommodation, taking this to justify the need for establishing cheap hostels for single people, Münsterberg called for extending municipal houseless poor provision in line with the demand, pointing to its role in making a significant contribution to the safety of Berlin's streets at night – and in doing so, restated an argument with its roots in the late eighteenth century.

Even into the second half of the nineteenth century, concerns about law and order and policing issues had forced beggars and the homeless, with other members of socially marginalized groups, into the workhouse located centrally at Berlin's Alexanderplatz. It was only in 1873 that Berlin city council took steps to establish an independent Asylum for the Houseless Poor with two separate wards, one for families and one for single homeless people. The impetus for such a move had derived from violent protests by the homeless and other members of the lower classes. These protests had awakened the middle-class public to the

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on research conducted for my doctoral thesis, due to be published shortly under the title: *'Im Netz der Liebe – Zuwanderer und Innere Mission in Berlin (1848-1914)'*.

<sup>2</sup>Discussion on homelessness on 8.11.1904. GStA PK I. HA Rep. 77 Tit 227c Nr. 23, Vol. 3, Bl. 12-17.

homeless problem – a social issue reaching mass phenomenon dimensions after Berlin became the capital of Imperial Germany. But even in the municipal Asylum for the Houseless Poor, security and policing concerns were much in evidence: to obtain one of the 3000 plank beds in the 49 dormitories, one had to register with the police officers on duty and, on their first visit to the Asylum for the Houseless Poor, new inmates had to undertake to find themselves their own accommodation within a specified period. If no accommodation had been found by the deadline given, the person was liable to be arrested and, in the worst case, received a two-year workhouse sentence.<sup>3</sup> From the 1880s, this system of police controls and disciplining was supplemented by prescribed health measures for the homeless with, for example, the new Asylum building containing modern tub baths and fumigation facilities for the clothes of the Asylum users. Not surprisingly, this perception of the homeless as a danger to law and order and to society's standard of health coined both the architecture and the house rules of the Berlin Asylum for the Houseless Poor.

In 1904, although Münsterberg still held to this view of the homeless, he found Singer and Bodelschwingh arguing against him. As chairman of the privately-run Berlin Asylum Association for the Houseless Poor, Singer often had to deal with the city authorities, and constantly emphasised how both the association's hostels for women and men, established in 1869/70, prevented social ills and encouraged better hygienic standards. Singer regarded the homeless as innocent victims of the social and economic conditions and his primary concern was to ensure they had access to work and accommodation as quickly as possible. For this reason and to protect the homeless person's "moral integrity", the association's asylums maintained the anonymity of the inmates, an approach regarded as providing the basis for "re-establishing a normal life".<sup>4</sup>

Bodelschwingh too was concerned with reintegrating the unemployed and homeless into society, arguing cogently against homeless asylums as places where inmates were merely "deposited". However, in contrast to Singer, he believed homelessness was far more a moral and religious issue than an economic or social one. Taking the prevailing middle-class gender models as his point of reference, he ranked work as the mainstay of male honour – a man without work not only lacked self-respect but the inner stability that prevented an almost

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<sup>3</sup>Frank Zadach-Buchmeier, *Anstalten, Heime und Asyle: Wohnen im institutionellen Kontext*, in: Jürgen Reulecke (Ed.), *Geschichte des Wohnens*, Vol. 3, Stuttgart 1997, 637-743, 717-720.

<sup>4</sup>Jürgen Scheffler, „Weltstadt“ und „Unterwelt“: Urbanisierung, Armenpolitik und Obdachlosigkeit in Berlin 1871-1914, in: *IWK* 26 (1990), 158-181, 170.

inevitable slide into criminality, immorality, and alcoholism. Bodelschwingh regarded anyone giving money to the begging homeless poor as actively abetting poverty, helping to further undermine the beggar's will to work. There was only one way out of this vicious circle: educating the homeless to accept a daily life structured around work and prayer.

Bodelschwingh proposed setting up a system of workers' colonies to provide an organisation to educate the homeless and unemployed in both work and prayer and, from 1882, realised his plan throughout the German Empire, primarily in Westphalia and other Prussian provinces. These workers' colonies belonged to a welfare system of homeless and wayfarer welfare largely evolved by Bodelschwingh himself, intended not only to channel and control the streams of migrants but also to protect them from police interference. The "success story" of cooperation between state, local authorities, the *Innere Mission* and non-state charitable welfare was most obvious in Westphalia, where a close network of workers' colonies and places for wayfarers to work was established. In the course of this development, though, the main focus increasingly shifted from the educational value of work in bringing the men to religion to educating the men to work - a shift apparent, for example, in the "Prayer and Work" motto adopted by the first workers' colony at Wilhelmsdorf near Bielefeld and the slogan "Work not Charity" (*Arbeit statt Almosen*), used Empire-wide for Bodelschwingh's model, clearly stating the main aim of training the homeless to be capable of work.<sup>5</sup>

When local authorities' dwindling financial resources threw the system of wayfarers' welfare into crisis in the 1890s, Bodelschwingh began to press actively for a workers' colony to be established in Berlin, concerned to present his idea as offering an overall solution for the problem of urban homelessness. However, although he proved unable to push through his plan completely in the 1904 discussions, just one year later he set up a rural workers' colony near Bernau, to the north of Berlin, primarily intended to take in the male homeless staying at the Berlin Asylum for the Houseless Poor. Despite determined resistance by the Social Democrats on the town council, Bodelschwingh succeeded in gaining majority support for his workers' colony, which he dubbed *Hoffnungstal* (Valley of Hope). The town council resolved to release around 500 acres of municipally owned forest near Bernau to *Hoffnungstal*, free of charge, and further agreed on a per diem of seventy pfennigs for each of the 150 inmates in

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<sup>5</sup>Bodelschwingh's model found general acceptance outside Protestant circles too. For example, a Jewish workers' colony was founded in Berlin's Weissensee district, while the Catholic welfare organisation also established their own workers' colonies. Cf. Jürgen Scheffler, *Die wandernde Bevölkerung*, in: Ursula Röper / Carola Jüllig (Ed.), *Die Macht der Nächstenliebe. Einhundertfünfzig Jahre Innere Mission und Diakonie 1848-1998*, Berlin 1998, 174-181.

total who could be lodged in the *Hoffnungstal* colony.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, arrivals at the municipal Asylum were also told of the *Hoffnungstal* colony – a gesture likely to have been especially welcomed by those who had exhausted the prescribed nights of stay in the municipal Asylum and, with every further night, faced the prospect of being committed to the workhouse.

In that sense, many joining the *Hoffnungstal* workers' colony did not do so completely voluntarily, despite Bodelschwingh repeatedly highlighting the significance of voluntary admission in his publications. Just as in other workers' colonies, every new arrival had first to take a bath and leave his clothes to be fumigated.<sup>7</sup> In place of his old clothes, the clothes store provided him with a more or less new set of clothes, which he was then expected to “earn” by his own efforts. If he left the workers' colony before he had done so, a personal description could be passed on to the police and he could be arrested for misappropriation of funds. Moreover, every future member of the workers' colony had to sign an employment contract obliging him to obey the house rules.<sup>8</sup> This contract also provided for the worker's good behaviour on the *Hoffnungstal*'s fruit farm as the basis for bonus credits. The longer the worker stayed at *Hoffnungstal* the larger such bonuses became, but they were only paid out on leaving the colony and only if the worker left at the end of a specific period previously agreed. The bonuses were considerably less than the wages commonly paid at the time for similar work.<sup>9</sup>

The working day in the colony began at six o'clock in the morning in summer, and at seven in winter. The workers were allowed a two-hour break at midday where, supervised by two deacons, they first ate and could then either read or talk to each other. They then returned from their work on the fruit farm in the evenings at six or seven o'clock respectively. They had to join in a morning and evening prayer lasting around twelve minutes; Sunday was a day of rest but they were obliged to attend church service. In contrast to workers' colonies established earlier, every worker at *Hoffnungstal* had their own little cubicle with a bed and a wardrobe, separated from the others by a simple plank wall and with a curtain door. With no check on the inmates during the night, as was common practice in prisons and workhouses,

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6Report on the extraordinary meeting of the city council on 20 March 1906. LAB A Rep. 000-02-01, Nr. 1494.

7Fiesel, *Herberge zur Heimat und Arbeiterkolonie*, Berlin o.J. [1905], 140pp.

8Scheffler, 1998, 178.

9Hans Hyan, *Die Arbeiterkolonie Hoffnungstal*, in: *Die Gartenlaube* 26 (1906), 547-48, printed in: Klaus Bergmann (Ed.), *Schwarze Reportagen. Aus dem Leben der untersten Schichten vor 1914: Huren, Vagabunden, Lumpen, Reinbek bei Hamburg*, 1984, 264-270, 266-67.

*Hoffnungstal* allowed them considerable more privacy than the majority of them had been used to.<sup>10</sup>

Yet despite such concessions, *Hoffnungstal*'s unfaltering daily rhythm, the supervised work and leisure, and the firm refusal to pay any workers cash all created an everyday life marked by extensive guardianship over the men there, a system reflecting Bodelschwingh's image of the men as weak-willed and, in an intellectual and moral sense, childish. Middle-class circles readily accepted such talk of "big children" needing to be strictly supervised in the workers' colonies with, for instance, Hans Hyan approvingly citing this term in his article on *Hoffnungstal* published in the "Gartenlaube" journal, which enjoyed a large circulation among the educated middle-classes, and city councillor Fischbeck justifying the "gentle persuasion" exercised in *Hoffnungstal* by recourse to the inmates' moral and physical "defects".<sup>11</sup>

It is more than questionable, though, whether the comprehensive guardianship system in *Hoffnungstal* really achieved its goal of bolstering the moral and physical resources of the workers there to facilitate their survival in the world of the free market. In his pamphlet on wayfarer's welfare, Hans Ostwald, who had personal experience of wandering through Germany as unemployed and homeless, claimed the heavy workload and poor diet in the workers' colonies were totally unsuited to building up the men's physical strength.<sup>12</sup> But the most serious indictment was voiced independently by Ostwald and Singer, who both cast doubts on the core notion of educating men to work, accusing such workers' colonies as only feeding what Singer referred to as the "circle of poverty". Singer pointed out that the rough manual labour imposed on many temporarily unemployed men would necessarily damage those fine manual skills they needed to practice their crafts – an argument refuted by Fischbeck with the equally plausible claim that the only men who ended up in workers' colonies had not worked in their own professions for a number of years.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Ostwald maintained the colonies so eroded the homeless person's self-respect and sense of responsibility that they would be, in the end, neither able to find their way in the world of

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<sup>10</sup>Hyan, 1984, 268.

<sup>11</sup>Hyan, 1984, 269 and Report on the extraordinary meeting of the city council on 25 March 1907. LAB A Rep. 000-02-01, Nr. 1389, Bl. 240-41.

<sup>12</sup>Hans Ostwald, *Die Bekämpfung der Landstreicherei. Darstellung und Kritik der Wege, die zur Beseitigung der Wanderbettelei führen*, Stuttgart 1903, 61, quoted in: Klaus Bergmann, Introduction, in: Hans Ostwald, *Vagabunden. Ein autobiographischer Roman*, edited and introduced by Klaus Bergmann, Frankfurt a.M. 1980, 5-33, 29.

<sup>13</sup>Report on the extraordinary meeting of the city council on 20 March 1906. LAB A Rep. 000-02-01, Nr. 1494.

work nor adjust back to everyday life on the streets with its own specific set of customs and survival techniques.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, some of those agreeing to work at *Hoffnungstal* may not have believed they derived no “profit” at all from their stay there - although in quite another way than the colony founder had imagined. The majority of the men staying at *Hoffnungstal* came there because they would otherwise have been sentenced to serve up to two years in a workhouse. In comparison, the daily regime in the workers’ colonies was not as strict, permitting more contact with the outside world, allowing a certain personal sphere of retreat, at least at night, and was, as a rule, only limited to four months or, at most, one year. Moreover, especially in winter, *Hoffnungstal* may well have offered old and ill homeless persons an alternative to a life of constantly moving on.

Bodelschwingh’s idea of workers’ colonies emphasised the different fates of men tramping the roads, sending out a clear signal against a prevailing discourse indiscriminately equating homelessness with criminality and deliberate avoidance of work. With his notion of, at least, parts of the houseless poor being more than willing to work, he helped open up the horizon of integration in civil society for a small group of men. From then on, whether someone was regarded as willing to work or not depended on their readiness to accept admission into a workers’ colony rather than a homeless hostel, their willingness to submit to the daily regime, and to take up the job arranged when they left. This total aspiration to complete wayfarer’s welfare was already noted by Hans Ostwald, who criticised it by saying: “This entire system of welfare has simply mutated into a system of forced care. Instead of providing help, the primary aim is to apply strict controls to ensure no one unworthy receives support. But in this way, those worthy of help also have to be similarly pressed into the yoke of law and order regulations.”<sup>15</sup>

By making the issue of unemployment and homelessness into a moral issue and, as such, a problem apparently only to be solved via educational means, other economic, social or cultural reasons for using an Asylum for the Houseless Poor became obscured or regarded as purely secondary. Those refusing to undergo Bodelschwingh’s test of the willingness to work, or anyone who failed it, found themselves labelled ever afterwards as incorrigibly work-shy and uncooperative. In the course of what Ralph Jessen termed the “de-policing” of homeless welfare, the resonance of such notions was only too apparent, as shown by the support for

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<sup>14</sup>According to Bergmann, 1980, 29.

<sup>15</sup>Ostwald, 1903, 268, quoted by Bergmann, 1980, 29.

Bodelschwingh's workers' colonies, especially in those circles decisive in dictating the design of the welfare system.

Homeless women were largely excluded from the system of workers' colonies. Although Bodelschwingh provided his support for a women's colony founded in Erkner near Berlin in 1912, this was primarily intended to take in "endangered" women or former prostitutes.<sup>16</sup> Such a difference in emphasis is symptomatic of the way the *Innere Mission* approached the issue of homeless women. Although *Innere Mission* publications also talk of "female strolling players of the major cities", their term described prostitutes and not homeless women.<sup>17</sup> This omission cannot solely be explained by claiming that women in need had most likely resorted to prostitution since, after all, there were wards for homeless women in both municipal provision for the homeless and the private Berlin association's asylum, and although these wards were smaller than those for the men, they were still in demand.<sup>18</sup>

Instead, the blindness towards women's homelessness in the ranks of the *Innere Mission* can only be explained by looking at how women were defined as sexually deviant. Just as the man's work ethic was regarded as the moral core of a male personality, so female virtue was seen as a bulwark against all other forms of deviance.<sup>19</sup> Once this bulwark had fallen, it appeared only a question of time and opportunity before the woman would turn to theft, deceit and begging. In this way, female deviance was comprehensively sexualised and any transgression of sexual norms interpreted as a potentially criminal act. Even though many prostitutes did indeed have an apartment, and frequently had a partner or other interpersonal relationships as well, representatives of the *Innere Mission* and moral code advocates merely regarded them as "female strolling players". Their vagabondage lay in their sexual "drifting" which, due to virtue's centrality for the female personality, was interpreted as a fundamental instability that threatened society. For this reason, this sexualised understanding of "vagabondage" almost completely obscured real cases of women's homelessness.

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<sup>16</sup>Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, Eine große Not. Die Heimstätte in Erkner, Bethel 1912. EZA Best. 14, 1794.

<sup>17</sup>Petition presented by the Congress of the German Moral Code Associations (Kongress der deutschen Sittlichkeitsvereine) to Kaiser Wilhelm II on 29 October 1892. ADW CA Gf/St 213.

<sup>18</sup>Scheffler, 1990, 166-67.

<sup>19</sup>Hinze, Geschichte der Anstalten für die gefährdete und gefallene weibliche Jugend, Kaiserswerth a. Rh. o.J. [1912], 15.