Reich Ministry of Labor Policy on the Rejection of Labor Conscription for Married Women (September 7, 1939)

Abstract

Needless to say, the National Socialist idea of the world, which assigned women the role of housewife and mother, did not correspond to reality. A variety of mostly half-hearted legal initiatives were aimed at getting young women into marriage, and thus out of the labor market, as early as possible. Nevertheless, the number of women—including married women—grew in all areas of the economy during the thirties, reaching a total of around 14 million in 1939. The employment of women increased especially in industrial sectors involved in Germany's rearmament within the framework of the Four-Year Plan. Even during this relatively early phase, German military production was considerably hampered by a general labor shortage, and this situation only grew worse with the outbreak of war and the resulting withdrawal of German men from the economy. Still, Hitler was decidedly opposed to general measures on the compulsory employment of women in war production. This was not only an attempt on his part to preserve the model of society he propagated—he also questioned the economic utility of women, though at the same time he did not wish to lose their loyalty. As the following ministerial decree shows, all other sources of labor were to be exhausted before fully integrating Germany's women into the war economy. As the war progressed, this meant the increasing exploitation of forced laborers from foreign countries.

Source

Berlin, 7. September 1939

The Reich Ministry of Labor
Val 5552/398/39 g.

Secret!

Consultant: Dr. Hamann
Re: Labor Conscription for Married Women

(a) State Secretary Dr. Syrup has decided that married women who have hitherto not been in employment will continue not to be liable for labor conscription unless they wish to volunteer for the labor mobilization program entirely of their own free will. The regional labor offices are to be informed accordingly.

(b) To the Presidents of the Regional Labor Offices (personal)

Re: Circular of 3.vii.39

In the circular referred to above I have laid down that in peacetime women who have domestic and family responsibilities are not to be called up unless they were previously in employment and unless their family circumstances and health have changed in the meantime.

Even under the present circumstances I do not consider it advisable to utilize married women who were not previously in employment unless the women volunteer for the labor mobilization program entirely of their own free will. I request, therefore, that you ensure that the above-mentioned instructions contained in the circular continue to be applied.

The manpower requirements for plants engaged on projects of national importance must be met by exploiting all other possibilities (the employment of labor from plants engaged on non-priority projects, particularly of female workers and employees who become available through the closing down of such plants, by exchanging labor between the different areas, volunteers, etc.). If this should prove impossible, please inform me of the fact.

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