

Socialistischer Verein Vorwärts: Melbourne's nineteenth century German socialist association. By Volkhard Wehner © Copyright 2020 Volkhard Wehner

Abstract

In 1886 a small group of German immigrants—mostly refugees from Bismarck's anti-socialist terror—founded a club in Melbourne they named **Socialistischer Verein Vorwärts**. It was one of Australia's earliest socialist associations.

Despite an acute lack of primary documentation, this article attempts to examine the background and activities of the club's members to determine to what extent, and with what success, they and their club participated in Victoria's political life at a time when numerous socialist, communist, anarchist and reformist workers' clubs were emerging, all of them contributing to the formation of the political Left. It also attempts to determine whether the activities of the club had any long-term effect on the political scene in Victoria.

The conclusion indicates that despite their experiences in Germany's militant political environment, Vorwärts members appeared to adopt a fairly passive attitude that lacked a clear focus and failed to advocate class warfare along the lines of the German socialist movement.

A brief comparison is made with a German club in Argentina bearing the same name that adopted more deliberate and consistent socialist objectives.

Keywords:

Socialistischer Verein Vorwärts; Verein Vorwärts, Melbourne; Victoria, Australia-Socialist associations; Socialism-Australia; Louis Gross, socialist agitator; Gross Family, Melbourne

The foundation of the Socialistischer Verein 'Vorwärts'¹

Introduction

In late 1886 a small group of German expatriates met in Melbourne to form a political club they named Socialistischer Verein 'Vorwärts.' Though scant, the evidence of their activities clearly shows that their aim was to share among themselves their political experiences, collect books and pamphlets on socialism, and in some way to participate in the political life of their new homeland. The early date also signifies that the Verein was one of the earliest socialist organisations in Australia.

The objectives of this investigation can be summarised as the following two: first, to identify the Verein's members and to investigate what they hoped to achieve by founding their association, what activities they engaged in, how they related to the small but active expatriate German community, and what relations they established with the Anglo-Australian labour movement. The second objective is more wide-ranging, namely to determine how the tradition of radicalism, internationalism and class warfare that characterised the German labour scene and its militant social-democratic movement in the late nineteenth century echoed against an entirely different Australian labour tradition, and whether the Vorwärts members were successful in fostering a greater understanding of the European political scene. The outcome of this investigation will document whether Vorwärts succeeded in establishing a transnational connection between the German labour movement and various radical groups in Victoria, and if so, how any impact of its activities can be observed and measured.

¹ 'Vorwärts' (lit. 'Forward') was the name of the central organ of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and its predecessor since 1876. 'Verein' means 'club' or 'association.' After about 1900, the German spelling of Socialismus and sozialistisch changed to Sozialismus/sozialistisch.

Founding the Verein

Stefan Manz and other writers observe that Germans abroad were indefatigable club founders, usually with the aim of socialising, to sing patriotic songs, and to drink beer on Sundays, rather than to engage in more meaningful and pro-active ways with their hosts.² How does Vorwärts fit into such a paradigm? We are fortunate to be able to make some comparisons with an identically-named socialist club that was established almost at the same time by German political refugees in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As the Argentinian club is better documented than its Melbourne equivalent, some comparisons of its activities and perceived effectiveness with the Melbourne club can be made.³

In contrast to the Argentinian club, investigating the Melbourne club is fraught with numerous problems because documentary evidence of its activities is scarce. The little material we have is confined to pointers and newspaper references—though even these are mostly vague or unclear—about the background and activities of some of its members. No constitution, minute books, membership lists, policy statements or Verein publications exist, and its reputedly extensive library has been dispersed. With one exception, the names of the founding members can only be conjectured, and even the precise date of its foundation is uncertain.⁴ For all these reasons it is almost unavoidable to rely to some extent on conjecture, hypotheses, in some cases even on guesswork, to reconstruct the activities of the Verein. There are many likely reasons for this paucity of evidence. Foremost amongst these is that the documents of the Verein's origin may have been lost or destroyed in consequence of the terror meted out on Australia's German-speaking community by the *War Precautions Regulations* and various other government measures during World War 1, added to by acts of civilian persecution and vandalism. The loss or destruction of similar records and traces of the activities of other German clubs, for example of the Melbourne Deutscher Verein, the Turnverein, and several regional clubs, is fairly well known.⁵ What makes this so regrettable is that episodic evidence suggests that Germans were often quite pedantic in recording even the minutiae of their club activities. However, we can assume with reasonable certainty that the Verein was founded in 1886, and that among its founding members were a number of men whose socialist leanings have been documented in various places. Thus the methodology adopted for the present discussion is to extrapolate a history of 'Vorwärts' through analysing the activities of some of its members.

Although we have no corroborating evidence, it is possible that some of the men listed below—all of whom have subsequently been recorded as being members of Vorwärts—were present on the day the Verein was founded. They include Oscar Blanck, by trade a painter, who had arrived in Victoria in 1882. Years later he would represent the Painters Union at the Melbourne Trades Hall. His name is connected with some of the later recorded activities of the Verein in 1908.⁶ Johann Dietrich Heinrich (Henry) Cordes, born at

² Stefan Manz, 'Negotiating Ethnicity, Class, and Gender: German Associational Culture in Glasgow 1864-1914.' In *Immigrants and Minorities* 31, no. 2 (2013): 146-170; especially page 146. doi: 10.1080/02619288.2013.781747

³ Alfredo Bauer. 'Ein Stück demokratische Tradition. 130-jähriges Gründungsjubiläum des sozialistischen Vereins Vorwärts in Buenos Aires.' In *ila* 361 (December 2012): 50–52. <https://www.ila-web.de/ausgaben/361/ein-st%C3%BCck-demokratische-tradition>. Retrieved June 14, 2018.

⁴ Press references, for example the celebration of the Verein's ninth anniversary in 1895 in *The Champion*, corroborates the foundation date of 1886. See 'The Week,' *Champion* (Melbourne), October 19 (1895): 3. Verity Burgmann, *In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor, 1885-1905* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), xii and 108, and Joe Harris, *The Bitter Fight: A Pictorial History of the Australian Labor Movement* (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1970), 107, both claim a later date (1887), while Walker in *Solidarity Forever!*, 50, claims 1885. Bertha Walker, *Solidarity Forever!...a Part Story of the Life and Times of Percy Laidler—the First Quarter of a Century...* (Melbourne: National Press, 1972; new electronic edition, 2012). None of these authors provide clear sources.

⁵ This subject is discussed fairly extensively in Volkhard Wehner, *The German-speaking Community of Victoria Between 1850 and 1930: Origin, Progress and Decline* (Berlin: Lit, 2018), Chapter 5, 'World War 1 and the Destruction of an Imagined Enemy,' *passim*.

⁶ Victorian Socialist Party (VSP). [*Minutes of General Meeting*, December 30, 1908]; *The Age*, February 18 (1910): 4.

Osterholz in Lower Saxony in 1845 but by the 1870s working in Hamburg, was a joiner who arrived in South Australia in 1884. By 1885 he had moved to Victoria; in 1886 he lived at Fitzroy. He eventually became an orchardist at Meeniyan in South Gippsland. His obituary describes him as one of the founders of Vorwärts, the only member thus clearly identified.⁷ Adolph Heinrich Theodor Deters, a cigar maker, born in 1846 at Hamburg, arrived in Victoria in 1886 where initially he lived at Collingwood, later Carlton. At one stage he was the president of Vorwärts.⁸ Fred Graefe, a locksmith, was a very early arrival in Victoria (1860). By the 1880s he also resided at Collingwood. Louis Julius Gross, born c.1848 at Gotha⁹ but subsequently working in Hamburg, was a bricklayer by trade. He possibly arrived in Victoria in early 1886 after two years in South Australia. Most of his life was spent in Richmond. His life and attitudes have been well-documented by his granddaughter Bertha Walker, a political activist and author of two publications that throw some light on the life and times of her grandfather.¹⁰ With a common name difficult to trace with certainty, it is possible that Carl (sometimes referred to as Charles) Schmidt came to Victoria prior to 1886. In later years he became one of the directors of the short-lived Socialist Savings Bank. Franz (sometimes Francis) Edmund Striezel (sometimes Strietzel), 1860-1935, was a native of Dresden, Saxony. A woodworker, in later years he became a successful and well-known artist-woodcarver. Leaving Berlin shortly after his marriage in 1886, he and his wife settled in Melbourne, moving around various inner eastern suburbs. Next to Gross, his various political activities are fairly well documented.¹¹

Other likely members of Vorwärts who joined after 1886 were Friedrich Wilhelm Ewe, a tailor from Tucheim, Saxony-Anhalt (joined after 1890); Hugo Fritzsche, a carpenter (joined after 1890), Carl Mitscherlich, a cabinet maker, a native of Saxony where he was born in 1862 (joined after 1891), Franz Schneider, a carpenter (joined after 1887), and Carl Emil Thies, a gardener (joined after 1902).¹² All members were men although Marxist tradition emphasised equal rights for women.¹³ One of the later members, Carl Mitscherlich, conceded that ‘the strength of our membership averaged about twelve members.’¹⁴ This shows that, despite some comings and goings, Vorwärts was not a mass organisation. But was size really important? In his survey of radical groups Bruce Scates observed that ‘size is a poor criterion

⁷ ‘Henry Cordes: Follower of Lassalle.’ (Obituary). In *The Socialist*, January 23 (1914): 2.

⁸ ‘Die Arbeiterbewegung in Australien,’ *Neue Zeit*, Heft 17 (1909): 600.

⁹ Attempts to document Louis Gross and his family’s activities in Gotha were unsuccessful. It is possible that the long-standing nexus between the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Thuringian town of Gotha could have influenced Gross. At the 150th jubilee celebrations of the SPD in 2013, the Arbeiterverein Gotha, founded in 1863, was acknowledged as the ‘Keimzelle [nucleus] der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands.’ ‘Oberbürgermeister gratuliert aeltester Partei in der Stadt’ https://www.gotha.de/service/aktuell/pressemitteilungen/pressemitteilung-detailansicht/article/150_jahre_sozial-demokratische_partei_deutschlands_in_gotha.html. Accessed May 21, 2019. The first congress of the SPD was held at Gotha in 1875 when the Party adopted the explicitly socialist *Gotha Programme* which called for universal suffrage, freedom of association, limits on the working day, and various laws protecting workers’ rights. See Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878-1890* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 333-4.

¹⁰ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*; Walker, *My Revolutionary Childhood* [electronic resource]. [n.p.: Copyright Alan Walker, 2016]. <http://www.solidarityforeverbook.com/My%Revolutionary%Childhood>. Accessed May 23, 2019. Apart from making extensive use of both publications, the author acknowledges the biographical and documentary assistance received from Bertha Walker’s son Alan Walker.

¹¹ Some archival records concerning Franz Striezel are held by Mont de Lancey Historic Homestead, Wandin North, Victoria.

¹² The sources for the preceding section include the Melbourne street directories by Sands and McDougall; the PROV online databases of Births, Deaths and Marriages and of passenger arrivals; newspapers indexed in *Trove*; and personal research based on a variety of minor sources.

¹³ See for example August Bebel’s *Woman under Socialism* (1879).

¹⁴ NAA. Sozialischer Verein Vorwärts, Trustees Carl Mitscherlich, F W & We, Emil Flues [*sic*, i.e. Sozialistischer Verein Vorwärts] 1917-18; MP16/1 1918/21

of significance. The challenge of 19th century radicalism was its very existence ... because ... large and small ... societies ... questioned the status quo.¹⁵

Before proceeding, two important questions require answers. First, what reasons explain why these men chose to emigrate to Australia, and soon after their arrival to found a socialist club in a country where at that time socialism, or even an understanding of its political significance, was still rudimentary? Second, what was the political situation in Victoria in the 1880s and the context into which Vorwärts was launched? A useful start can be made by examining the political situation in the homeland of the Vorwärts members.

Socialism in Germany

In the wake of the 1848-49 revolutions in Germany and the reactionary era that followed, it was not until the 1860s that the first genuine working-class party came into existence. Following the establishment of various workers' education associations, Ferdinand Lassalle, an associate and sometime collaborator of Karl Marx since the revolution fifteen years earlier, in 1863 proclaimed the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein (ADAV), a working-class socialist party that soon had almost 5,000 members. Later in the decade, in 1869, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht established a more clearly Marxist party, the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (SDAP), at least in part to compete with the ADAV for parliamentary support.¹⁶

After the Franco-Prussian War, following the victory of the combined German states under Prussian leadership over the French Empire of Napoleon III, Germany was united in 1871. The newly-formed German Reich (empire), after a dramatic economic downturn, by the late 1870s began to emerge as a major industrial and military power. In tandem with the united nation's rapid industrial growth an organised industrial proletariat evolved. The latter's political aspirations soon led to extensive conflicts with the political vision of the Reich chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, especially after the unification of the two workers' parties in 1875 had made them an influential force in the Reichstag (federal parliament) under the new name Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD).¹⁷ Analogous to his earlier attempts to suppress the influence of the Catholic church and the Centre parties in the Reichstag,¹⁸ Bismarck, by using two unrelated assassination attempts on Kaiser Wilhelm I as a pretext, in 1878 succeeded in gaining Reichstag support to suppress the SAPD, and outlaw all of its activities, meetings and publications by use of the anti-socialist law known as the *Sozialistengesetz*. Over the ensuing twelve years that law led to numerous prosecutions, imprisonments and prohibitive fines. Its worst feature was its Section 28 ('*Paragraph 28*'), which legalised the banishment of party supporters from their home town without any recourse by legal means. In total some 891 expulsions took place, including 209 from Prussia, 218 from the Hamburg district, 61 from Leipzig and surrounding Saxony, and 52 from Posen.¹⁹ The threat of banishment drove many socialists and socialist sympathisers to emigrate. Despite support by the now virtually underground party for victims of the oppressive law, the party frowned at emigration. The socialist Hamburg *Volksblatt* wrote that

¹⁵ Bruce Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

¹⁶ The principal sources consulted on the history of German social democracy are Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party*, op.cit.; Helga Grebing, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: ein Ueberblick* (Munich: Nymphenburger; 1966); and Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire: Mass Expulsions in Germany, 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2015).

¹⁷ The SAPD was re-named Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) in 1890.

¹⁸ In what is referred to as the *Kulturkampf*, i.e. the anti-Catholic Reichstag legislation ostensibly aimed at secularising the state.

¹⁹ Heinzpeter Thuemmler, *Sozialistengesetz 28: Ausweisungen und Ausgewiesene* (Vaduz: Topos, 1979), 171-244 *passim*, especially page 127.

‘Our final end is not emigration ... but revolution ... through struggle at home.’²⁰ While the official number of expelled socialists going to America was only 146, many hundreds of additional fellow-believers joined them. Their contribution to America’s socialist and union movement was enormous.²¹ Only one specific case is known where an expellee came to Australia,²² but by their own admission, several Vorwärts members had left in protest or under threat of banishment for their socialist beliefs, activities or even merely their SAPD membership. It is with that in mind that this investigation is undertaken.²³

Victoria in the last two decades of the nineteenth century

For Victoria, the last two decades of the century were a period of what one might describe as a political ‘awakening,’ a phase that continued almost until World War 1. The completion of a telegraph line in 1872 that connected Australia to Europe and America demonstrated that scientific, cultural as well as political ideas could now be transmitted more rapidly around the globe. Although the euphoria following the Eureka uprising was long spent, new and radical ideas were now arriving via the telegraph wires from the centres of European (and American) working-class activities, while socialist and radical journals arrived more slowly per ship’s mail. A wide range of radical groups were forming, animated by utopian, socialist, communist, Christian socialist, anarchist, Fabian, evolutionist, and tax reforming ideas, and some even by half-understood ideas based on the *Communist Manifesto*. Yet, in Victoria true socialist ideas made little headway. They remained ‘confined ... to the small numbers of recent German immigrants’ whose ‘working-class traditions inclined them to socialist thought and action,’ as Burgmann observes.²⁴ She continues: ‘Apart from ... the continuing activities of the Verein Vorwärts ... the seven lean years of Victorian socialism from 1891-1898 [only] saw the appearance of three short-lived and feeble socialist organisations.’²⁵ ‘E.B.’, an anonymous Melbourne correspondent for the German socialist journal *Neue Zeit*, claims that German social democrats were ‘the *Sauerteig*’ (the yeast or ferment) that started the socialist movement in Australian cities.²⁶

‘E.B.’ mirrors Burgmann’s pessimistic assessment. In his 1909 report he describes the workers in Victoria as ‘backward in political terms,’ who considered themselves ‘socialists but have no idea what this encompasses.’²⁷ Farrell is more generous in his assessment although he admits that most of the small groups then forming were primarily debating clubs rather than active, class-conscious organisations driving unions and working men into action.²⁸ Nevertheless they can be seen as agents of change, initiating what Scates sees as a

²⁰ Horst Roessler, ‘Attitudes of German Socialists and their Forerunners Towards Emigration and Colonisation Projects in the Nineteenth Century.’ In Eberhard Reichmann, La Vern J. Rippley, and Joerg Nagler, eds. *Emigration, and Settlement Pattern of German Communities in North America* (Indianapolis: Max Kade German-American Center, Indiana University—Purdue University, 1995), 345.

²¹ Thuemmler, *Sozialistengesetz*, op.cit., 244-5; Stan Nadel, ‘The German Immigrant Left in the United States.’ In Paul Buhle and Dan Georgokas, eds., *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 51.

²² Hans Heinrich Diercks: see ‘Verzeichnis der Ausgewiesenen nach Paragraph 28’, no.117, in Thuemmler, *Sozialistengesetz*, op.cit., 182; see also Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,101. Diercks was expelled from Hamburg in 1881.

²³ Ignaz Auer, *Nach zehn Jahren: Material und Glossen zur Geschichte des Sozialistengesetzes* (Nuernberg: Fraenkische Verlagsanstalt, 1913), *passim*. Useful references are found under ‘Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland’ at https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arbeiterbewegung_in_Deutschland, accessed February 1, 2018. Thuemmler, *Sozialistengesetz*, op.cit., 127;171-244 *passim*. Chapters vii-ix in Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party*, give a useful history of the parliamentary development of the Social Democratic Party under the anti-socialist law.

²⁴ Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,106.

²⁵ Burgmann names those marked with *, below. The SDF was actually founded in 1889. Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,117.

²⁶ ‘E.B.’ (pseud.). ‘Die Arbeiterbewegung in Australien.’ In *Neue Zeit*, Heft 17 (1909): 600.

²⁷ *ibid*.

²⁸ Frank Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour: The Left in Australia, 1919-1939* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1981), 5. See also Jeff Sparrow and Jill Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne: A Secret History* (Carlton North: Vulgar Press, 2001), 105.

climate of challenge and reassessment of society, cautiously preparing an evolutionary path towards a national working-class party that eventuated in 1891 with the foundation of the ALP.²⁹ While that party was (and remained) reformist, non-socialist, and compromised by its alliance with liberals and nationalists, many writers argue that it represented a major step in advancing the interests of workers.³⁰ It must be noted that at that time Australian workers already benefited from advanced electoral and political gains and thus could justly disregard a confrontationist political course of the type the socialist leaders of the German working-class had chosen.

The timeline for some Victorian clubs established at this time illustrates the diversity of political thought and practice emerging during this period.

1886: Verein Vorwärts (the same year the Allgemeiner Deutscher Verein was founded in Adelaide)

1886: Melbourne Anarchist Club³¹

1889: Australian Socialist League (Melbourne Branch)

1889: Social Democratic League³²

*1889: Social Democratic Federation in Victoria³³

1890: Single Tax League

1891: Australian Labor Party

*1892: Social Crusade of Victoria³⁴

1893: Frank Sceusa sent to attend the International Socialist Congress, Zurich³⁵

*1895: Australian Fabian Society (a revival of an earlier (1891) South Australian society of the same name)³⁶

1897: Victorian Socialists' League³⁷

1897: *The Tocsin* (journal) and Tocsin Clubs.

Verity Burgmann considers the birth of *The Tocsin* the beginnings of a true 'tradition of the socialist left.'³⁸

1898: Women's Social and Political Crusade

1898: Victorian Labor Federation³⁹

1902: Social Democratic Party of Victoria, successor of Victorian Socialists' League⁴⁰

²⁹ Scates, *A New Australia*, op.cit.,13.

³⁰ See for example Frank Bongiorno, *The People's Party: Victorian Labor and the Radical Tradition, 1875-1914* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 1-4 *passim*, and 137ff.

³¹ Sparrow and Sparrow observe that the Melbourne Anarchist Club also harboured many Germans, mostly social democrats who had fled from Bismarck's Germany. Sparrow and Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne*, op.cit., 97. See also Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,108.

³² Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,109-17 *passim*. The League's discussions with Verein Vorwärts regarding affiliation foundered following police action against the League for meeting illegally. Burgmann notes that many internationalists, especially Germans and Italians, were members of the League including Heinrich Diercks. The latter had been banished under the notorious 'Paragraph 28' of Bismarck's anti-socialist law; see also Note 22, above. Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,101.

³³ Farrell, *International Socialism*, op.cit.,5; Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,119.

³⁴ Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,117, describes this as a 'feeble socialist organisation,' ideologically an outgrowth of the SDL. The author was unable to find any reference to it.

³⁵ Farrell, *International Socialism*, op.cit.,14; Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,48; Cresciani, Gianfranco, 'Sceusa, Francesco (1851-1919),' in *ADB On-Line* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sceusa-francesco-8351>

³⁶ Race Mathews, 'Harry Champion and the Melbourne Fabian Society,' in Race Mathews, *Australia's First Fabians: Middle-Class Radicals, Labour Activists and the Early Labour Movement*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 75-135 *passim*.

³⁷ Farrell, *International Socialism*, op.cit.,6; Bongiorno, *The People's Party*, op.cit.,143,145; Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,124-28.

³⁸ Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,120,122; Bongiorno, *The People's Party*, op.cit.,141. In 1907 *The Tocsin* was succeeded by the official Victorian Labor Party organ, *Labor Call*.

³⁹ Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,121.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 124-28.

1905: Social Questions Committee under Tom Mann

1906: the Social Questions Committee was formally re-constituted as the Victorian Socialist Party⁴¹

Verein Vorwärts: activities of the Verein and its members

Both Burgmann's comments about Vorwärts and German socialism, and 'E.B.'s 'Sauerteig' comment mentioned earlier, warrant some qualification.⁴² As noted above, the Verein Vorwärts was too small to publish a magazine or even a newsletter. Its 'documented' published record is confined to a few contributions to the left press, principally stemming from one of its members, Louis Gross, apart from some news reports and references in the mainstream press. Did Vorwärts attempt to spread its message, and what did it say? Was it any better than the debating clubs of which Farrell speaks? Did any outsiders take note of its activities? Despite the small number of Verein members, its regular inter-club contacts, and its friendly relations with Melbourne's Turnverein (with no doubt, an overlap of members) attracted over 300 guests who attended its ninth anniversary in 1895.⁴³ That itself can be seen as an indication that the club was now widely known and respected.

The books and journals in the Verein's growing library were the basis of the fortnightly meetings of its members. They were the tools by which they informed and educated themselves, but which they also 'passed round and discussed' (as Bertha Walker notes).⁴⁴ This means they shared their library resources among themselves but also with others, including what they had learned from newly received pamphlets and socialist journals. In that they would very likely also include interested parties from outside the Verein. Larry Petrie of the Melbourne Australian Socialist League had accepted a Vorwärts invitation to visit them, and he noted the 'spirit of comradeship [and] earnestness' of its members.⁴⁵ In her survey of the Hamburg working-class political scene, Madeleine Hurd notes that in that patrician city state, education stood high in the estimation of committed and organised workers. Here, 'along with their hard work [these workers combined this with] a desire for a higher way of life' through education and self-improvement, engendering respectability, 'mental freedom,' and wider community acceptance.⁴⁶ Leisure time was to be used for self-education rather than for frivolities like drink and purposeless socialising that led to behaviour exemplified by the derogatory designation of 'Lumpenproletariat' (proles, rabble). Education, and especially self-education, had a long tradition in the German working-class movement. Karl Birker has made a detailed study of workers' education associations, and Ernst Schraepfer in the Foreword to Birker's book emphasises that not only did workers make extensive use of these educational resources, but that these associations helped to bond and encourage solidarity among members.⁴⁷ Though somewhat pedantically expressed, when Vorwärts secretary Louis Gross scolded the Brisbane labour paper *The Worker* for 'wasting' its pages on sports reports he had in mind preferable alternatives: 'Socialism has nothing to

⁴¹ Bongiorno, *The People's Party*, op.cit., *passim*, especially 135-7; E.F. Hill, 'The Party as the Inheritor of Socialist Trends in the Victorian Labor Movement,' in *Communist Review* (August 1945): 580-582.

⁴² It must be assumed that 'E.B.' had not only the members of the Verein Vorwärts in mind but all Germans active in various associations including the Melbourne Anarchist Club, the Social Democratic League, the Melbourne Turnverein, and others. See also John Perkins and Jurgen Tampke, 'German Liberal Intellectuals and Australian Socialism before the First World War.' In *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 72, no. 2 (April 1986): 255-67.

⁴³ *Champion*, October 19 (1895): 3.

⁴⁴ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit., 50.

⁴⁵ Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit., 108.

⁴⁶ Madeleine Hurd, *Public Spheres, Public Mores, and Democracy: Hamburg and Stockholm 1870-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 152.

⁴⁷ Karl Birker, *Die deutschen Arbeiterbildungsvereine 1840-1870* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1973), vii, and especially 155-59. Grebing's *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, page 7, while not specifically focussed on workers' education, draws attention to the fact that education freed the working class from the political dominance of the *Bildungsbuergertum*. See also Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party*, op.cit., 20-29 *passim*.

do with barbarous games ... Besides ... political economy, teach the readers a little in natural science, modern philosophy, astronomy, etc. This will do far more good.⁴⁸ Two decades later Tom Mann, a major influence on Victorian socialism, advocated a similar lifestyle paradigm to the members of the newly-formed Victorian Socialist Party (VSP) and their families, encouraging the formation of a ‘socialist consciousness,’ indeed, ‘a commitment to socialism as a religion,’ in which education played a major role.⁴⁹

Where Vorwärts differed from most other left clubs prior to the advent of the VSP was its advocacy of internationalism, clearly based on the Marxist principles espoused by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which its members had brought with them from their former homeland. Andrew Bonnell notes: ‘The Germans, with the experience of the Marxist party in Germany behind them, may be seen to have made a distinctive contribution, stressing the primacy of class struggle ... [and] an internationalist outlook.’⁵⁰ This was manifest in various ways. For example, the invitations Vorwärts sent to fellow radical organisations in 1890 to commemorate the Paris Commune of 1871 is clearly an illustration.⁵¹ Its observance of May Day as the international workers’ day, first conceived by the First International in 1864—it was formally adopted by the Second International in 1889 but had been a practice followed by the German working class long before (and forbidden under the Bismarck regime)—is another. The Brisbane *Worker* commented that Vorwärts celebrated May Day in 1895 ‘in a true internationalist spirit.’⁵² Another instance was the Verein’s appeal for support for the starving millions in India.⁵³ A letter by Vorwärts secretary Louis Gross to *The Worker* concluded with the sentence ‘Hurrah for the International.’⁵⁴ Former Vorwärts secretary Carl Mitscherlich’s declaration of: ‘We believe in no creed, or nationality, our religion is the “brotherhood of man”’ was perhaps the clearest indication of the internationalism the Verein espoused.⁵⁵

A second distinguishing characteristic was the Verein’s collaborative relations with other likeminded organisations and individuals. Sharing information gleaned from its library and the overseas socialist newspapers to which they subscribed, has already been alluded to. The Verein eschewed exclusivity or self-righteous isolationism. On a number of occasions it invited other clubs or prominent socialists to Verein events. As already noted, the Socialist League’s Larry Petrie attended a Vorwärts meeting in 1889; Labor MLA William Maloney came to its anniversary celebrations in 1895,⁵⁶ and in 1909 VSP members attended its twenty-third anniversary.⁵⁷ In 1912 the VSP’s journal *The Socialist* celebrated the twenty-

⁴⁸ Bongiorno, *The People’s Party*, op.cit.,155; ‘Political Pellets,’ in *The Worker*, March 2 (1895): 3.

⁴⁹ Bongiorno, *The People’s Party*, op.cit.,151; Farrell, *International Socialism*, op.cit.,6. See also Geoffrey Hewitt, ‘A History of the Victorian Socialist Party, 1906-1932.’ [B.A. Honours Thesis, Department of History, La Trobe University, 1974], 103-104,121,174, *passim*.

⁵⁰ Andrew G. Bonnell, ‘From Saxony to South Brisbane: the German-Australian Socialist Hugo Kunze.’ <https://labourhistorycanberra.org/2015/03/2011-asslh-conference-from-saxony-to-south-brisbane-the-german-%c2%adaustralian-socialist-hugo-kunze/#more-1166>. Accessed September 26, 2017.

⁵¹ ‘Anniversary of the Paris Commune,’ *The Age*, March 20, 1890, 9.

⁵² ‘German Socialists celebrate May Day,’ *Worker*, May 18 (1895): 3. In the literature the celebration of May Day is widely claimed as originating from Chummy Fleming, his Anarchist Club, Labor politician William Maloney, and Queensland shearers at Barcaldine, Queensland. See Len Fox, ‘Early Australian May Days.’ In *Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin 2* (May 1962): 36-47 DOI 10.2307/275500876; and Joe Toscano, ‘The Beginnings of May Day in Australia,’ *Anarchist Age Weekly Review* 297 (April 27-May 3, 1998) www.takver.com/history/mayday.htm, accessed February 1, 2018. As a long-established European tradition since the 1st International, May Day celebrations were introduced by German members of the Melbourne Turnverein and taken up by Dr Maloney. In 1895 *The Age* commented on ‘1st May, the Labor day observed by the Germans:’ ‘May Day Demonstration,’ *The Age*, April 15 (1895): 6.

⁵³ ‘The Tocsin Indian Famine Relief Fund,’ *The Tocsin*, August 23 (1900): 7.

⁵⁴ Louis Gross in *The Worker*, October 3 (1891): 3.

⁵⁵ [Sozialistischer Verein Vorwärts] 1917-18; MP16/1 1918/21; see also Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, 55, who mentions Henry Cordes’ talk on ‘The German Experience’ to the Cosmopolitan Committee of the VSP.

⁵⁶ ‘The Week,’ *Champion*, October 19 (1895): 3; see also Burgmann, *In Our Time*, 111.

⁵⁷ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,51.

sixth anniversary celebrations of Vorwärts as ‘a splendid social and financial success.’⁵⁸ The Vorwärts proposal in 1888 to the Australian Socialist League to discuss collaboration and joint action,⁵⁹ and its regular participation in official commemorations and demonstrations on the Yarra Bank; its suggestion to merge May Day and Labour Day—quite a controversial issue at the time⁶⁰—and eventually, its merger with the VSP, to be discussed later, are all cases in point. Even the flow of letters and notices to the *Worker* illustrate this attitude for sharing and networking.

However, while Vorwärts members clearly believed in it, there is little evidence that they actively advocated open class warfare except to support ‘justified’ industrial action, as Vorwärts member Mitscherlich admitted in 1918.⁶¹ Was this perhaps a concession to the more narrow aims of the craft unions and other sections of the Victorian labour movement, which differed markedly from the more radical workers’ movement in Germany? The disastrous experience of the maritime strike in 1890 may have convinced Australian workers that reformist state socialism may be a more safe and successful strategy than outright class warfare.

Burgmann also invites a comparison, albeit indirectly, between Vorwärts and South Australia’s Allgemeiner Deutscher Verein (ADV, in the press usually referred to as German Association), also established in 1886. With a substantial membership,⁶² its own journal (*The Pioneer*), and formal affiliation with the ALP almost from its establishment, the South Australian club was not only very successful but appeared to be distinctly leftist, indeed radical, perhaps because it was seen by visitors, and especially the conservative South Australian German establishment including the Lutheran church, as ‘a hotbed of socialism’ or even as ‘communistic and anarchistic.’⁶³ However, as Harmstorf points out, despite appearances, the ADV was anything but a socialist association.⁶⁴ Although it had some vocal socialists among its members, it served as an umbrella organisation for a whole raft of pre-existing German clubs, thus combining members with socialist ideas, recent arrivals with distinctly nationalist leanings, plus members of various small but purely apolitical associations.⁶⁵ There is an analogy with Melbourne’s Turnverein which also had a number of socialists among its members, but Bertha Walker’s comment that ‘the Turn Verein [*sic*] ... was less political and more national with a picture of the Kaiser on the wall. Nevertheless socialists would go to its all-night balls and other social functions’ only tells part of the

⁵⁸ ‘Party Chronicles,’ *The Socialist*, May 17 (1912): 3.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*; ‘Melbourne Notes,’ *The Australian Radical*, February 16 (1889): 2; see also February 23, 1889; Burgmann, *In Our Time*, *op.cit.*, 108.

⁶⁰ ‘Melbourne May Day Committee,’ *The Worker* (Wagga), May 16 (1907): 13.

⁶¹ Detective Sickerdick interview with Carl Mitscherlich, January 9, 1918 [Sozialistischer Verein Vorwärts] 1917-18; MP16/1 1918/21

⁶² in 1905 it stood at 550 members: Burgmann, *In Our Time*, *op.cit.*, 150.

⁶³ The captain of the German war ship SMS *Condor* on his visit to the ADV in 1903 found it to be ‘a hotbed of socialist tendencies.’ On his return visit in 1910 the new president of the club ‘took pains to assure [him] that the socialist tendencies had as good as disappeared from the club.’ ‘The portraits of socialist leaders [which had offended him in 1903] have disappeared and have been replaced by a portrait of Your Majesty,’ he reports. ‘Document Twelve [Item 15, The German Community in Adelaide and Environs],’ quoted Jurgen Tampke, *Ruthless Warfare: German Military Planning and Surveillance in the Australia-New Zealand Region before the Great War* (Dickson, ACT: Southern Highlands Publishers, 1998), 109-10; Andrew Bonnell, ‘Missing Links?: The Queensland Labour Movement and German Social Democracy Before 1914.’ In Andrew Bonnell and Rebecca Vonhoff, eds., *Germans in Queensland: 150 Years*. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 115.

⁶⁴ Ian Harmstorf [Several processed articles and extracts by Harmstorf, including ‘A Short History of the South Australian German Association’; ‘True Germans are Patriotic South Australians: South Australian Germans before 1918’ and ‘German Settlement in South Australia to 1914.’ No publisher, no pagination, no date; possibly South Australian College of Education, School of Humanities and Social Science, c.1988]. See also Burgmann, *In Our Time*, *op.cit.*, 149-51, 158, 161.

⁶⁵ Harmstorf, *op.cit.* In ‘True Germans are Patriotic South Australians,’ Harmstorf names the Progress Association, the Low German Association, the Adelaide Quartet Association, the Adelaide Singing Circle, Adelaida Liedertafel, Piano-Accordeon Group Elite, the Berlin Group, Bavarian Group, Ladies Fitness Group, German Descendants’ Group, Theatre Group, Folksong Choir, and Adelaida Liedertafel being part of the South Australian German Association.

story.⁶⁶ Labor MLA William Maloney claimed he had been a member of the Turnverein for over forty years, and his biographer R.B. Cuning writes, ‘it was through them that [he] first came into contact with the ideas of European socialism; and as [Maloney himself] put it, “learned most of [his] democracy” and became an avowed socialist.’⁶⁷ In later years the friendly relations between the Turnverein and the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP)—often VSP functions being held at the Turnverein’s premises—is an indicator of a degree of empathy between the two.⁶⁸ However, both Adelaide’s ADV and Melbourne’s Turnverein were not socialist organisations, while Vorwärts was what its name implied: a socialist club.

The two main sources that throw a limited amount of light on the nature of the Verein Vorwärts are firstly the official 1918 protocol of the interrogation of former members, produced under the authority of the *War Precautions Regulations*; and secondly, the recollections and biographical research by family historian and political activist Bertha Walker, a descendant of Vorwärts co-founder Louis Gross. Unfortunately, neither source is very comprehensive.

In January 1918 Victorian Police Detective F.W. Sickerdick interrogated club members Friedrich Wilhelm Ewe and Carl Mitscherlich about their political beliefs and the objectives of Vorwärts.⁶⁹ Ewe stated that the Verein ‘was a purely socialistic club,’ and that its members ‘believed in no war or militarism.’ Carl Mitscherlich described the objects of the club as ‘buying different socialistic books. We used to receive books from Germany and America, and we used to buy the *Labor Call*, [and] if we had a credit balance we would subscribe to various social movements [and support justified strikes] ... we believe in no war, or creed, or nationality, our religion is “the brotherhood of man.”’ He added that members held their fortnightly meetings at Durgarten’s Hotel, a stone’s throw from the Turnverein in La Trobe Street, and that their membership had rarely exceeded twelve but prior to the war had declined to about six. Their meetings had been conducted in German, but in response to wartime measures, the club had gone into recess. The vagueness of the two men’s responses, at face value at least, could be seen as lack of clarity about the club’s mission. More likely, however, it might have been a deliberate attempt at obfuscation to deflect any attempts to prosecute them as well as other and former Vorwärts members.⁷⁰

Bertha Walker’s are more personal recollections of the doings and attitudes of her grandfather Louis Gross and his various friends who frequently visited their home. They are complemented by what she had picked up from her parents.⁷¹ She was aged twelve when Louis died. She makes no reference to the Verein’s involvement in the wider political scene—though Sparrow and Sparrow insist that Vorwärts ‘involved itself in local politics.’⁷² Walker implies that there was a good deal of overlap of membership with other left associations that is also corroborated in other sources, and has already been noted. While she notes that the Vorwärts members were ‘Germans who fled from “Prussianism,”’ her follow-up comment that they ‘mainly organised some social life’ suggests that Vorwärts was more of a social than a political club.⁷³ Averting to the prominence of Italian, and later also Russian

⁶⁶ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,51.

⁶⁷ R. B. Cutting, ‘The Little Doctor: A Biography of Dr William Maloney.’ [B.A. Honours Thesis, Monash University, 1974], 6; Serle, ‘Maloney, William Robert (Nuttall) (1854–1940)’, in *ADB On-Line* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/maloney-william-robert-nuttall-7470>

⁶⁸ See for example ‘Party Chronicles,’ *The Socialist*, August 15 (1913): 3.

⁶⁹ Sickerdick, in [Sozialistischer Verein Vorwärts] 1917-18; MP16/1 1918/21.

⁷⁰ [Sozialistischer Verein Vorwärts] 1917-18; MP16/1 1918/21.

⁷¹ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit., *passim*.

⁷² Sparrow and Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne*, op.cit.,196.

⁷³ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,50-51. Jim McIlroy, *Australia’s First Socialists* (Chippendale, NSW: Resistance Books, 2003) makes no reference to Vorwärts. Various other writers including Farrell, *International Socialism*, op.cit., Fox, ‘Early Australian May Days,’ op.cit.; David W. Lovell, *Marxism and Australian Socialism: Before the Bolshevik Revolution* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1997), and R.N. Ebbels, *The Australian Labor Movement 1850-1907, Extracts*

expatriates in the political arena she gives an impression that the absence of high-profile Germans makes them seem ineffectual as political activists.⁷⁴ We know that some of the radical clubs produced prominent activists like the ASL's secretary J.A. Andrews, or the Anarchists' 'Chummy' Fleming; Walker's recollections name not a single Vorwärts member. How can that be explained?

This would seem an appropriate point to make some comparisons with the Argentinian Vorwärts club, described in an essay by a long-time associate, Austrian refugee Alfredo Bauer. Established in 1882 by thirteen German immigrants—workers who had fled from Bismarck's anti-socialist persecution—the club's constitution determined it adopt a dual role, first, as providing social and cultural support to fellow German immigrants, but secondly and importantly, 'to participate actively [*machte es ... zur Pflicht*] in the social and political life of the country.' The club took a leading role in the move to establish May Day as the special day for the working class in Argentina. It provided a venue for the proclamation of Argentina's Socialist Party in 1896, and numerous left political and union activities were held at its headquarters and under its sponsorship. During World War 1 the club adhered to a rigidly anti-militarist policy, and later in the century it actively opposed fascism in Argentina and Europe. Importantly, for most of its long life, the club published its own journal, *Vorwärts*. Though published in German, its subtitle, *Organ fuer die Interessen des arbeitenden Volkes* ('Serving the Interests of Workers') clearly identified its more universal objectives. Bauer's article also indicates that Argentina's conservative government took punitive legislative action to suppress the activities of Vorwärts and other left organisations, and that the mainstream press regularly reported on its activities. All the foregoing would indicate that, unlike Melbourne's Vorwärts, its Argentinian sister club was active, prominent, and successful in playing a significant role in the political life of its host country.⁷⁵

Australia had become the home of several other committed socialists who had been brought up in the German socialist tradition. Andrew Bonnell writes about one of them: German-born Queensland socialist Hugo Kunze, who is credited with some remarkable political achievements that illustrate qualities of a sort the Melbourne Vorwärts members appeared to lack: a sense of mission, the will to spread his political convictions forcefully and publicly, to make appeals, give speeches, be noticed, even if attracting notoriety.⁷⁶ Among the leading socialists in 1890s Victoria not one was directly linked with Vorwärts. That seems surprising. In Germany, despite the anti-socialist law, the Social Democratic Party had matured and ultimately triumphed despite Bismarck's repressive politics, to become one of the strongest and most effective Marxist parties in the world. In America, German socialist emigrés came to dominate trade unions. As we noted, in Argentina German socialists participated actively in the overall political life while in Australia, notwithstanding the fact that Germans had been among the most committed rebels at Eureka in 1854, towards the end of the century few participated in the manner of Queensland's Hugo Kunze.⁷⁷ In Victoria, several persons of German background with distinctly radical views were contemporaries of Vorwärts, though none was connected with it. Among them we find the journalist, writer and

from *Documents selected by R.N. Ebbels* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1960) (various editions) also ignore its existence.

⁷⁴ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, 48,52. Yet, Burgmann observes that 'many...internationalists were Italian or German.' Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,101.

⁷⁵ Alfredo Bauer. 'Ein Stück demokratische Tradition. 130-jähriges Gründungsjubiläum des sozialistischen Vereins Vorwärts in Buenos Aires.' In *ila* 361 (December 2012): 50–52. <https://www.ila-web.de/ausgaben/361/ein-st%C3%BCck-demokratische-tradition>. Retrieved June 14, 2018.

⁷⁶ Bonnell, 'From Saxony to South Brisbane,' *passim*; Bonnell, 'Missing Links?,' *passim*.

⁷⁷ Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861* (Parkville, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1963), 109,168.

newspaper proprietor George Leonard Vogt (1848-1937). With clear Labor Party sympathies, he described himself as ‘a fighting journalist,’ and ‘a champion of the workers,’ as his biographer J.D. Adams notes.⁷⁸ A reform advocate rather than a socialist, he shared with Vorwärts a strong commitment to internationalism and sympathies for the International.⁷⁹ Another German-born activist, though not a socialist but a radical nevertheless, Max Hirsch was one of the most prominent political thinkers of his time. Settling in Victoria in 1890, he became a committed single-tax reformer, and despite holding anti-unionist views, he was sympathetic to workers’ and especially women’s rights. His political views were ambivalent: in 1893, at what *The Socialist* described as the first Australian celebration of May Day, Hirsch chaired the meeting on the Yarra Bank that had brought together a number of left organisations including the Verein Vorwärts.⁸⁰ British Fabian Beatrice Webb, contemptuously surveying Victoria’s left scene on her visit in 1898, was much impressed by Hirsch’s ‘courtly and attractive’ manner.⁸¹

It would be unreasonable to dismiss the effectiveness of Vorwärts out of hand. Several of its members stand out as political activists. The most well-documented, Louis Gross, had come from Hamburg, which social-democratic leader August Bebel had referred to as ‘Die Hauptstadt des Sozialismus’ (the capital of socialism).⁸² Louis had been ‘forced to leave Hamburg ... because of his political beliefs’ in 1883.⁸³ Judging by his outspoken commitment to socialism, combined with his somewhat choleric temperament, he may well have been expelled under Bismarck’s draconic anti-socialist legislation. His granddaughter described him as ‘an earbasher for socialism.’ His daughter Bertha Tunnecliffe, wife of Labor leader Tom, remembered that in conversation, ‘what [ever] came up, he turned it to socialism.’⁸⁴ As a long-time secretary of Vorwärts, Louis was also a regular contributor of letters to various journals: a congratulatory message in 1891 to the Amalgamated Shearers Union wishing them a successful conference⁸⁵; to the *Worker* in the same year, providing some information on the history of the SPD, and closing with a ‘Hurrah for the International,’⁸⁶ and again to the *Worker*, admonishing them to avoid references to sports events and the churches as ‘spoil[ing] the ... paper’ and ‘a waste of time,’⁸⁷ and again later, with a commentary on the international labour scene.⁸⁸ In 1895 he made a call for support for ‘victims of class injustice.’⁸⁹ After a long break—unemployment having driven him to South Africa—he provided a spirited defence of SPD leader August Bebel that aimed to correct a misleading article in the *Worker*.⁹⁰ In 1909 Louis was one of the guest speakers at the twenty-third anniversary celebrations of the club he helped form in 1886.⁹¹ Less politically engaged in his later years, in 1912 we find him on the committee of the People’s Hall Society.⁹² In

⁷⁸ ‘Vogt, George Leonard (1848-1937).’ In *ADB-Online* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/vogt-george-leonard-8929>

⁷⁹ Harris, *Bitter Fight*, op.cit.,37.

⁸⁰ ‘The Origin of Victoria’s May Day: Historical Glimpse,’ in *The Socialist*, May 11 (1917): 3

⁸¹ Airlie Worrall, ‘Hirsch, Maximilian (1852-1909).’ In *ADB-Online* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hirsch-maximilian-6682>; see also Sparrow and Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne*, op.cit., 53.

⁸² Dirk Brietzke, ‘Industrialisierung, soziale Frage und Arbeiterbewegung in Hamburg 1830 – 1914,’ <https://geschichtsbuch.hamburg.de/epochen/industrialisierung/> Accessed September, 27, 2017.

⁸³ Death notice of Christiane Gross (wife), *The Age*, March 28 (1939): 4.

⁸⁴ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,103.

⁸⁵ *Evening Journal* (Adelaide), February 13 (1891): 3.

⁸⁶ *The Worker*, October 3 (1891): 3.

⁸⁷ ‘Political Pellets’, *The Worker*, March 2 (1895): 3.

⁸⁸ *The Worker*, August 3 (1895): 5.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, November 16 (1895): 3.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, June 24 (1905): 10.

⁹¹ Walker, *Solidarity Forever*, op.cit.,50.

⁹² The People’s Hall Society, affiliated with various left organisations including the Victorian Socialist Party, was an incorporated charity under the Provident Societies’ Act. It had numerous German members. A notice (‘To German Shareholders of People’s Hall Society: Important Notice’), published in *The Socialist* on April 14, 1916, page 4, requested that all German shareholders register their names under Regulation 49 DI of the *War Precaution Regulations*.

1913 *The Socialist* reports that ‘our comrade Gross’ attended the funeral of his long-time friend and fellow socialist Henry Cordes.⁹³

Franz Striezel, a sought after and highly successful woodcarving artist, whose work still graces Melbourne’s St Paul’s Cathedral, the Melbourne Town Hall and Australia House in London among many others, and who today is represented at Victoria’s National Gallery, a regional museum, and many private collections, appears to have been more of a political support worker acting behind the scenes.⁹⁴ In 1895 he received an honourable mention for providing art work at the May Day celebrations in Melbourne by producing ‘living pictures depicting “Capitalism of to-day” and “Socialism in our time,”’ as well as drawings of Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle.⁹⁵ The socialist journal *Tocsin* at various stages noted his activities as a member of the VSL (1899) and the SDP (1903). An article in the German social democrat journal *Neue Zeit* in 1908 names him as Vorwärts secretary.⁹⁶ As late as 1924 Striezel’s commitment to socialism was still manifest when he translated the work *Morality and Society* by Swiss-German medical scientist, socialist and philosopher Auguste Forel into English. It was published by the Socialist Party of Victoria in 1930.⁹⁷ Striezel’s commitment to socialism, like that of Louis Gross, may possibly have been influenced by his regional origins. Saxony, where he was born and raised, was by far the most industrialised state of the German Reich, and by the middle of the nineteenth century it already bore the epithet of ‘Red Saxony’ on account of its long-standing socialist tradition and anti-Prussianism. It was here that one of the predecessors of the Social Democratic Party, the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein, was founded in 1863.⁹⁸

Heinrich (Henry) Cordes and his son Max were Vorwärts members who made their transition to Tom Mann’s Victorian Socialist Party (VSP) very effectively, both as party workers and speakers, and as regular contributors to its journal *The Socialist*. Henry, in particular, often visited Melbourne and the *Socialist* headquarters from his South Gippsland farm. In 1907 he delivered a lecture to the Cosmopolitan Committee of the VSP on ‘German experiences.’⁹⁹ Several articles by him, mostly published in *The Socialist*, often addressing rural questions, earned him the epithet of ‘Der Bauern Philosoph’ (sic, ‘The peasant philosopher’). In his obituary *The Socialist* described him as ‘A man of whom the socialist movement could be proud.’¹⁰⁰ His son Max was also an occasional contributor to *The Socialist*, described as ‘A voice from the bush.’¹⁰¹ On one occasion Max entered into the debate on the long-term role of the VSP in the pages of the *Socialist*.¹⁰² After his arrest and internment at Holsworthy concentration camp as an enemy alien in 1918 the Party undertook to work towards his release.¹⁰³

The later years of Vorwärts

What seems like an extraordinarily long life for a small organisation like Verein Vorwärts—if we accept its longevity of 32 years at face value—warrants some explanation. Founded in

⁹³ ‘Party Chronicles,’ *The Socialist*, December 12 (1913): 2.

⁹⁴ Archival records on Franz Striezel held by Mont de Lancey Historic Homestead, Wandin North, Victoria.

⁹⁵ ‘German Socialists celebrate May Day,’ *The Worker*, May 18 (1895): 3.

⁹⁶ ‘Die Arbeiterbewegung in Australien,’ *Neue Zeit*, Heft 17 (1909): 600.

⁹⁷ A copy of the book held by the National Library of Australia bears the note ‘Translated by F.E. Striezel, Melbourne, 1924. Edited by J.M. Alexander, Melbourne, 1930, for Union Voice.’

⁹⁸ This is covered in detail in James N. Retallak, *Red Saxony: Election Battles and the Spectre of Democracy in Germany, 1860-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). The article by Liane Shutov, ‘Spurensuche im ehemals “roten Sachsen”’ is a good illustration of regional politics’: *Deutschlandfunk*, May 23 (2013) https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/spurensuche-im-ehemals-roten-sachsen.1769.de.html?dram:article_id=247553. Accessed August 20, 2018.

⁹⁹ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,55.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Henry Cordes: Follower of Lassalle.’ In *The Socialist*, January 23 (1914): 2.

¹⁰¹ *The Socialist*, July 17 (1908): 61.

¹⁰² Max Cordes, ‘Political Action.’ In *The Socialist*, May 14 (1909): 4.

¹⁰³ *The Socialist*, February 8 (1918): 3.

1886, Detective Sickerdick's 1918 report indicates that the Verein was still in some way 'hanging in' even though technically it had ceased to exist, after a drawn-out merger with the VSP was finally consummated in 1912. It still had its own bank account.¹⁰⁴ What is surprising is that the over 700 index cards of VSP members name not a single former Vorwärts member. But as the name of one-time VSP committee member Chris Gross, and even that of Tom Mann are also absent, that list seems to be rather incomplete.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the fact that the former Vorwärts members were ageing, and their enthusiasm may have become blunted over time, they might have taken the opportunity to 'drop off the radar.'

A merger proposal with the VSP, begun in 1908 and initiated by Vorwärts, must have relieved its members of the feeling of a certain self-consciousness. As committed internationalists one can imagine that they must have been conscious, perhaps even a little embarrassed, that they gave the impression of being a purely ethnic German club. The few press references are surprisingly neutral by usually referring to it as Verein Vorwärts rather than *German* Verein Vorwärts. An attempt in 1889 to work closely with the ASL could well be construed as a first attempt by Verein members to break out of their ethnic constraint. Bertha Walker notes that her grandfather Louis Gross discouraged his family to see themselves as Germans but as Australians, and to stay clear of the various German associations.¹⁰⁶ The protracted four-year merger discussions with the VSP between 1908 and 1912 were another attempt. But wishing to retain ownership of their library—though offering to make it freely available to VSP members—and accepting a special status within the VSP, indicates a certain ambivalence on their part, and perhaps some regrets for losing their identity as a separate organisation.¹⁰⁷ It is unfortunate that the VSP *Minutes* pay little attention to the merger, no doubt prompted by the turbulent period the party was going through at the time of the merger. After the serious setbacks of strike action at Broken Hill, Tom Mann's imprisonment, internal dissension within the VSP, and finally Mann's return to Britain in 1910 followed by a less consistent VSP leadership under Mann's successor R.S. Ross, all played a role.¹⁰⁸

International relations and contacts

As the Australian labour scene evolved in the 1890s, links with similar clubs in Britain and to a lesser extent with Europe, became more regular. The visits by Henry George in 1890, Keir Hardie in 1897, Beatrice and Sidney Webb in 1898, as well as various other prominent labour politicians and activists, were part of this trend. Farrell notes that 'Contacts were also established ... with the French and German socialist movements.'¹⁰⁹ Verein Vorwärts had co-sponsored the attendance of Italian-born Frank Sceusa at the International Socialist Congress in Zurich in 1893, and it is not unreasonable to assume he and English trade union leader Tom Mann might have crossed paths. We know that Mann had attended various socialist meetings in Europe and had also established fairly close contacts with German socialists.¹¹⁰ This no doubt led to two of his articles on the British labour scene, translated into German, to

¹⁰⁴ [Sozialistischer Verein Vorwärts] 1917-18; MP16/1 1918/21

¹⁰⁵ *Minute Books and Card Index of Members, Victorian Socialist Party*. State Library of Victoria, MS 8253.

¹⁰⁶ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,104.

¹⁰⁷ Hewitt counts the merger of the VSP with Vorwärts as the party's 'only organisational success' at a difficult time in its history. His comment suggests that the party may have been far keener to get the Vorwärts members on board than the members themselves, hence being offered a reduced affiliation fee of only sixpence per member. On the other hand, Hewitt notes that several Vorwärts members were already VSP members. Hewitt, *History*, op.cit.,111 and VSP *Minutes*, October 12, 1911 and March 26, 1912.

¹⁰⁸ Hewitt, *History*, op.cit., 111.

¹⁰⁹ Farrell, *International Socialism*, op.cit.,14.

¹¹⁰ Attempts have been made to document Tom Mann's likely contacts with German socialists by Wehner, in *The German-speaking Community of Victoria Between 1850 and 1930*, op.cit., Chapter Four. The present writer is grateful to Andrew Bonnell for drawing his attention to the correspondence between Mann and Joseph Bloch, editor of *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. Email Bonnell to author, February 27, 2018.

appear in the publication *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.¹¹¹ After coming to Victoria in 1902, Mann continued this practice, contributing two further articles, this time on the Australian labour scene.¹¹²

Two anonymous contributions by 'E.B.,' purported to be a German worker in Melbourne already mentioned above, that were published in the social democrat journal *Neue Zeit* in 1908-9, continue this stream of a transnational information transfer.¹¹³ These, as well as several other articles, published in the same journal, contributed to an increased German awareness of, and interest in, Australian labour affairs, especially in the German academic community. The latter eventually resulted in the visits to Australia by several high-profile German academics including Albert Manes and Robert Schachner, and an ongoing extensive debate in Germany of the Australian model of what was described as the 'workers' paradise.'¹¹⁴ However, as Lack, Ohles and Tampke show in *The Workers' Paradise?: Robert Schachner's Letters from Australia, 1906-07* (1990), there clearly was a two-way fallout that also left its mark on Australia. In addition, the 'German connection' is eventually corroborated by Tom Mann's friendship with Vorwärts co-founder Henry Cordes and especially the family of Louis Gross, perhaps explaining why Vorwärts eventually sought affiliation with Mann's VSP, and why Chris Gross (later Laidler) and her sister Bertha Gross (later Tunnecliffe), became fairly prominent members of the VSP.¹¹⁵

Conclusion: the legacy of Verein Vorwärts

When drawing up a balance to conclude this investigation of Vorwärts, what achievements and failures stand out that warrant consideration? Let us begin with the failures. Here, the reluctance of Vorwärts members to participate actively and publicly in the fight for workers' rights clearly stands out. Indeed, they appear to be mere backroom revolutionaries, almost timid, in large part confining their Marxist activities to Verein meetings and political discussions and friendly exchanges with likeminded individuals outside the Verein. Unlike the Argentinian club, they failed to display a high public profile. Few signs of their political legacy, namely the class-conscious militancy of German social democracy, are discernible. Their activities pale against the political activism of their compatriot Kunze in Queensland, or of local Victorian activists like Andrews, Sceusa, Mann, or even Vogt and Hirsch.

On the credit side, Scates' observation that questioning the political status must be acknowledged, and likewise the collaboration of Vorwärts with other left organisations. Both Burgmann and Bonnell note that Vorwärts contributed the idea of internationalism to the political debate in Australia.

Earlier it was noted that Vorwärts members were all male, even though Marxists strongly believed in the equality of the sexes, underlined in the writings of Friedrich Engels,

¹¹¹The first, 'Der Sozialismus in England' (Socialism in England), was published in *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 4 (April 1897), 193-202; the second, 'Der Maschinenbauer-Streik in England' (The Engineers' Strike in England) in *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 2 (February 1898), 51-56.

¹¹²'Einiges über die Lage der Arbeiterklasse in Australien' (Report on the Working Class in Australia). In *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 12 (1903), 917-20; and 'Arbeiterverhältnisse und Sozialismus in Australien' (The Condition of the Working Class and Socialism in Australia). In *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 2 (1906), 140-45.

¹¹³'Die Arbeiterbewegung in Australien: von einem deutschen Arbeiter in Melbourne' (The Working Class Movement in Australia, by a German Worker in Melbourne), published in *Neue Zeit*, 27 (1908-1909), part 1, no. 17, 596-603; part 2, no. 43, 572-76. The latter makes specific reference to the Verein Vorwärts.

¹¹⁴Including some very hostile observations by Theodor Sehmer in 1913: *Australien und Neuseeland: eine sozialpolitische Studie, zugleich eine Antwort auf Prof. Brentanos Vortrag 'Auf dem Weg zum gesetzlichen Lohnminimum'* (Berlin: Fr.Zillesen, 1913). Perkins' and Tampke's study 'German Liberal Intellectuals and Australian Socialism before the First World War' (1986) provides a detailed analysis of this transnational phenomenon, as does Tampke, 'Pace Setter or Quiet Backwater: German Literature on Australia's Labour Movement and Social Policies, 1890-1914,' in *Labour History* 36 (May, 1979): 3-17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27508349>. Accessed February 3, 2018.

¹¹⁵Hewitt, *History*, op.cit., 299; VSP *Minutes*, 1908 *passim*.

August Bebel and others, and at the local level, by the affirmative action of socialist leader Tom Mann, who called for socialist action to be a ‘religion’ and a family affair.¹¹⁶

The evidence would suggest that the impact Vorwärts had on Victorian politics was minimal and did not endure. However, this assumption could be juxtaposed by noting that two *female* descendants of one of the leading Vorwärts activists, Louis Gross, left a distinct impression on the Left in Victoria. Both women were profoundly influenced by their father and grandfather, respectively, and that they carried forward Louis’ revolutionary ideas. It would not be unreasonable to argue that their activities represent an important *echo*, an after-effect of the Verein’s existence and objectives, and thus can be seen as part of the legacy of Verein Vorwärts.

Christiane (‘Chris’ or ‘Chrissy’) Gross, daughter of Louis Gross, and later the wife of prominent VSP functionary Percy Laidler, became an active radical activist. Inspired by her father Louis, ‘an ear-basher for socialism;’ her sister Bertha Tunnecliffe¹¹⁷ later remembered that ‘It didn’t matter what subject came up, he [i.e. Louis] turned it to socialism. I didn’t take any notice but Chris lapped it up. Certainly Chris was the one in adult life to be most concerned and active,’ Bertha Tunnecliffe adds.¹¹⁸ Family friend Tom Mann encouraged Chris to join the executive of the VSP at its foundation in 1906. She later worked for the socialist propagandist Henry Hyde Champion while becoming a very successful ‘soap-box speaker’ at street corners on behalf of socialism and even earning the epithet of ‘red Chrissy.’¹¹⁹ Later still she became an avid IWW supporter. Her daughter Bertha Laidler (later Walker) went one step further. After an extensive career as a unionist in Australia, New Zealand and Britain she joined the Australian Communist Party, advancing to membership of its Victorian state committee. In 1943 she unsuccessfully stood as a CP candidate for the seat of Richmond.¹²⁰ A personal letter of January 1930 by Tom Mann to Bertha’s mother Chris, addressing her as ‘Comrade Chris Laidler,’ speaks warmly of his friendship towards the Gross family and remembers their shared political activism in the past.¹²¹

It may seem unusual, but the foregoing discussion suggests there is little doubt that the political activism of these two descendants of one of the Vorwärts founders can be seen as the most tangible legacy of the ideas of Verein Vorwärts.

¹¹⁶ August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism* (1879); Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884); Bongiorno, *The People’s Party*, 151; Farrell, *International Socialism*, 6. In the policy of the SDP, a predecessor of the VSP, Tom Mann included ‘the establishment of social and economic equality between the sexes.’ Quoted Burgmann, *In Our Time*, op.cit.,129; see also *ibid.*,126 and note 58.

¹¹⁷ Bertha married the prominent labour politician Tom Tunnecliffe.

¹¹⁸ Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, op.cit.,103.

¹¹⁹ Walker, *ibid.*,105.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, viii.

¹²¹ Letter, Tom Mann to Chris Laidler, January 15, 1930: Alan Walker Family Archive, North Fitzroy.