

Toni Offermann. *Die erste deutsche Arbeiterpartei: Materialien zur Organisation, Verbreitung und Sozialstruktur von ADAV und LADAV 1863-1871.* Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 2002. 391 pp. + 687 pp. (CD-ROM). EUR 60.30 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-8012-4122-3.



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Social History of the Early German Workers' Movement

In 1863 Ferdinand Lassalle founded the Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiter-Verein (ADAV), the first workers' party in Germany. The ADAV's merger with the Marxist Sozialdemokratische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (SDAP) to form the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD) in 1875 soon eclipsed the Lassallean party's distinct history. The historiography of the increasingly Marxist SPD (as the SAPD rechristened itself in 1890), not to mention its twentieth-century successors the KPD and SED, rejected Marx's rival Lassalle as a pseudo-socialist dilettante and his movement as nothing more than a sect. As a result, the ADAV has received comparatively little non-polemical scholarly attention, and even critical accounts have lacked the rich detail lavished on other parts of the early German socialist movement.

Toni Offermann notes that until this book, neither a precise overview of the ADAV's organizational structure nor a critical edition of the movement's key documents has existed (p. 39). Offermann has addressed both gaps simultaneously, beginning with a detailed organizational history of the ADAV (as well as the short-lived splinter party, the Lassalle'scher ADAV, or LADAV). Dwarfing this historical account are the book's appendices, which run to nearly 800 pages, the bulk of them in a PDF file

on the included CD-ROM. This massive collection of materials on both the ADAV and LADAV includes the minutes of the party executives' annual meetings, the groups' statutes, official dictates to the organizations' memberships, lists of party officials, and membership lists for local (L)ADAV branches. Offermann's book is thus part monograph and part edited document collection, and it is perhaps as an example of this emerging genre of scholarship that the work will interest most readers of this review.

In the monograph section of this work, Offermann has written a definitive account of the ADAV's (and LADAV's) organizational structure and history, which he intends to serve as a reference work for historians of the early German labor movement. Offermann comments that many scholars writing local or regional histories have shown a lack of understanding of the ADAV's structure, and the roles of the organization's various functionaries and bodies, leading them to misinterpretations. To fill the void of scholarly ignorance, Offermann devotes a long chapter to detailing the role of the president, vice-president, general assembly, various functionaries, and the local branches (*Gemeinde*) in the organization's structure. Two later chapters provide concise histories

(a “chronology with commentary and annotation,” in Offermann’s words) of the ADAV and the LADAV from an organizational perspective.

In addition to the book’s function as a reference work, Offermann advances several arguments about the social structure of the Lassallean workers’ movement. Offermann notes that Ferdinand Lassalle’s organizational ideas deviated sharply from the dominant liberal conception of association culture in two significant ways. Lassalle rejected the model of a loose federation of local associations in favor of a highly centralized body with a single executive capable of directing local agitation effectively. He also ridiculed as *Vereinsspielerei* (“association shenanigans”) many of the activities of workers’ associations, from engaging in social and economic mutual-aid projects to organizing cultural events. Lassalle hoped to establish a tightly organized association dedicated to achieving the political objective of universal male suffrage. Once all men could vote, according to Lassalle, it would be an easy matter to set up state-funded, worker-controlled productive associations, the decisive step in overcoming the system of class society peacefully and legally. To his thinking, a loosely knit union of local associations devoting their energies to multiple activities could not successfully push for the narrow goal Lassalle saw as central to the workers’ movement. Offermann argues that Lassalle’s vision, which had little in common with the traditional role of workers’ associations, was never practical, and despite his ideology, the local branches of the Lassallean organization, while not ostensibly autonomous associations, took on the important social and cultural functions Lassalle despised but workers expected. According to Offermann, it was in fact the cultural events arranged by the Lassallean branches, such as worker- and folk-gatherings that welcomed non-ADAV members (including women, who were legally barred from political activity), that contributed to the movement’s popularity. Lassallean orthodoxy notwithstanding, “a variegated associational landscape emerged,” Offermann claims, in which increasingly independent branches developed, under the guidance of local leaders, organization structures suited to local or regional workers’ culture (p. 57).

That the party’s appeal for many members had a great deal to do with its cultural activities helps account for the instability of the party’s membership over time. In one series of tables, Offermann illustrates the striking fluctuations in ADAV (and LADAV) membership over the years included in this study. Offermann argues that the ADAV had the character of a revivalist movement,

yet with a “fanatical fixation on organization,” accounting for its alternating expansion and decline in membership: “The quickly ignited enthusiasm, which led to huge spontaneous waves of joining at local worker- and folk-gatherings, could only partly be sustained with the associational ideology” (p. 130). Offermann points to four factors that provided the party continuity despite these fluctuations: the ADAV’s cadre of national leaders, made up of a few dozen functionaries, agitators, and Reichstag candidates; the regional and local functionaries and activists, who not only provided the ADAV continuity, but frequently became the stalwart “veterans” of later Social Democratic organizations; the thirty or so strong *Muttergemeinden* (“mother branches”), which frequently sent out speakers and visiting delegations to support and revive weaker *Gemeinden*; and the movement’s press organs, which helped connect local branches to the executive.

Offermann’s most developed argument in the book is his contribution to a long-running scholarly debate about whether there were “socio-structural differences between the memberships of the two factions of the workers’ movement—the SDAP and the ADAV” (p. 223). Some historians once argued that the SDAP drew its members from skilled workers who had previously been involved in the liberal workers’ education movement, while the ADAV attracted handworkers and workers in less-skilled trades. This typology (once a staple of GDR historical writing) conceived of the ADAV as the expression of a declining feudal class, and the SDAP as the authentic party of the advanced, class-conscious proletariat. More recently, Thomas Welkskopp, in his majestic tome, *Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz* (2000), took the opposite approach, arguing that the entire workers’ movement shared a common “social democratic” worldview, and therefore no discernible socio-structural differences existed between the members of the SDAP and the ADAV.

Based on his analysis of ADAV membership lists, Offermann presents a nuanced interpretation at odds with both of these views. He argues that Welkskopp’s work, which utilizes data about only the “active members” (that is, those in leadership positions) of the two workers’ parties, fails to capture differences that might be seen with a comparison of membership lists. Unfortunately, extensive local membership lists have not survived for the SDAP, but Offermann offers conclusions based on his study of the extant (L)ADAV lists. The ADAV, he asserts, attracted both handicraft workers (such as journeymen

and small masters) and factory workers, but the social base of the party lay in the handworkers' milieu. Offermann's analysis shows that the ADAV had the greatest appeal among workers in areas where handicrafts remained strong but where wage and factory work were becoming prevalent (p. 230). According to Offermann, Lassalle's ideology could be interpreted either as a way to sustain older forms of productive independence or as a way of uniting collectively to keep control over one's labor output in the new work environment. This speculation does not appear clearly rooted in evidence of worker sentiment, but inferred from the strength of Lassalleanism in the particular areas with this mix of handicraft factory labor. Offermann thus rejects Welskopp's assertion that the working-class movement shared an undifferentiated social democratic attitude, emphasizing instead the importance of the regional work milieu, as well local leaders, in affecting whether workers decided to join the SDAP or the ADAV. At the same time, his conclusions do not support a crude Marxist teleological understanding of the relationship between the two movements.

Offermann's book is both informative and well-argued, though its subject matter is bound to appeal to a relatively small number of readers concerned with the social and cultural history of nineteenth-century social-

ism. More generally interesting is the effectiveness of Offermann's utilization of a very deep but narrow set of sources to enter scholarly discussions that often rely on abstract models and hypotheses to explain the significance of working-class organizations and the development of class-consciousness. Finally, what is most exciting to this reviewer about Offermann's work is that he does not merely distill the results of his own research, but places his archival materials before the reader in all their detail, allowing other scholars to interpret these same sources, perhaps in entirely different ways. Obviously, the edited collection of documents is not a new concept, but the use of simple digital technology has allowed Offermann to write a monograph yet simultaneously introduce a vast array of archival materials to his readers at virtually no cost. The choice to put all of the additional data on the CD-ROM in the widely available (and easily useable and printable) .pdf format maximizes the convenience of this material's use. Reading this book, I could foresee many scholars (at least those with the time and patience to compile voluminous sources into a well-organized and easy-to-use form) appending such materials to their monographs, allowing them to expand and deepen the exchange of knowledge at the heart of the scholarly enterprise. This was the first scholarly work I have read with a CD included, but I hope it is not the last.

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