



# Problems of the Public Libraries of Vienna

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THE PRESENT SYSTEM of public libraries—Volksbücherei—in Vienna needs to be appraised in the light of its historic growth and development. This background still exerts a strong influence; and both the merits and the faults of the present situation can best be understood if reference is made to the history of Viennese public librarianship.

Libraries for the use of the general public have been present in Vienna since the middle of the nineteenth century. These institutions, often with very diverse tendencies, were established in definite opposition to the scholarly libraries existing at that time. In many cases, the scholarly libraries had been established for centuries and were exclusively devoted to the needs of research and teaching. The setting up of libraries for the people marked the birth of the basic two-way development of librarianship which continues to the present. The reasons for the establishment of libraries stemmed both from philanthropic considerations (it was expected that they would bring about a great increase in the general level of popular culture) and from the endeavor to diminish the gulf between the leading intelligentsia and the great mass of the people. The rise of the middle class in the beginning of the nineteenth century and the later importance of the working class and trade union organizations had an effect on the libraries. A third party which was concerned about libraries was the religious community, equally interested in letting its voice be heard.

It is difficult to get a complete picture of Vienna public libraries in the past fifty years mainly because of the lack of source material and also because of the political events of the period, which caused violent upheavals and changes of control. While public libraries in the beginning were denied any real support from the state, during periods of dictatorship, they felt its heavy hand. Thus it can be said that public libraries in Vienna have had a particularly checkered career. Up

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*Problems of the Public Libraries of Vienna*

to the beginning of the 1930's, the libraries for public use were with one exception entirely supported by private means.

The shape of the public library started to develop between 1850 and 1900 in two markedly different organizations. One group was formed by the Catholic educational associations, e.g., the St. Severinus-Verein, the St. Vinzenz-Lese-Verein, and the Catholic Damen Lese-Verein (Ladies Reading Association). Another group of organizations prominent in setting up working class education started the libraries of the Wiener Volksbildungsvereines (Vienna Association for People's Education) and of the Verein Zentralbibliothek (Association for the Central Library).

Side by side with these organizations were the libraries linked to political parties. Several district groups of Social Democrats began to build small libraries with their own means during the second half of the nineteenth century. The establishment of the Verein Volkslesehalle (Public Reading Rooms), originally by the Christian Socialists, followed in 1899. The situation is graphically shown by the figures in Table 1. The first municipal library was established in the Villa Wertheimstein in the nineteenth ward of Vienna in 1912 as the result of a private grant.

TABLE 1  
*Public Libraries in Vienna in 1909*

<i>Type of Library</i>	<i>No. of Libraries</i>	<i>Book Stock</i>	<i>No. of Loans</i>
Verein Zentralbibliothek	25	390,000	3,400,000
Wiener Volksbildungsverein	13	180,000	1,730,000
Verein Volkslesehalle	8	c. 80,000	750,000
Total	46	650,000	5,880,000

The libraries of the Vienna Association for People's Education, in common with the Catholic libraries, maintained their former influence up until 1920. At that time, however, the workers' libraries of the Social Democratic party began to get stronger. The basis for their strength lay in the leadership of Joseph Leopold Stern. He knew how to persuade the organized workers to provide the necessary financial support. He created a uniform administration for the libraries—the system "Stern"—and, by amalgamating small collections into strong central libraries, he produced efficient instruments for workers' education. The final report for the year 1932 shows the success of these

libraries; sixty-nine branches had 301,000 volumes and loaned 2,670,000 books to 48,000 readers. About one-fifth of the present-day branches of the Vienna City Libraries have their origin in the former Arbeiterbüchereien (Workers' Libraries).

The destruction of the First Republic and the ban on all democratic parties in February 1934 put an end to the regular work of the Arbeiterbüchereien. However, in the same year the new government tried to restore them under the political supervision of a Vienna city official as the Verein Arbeiterbüchereien. The experiment failed to produce the desired result, and a city ordinance brought the libraries completely under the control of the city of Vienna on August 1, 1936. This was the first time in the history of the city, and under politically rather questionable conditions, that public libraries became a part of the municipal government. The central administration was placed in the hands of a group of appointed officials, while the branches were run by staff who received a modest monthly recompense.

The assumption of power by the National Socialists brought a second wave of purges, and resulted in more complete political control of the libraries. A significant aspect of this period was the complete assumption of control over the libraries by the city as a result of the dictatorial power of the state. The library headquarters were enlarged, and the staff was made a part of the municipal services, and trained for its new duties. Table 2 summarizes the general state of the libraries for this period.

TABLE 2

*Comparative Data on Public Libraries in Vienna: 1935, 1937, and 1943*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Official Title</i>	<i>No. of Branches</i>	<i>Book Stock</i>	<i>No. of Readers</i>	<i>No. of Loans</i>
1935	Verein Arbeiterbüchereien	57	277,000	37,800	1,411,000
1937	Büchereien der Stadt Wien	53	256,000	32,500	1,124,000
1943	Städtische Büchereien	36	166,000	22,600	591,000

The cultural and material loss of the Vienna public libraries during the war years was very heavy. The post-war recovery period brought a fundamental structural change. There was a return to the control that had existed in pre-war years. The libraries of educational associations and parties, some of which had done very good work, were by this time completely destroyed and lacked the means to rebuild. New organizations had to be set up to replace them, either carrying on as

*Problems of the Public Libraries of Vienna*

before, or undertaking new work. In the first group were the parish libraries, now united in the Kirchliches Bibliothekswerk, and the up-and-coming libraries of the non-partisan trade union federation. In the second and new group were the municipal libraries, which formed the neutral and technical core of the Vienna public library system.

Since 1949 all Austrian public libraries have been affiliated with the Verband Österreichischer Volksbüchereien (Austrian Public Library Association) which is a member of the International Federation of Library Associations, and which aims at a union of all public libraries supported by public and private institutions. There is nothing like it for scholarly libraries in Austria. The academic librarians, however, established the Vereinigung Österreichischer Bibliothekare (Association of Austrian Librarians) for their professional needs.

A glance at all Vienna libraries at the present time, both scholarly and public, reveals the following picture of present conditions. Six large academic libraries in Vienna are open to the public; two of them—the Nationalbibliothek and the Universitätsbibliothek—have large general collections while the other four specialize, as indicated in Table 3. There are also twenty-four other libraries with collections in specific scholarly fields. Altogether these have 2,765,000 volumes and make 434,000 loans yearly. The numerous institute and seminar libraries of the universities, for which no statistical information is available, are not included in the above figures. The thirty special libraries of public corporations in 1963 report a total stock of 6,694,000 volumes and 1,244,000 loans.

TABLE 3

*The Main Scholarly Libraries of Vienna*

<i>Libraries</i>	<i>Book Stock</i>	<i>No. of Loans</i>
Nationalbibliothek	1,792,000	181,000
Universitätsbibliothek	1,506,000	458,000
Stadtbibliothek (history of Vienna & Austria)	270,000	62,000
Pädagogische Zentralbibliothek der Städt Wien (psychology, education)	143,000	61,000
Bibliothek der Kammer der Gewerblichen Wirtschaft (economics, sociology)	127,000	28,000
Bibliothek der Arbeiterkammer (politics, sociology, economics)	91,000	20,000
Total	3,929,000	810,000

RUDOLF MÜLLER

As already mentioned, public libraries in Vienna today are run by religious, political, private, and public organizations. Their different outlooks are the result of their different aims; this is especially the case regarding professional staffing and the chances for further growth. The libraries of the Kirchliches Bibliothekswerk (Parish Library Service) are all about of equal size and very weak. The Federation of Trade Unions has its own library section with ten full-time staff members. It advises libraries on book buying, conducts courses for plant librarians, and gives gifts of books and money. In 1964, the section spent 1.8 million schillings, but much more is needed for the upkeep of these libraries. A small amount of funds is supplied by individual unions, shop groups, and by certain employers.

The Verein Zentralbibliothek, with seven branches, and the five libraries in the Vienna Volkshochschulen (People's Colleges) are private popular libraries supported by private means with some aid from the municipal authorities. The People's Colleges in 1964 received subsidies amounting to 4,150,000 schillings; more than half of it came from the city of Vienna and a quarter from the Federal Ministry of Education. One-tenth, i.e. 420,000 schillings is used for the support of the libraries. The 1964 budget of the Verein Zentralbibliothek was 720,000 schillings, of which 320,000 schillings came from the city of Vienna, 80,000 schillings from the Federal Education Ministry, and 320,000 schillings from library revenue.

TABLE 4

*The Public Libraries of Vienna Today*

<i>Type of Library</i>	<i>No. of Libraries</i>	<i>No. of Volumes</i>	<i>No. of Loans</i>	<i>No. of Readers</i>	<i>No. of Staff</i>	
					<i>Paid</i>	<i>Unpaid</i>
Parish Library Service	59	95,000	110,000	5,700	3	150
Trade Union and Plant Libraries	502	448,000	1,278,000	55,000	6	1,100
Private Popular Libraries	12	179,000	287,000	6,200	17	3
Municipal Libraries	56	402,000	1,526,000	63,600	159	—
Total	629	1,124,000	3,201,000	130,500	185	1,253

There is no doubt that the municipal libraries of Vienna are now the most powerful agents in bringing books to the people, as shown by Table 4. In 1965 the municipal system consists of forty-nine well-located community branches with children's sections, and seven special agencies. The book stock of each library varies from 5,000 to 15,000 volumes. Two traveling libraries serve forty-two points at the periph-

### *Problems of the Public Libraries of Vienna*

ery of the city on a regular schedule. There are three young people's libraries in the larger vocational schools, one rotating library for the ninety-one pensioners' clubs established by the city of Vienna, and lastly the Central Library. The Central Library has about 40,000 titles and is the base for the Vienna public library system. Its function is mainly to supply the branches with more expensive books, in order to meet special requests of readers.

The Vienna City Libraries come under the Department of Culture and People's Education. Total expenditure for 1964 was 15.5 million schillings including an ad hoc grant of 930,000 schillings by the Education Ministry for books. Out of this total, 61 per cent went for salaries and wages, 16 per cent for books, and 23 per cent for rent, office supplies, etc. Library users pay a fee of 25 groschen to 1 schilling per volume; out-of-town borrowers must deposit 50 schillings.

During the next five years the gradual solution to some of the most urgent and fundamental questions of the Vienna municipal library system will be attempted. Construction of a new central library building has been approved. Initially it will house the central administration (acquisition, cataloging, staff training, etc.) and also the basic book stock with space for 100,000 volumes. It will be a two-story building of 2,000 square meters and will use the modular plan. Due to shortage of space, the present central library has closed access except for 2,000 reference volumes on open shelves. The intended change-over to open access needs much planning. A problem of particular difficulty is the expected tripling of the book stock. Eventually this central library will attempt to bridge the gap between the public and the scholarly libraries.

A new public library law is expected to create a healthy financial basis by securing a more equitable distribution of the support of the libraries between the federal government, the county, and the city. Besides the existing budgetary difficulties, there are also considerable constitutional obstacles. So far five different bills have been drafted and submitted by the Education Ministry, the Carinthia government, the Federation of Austrian Libraries, the Association of Austrian Public Libraries, the Association of Austrian People's Colleges, and the Socialist Party of Austria. Educational legislation, unlike other sorts of legislation, cannot be adopted separately by the Austrian Federation or by the Länder. Both governments must pass identical laws simultaneously. At the present time conflicting political views on centralization versus federation render such unified action very difficult.

The professional training of librarians requires considerable improvement. At the moment it consists of 150 hours of basic instruction and 100 hours per year in a training course. It is hoped that the recently appointed Austrian Educational Advisory Board will find a satisfactory answer to the matter of training for librarianship. The Board consists of one representative each from the Federal Ministry of Education, the Städtebund (whose members constitute the greatest number of professional librarians), and the Verband Österreichischer Bibliothekare.

The public libraries consider that cooperation with the primary schools represents an additional challenge. In practice, this could mean joint selection practices, a properly planned relation of book stock to curriculum, and the familiarizing of children and young people with books at an early age. At present there are very few contacts between academic and public librarians, and one can almost speak of an atmosphere of isolation on the part of these institutions.

Lack of staff has so far militated against the desirable extension of lending hours, which at present are twenty-four hours per week, and against the use of the libraries on Saturday (all staff members have Saturday off). A change is most likely to come in the new central public library. A plan for the development of the Vienna City Public Libraries provides for the extension of the library system to a total of sixty-five branches well-built, well-stocked, well-staffed, and situated with proper regard to the population of the city. This means that there would be one library for every 25,000 Vienna citizens. Five or six of these branches at focal points may be enlarged and become regional libraries with a minimum stock of 50,000 volumes each. A new and modern form of municipal libraries for Vienna is taking shape; its realization in the near future depends in the first instance on the understanding and the helpfulness of the relevant authorities.

### *General References*

The information on the religious libraries is mainly based on communications from the Head of the Kirchliches Bibliothekswerkes, Dr. Michael Sticker, librarian of Parliament. Statistical information on the trade union libraries was supplied by the head of libraries of the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions, Kurt Link. Information on the Central Library was supplied by the Verein Zentralbibliothek, those on libraries of People's Colleges by the Secretary for Education of the city of Vienna. The Federation of Austrian Public Libraries supplied the information relating to the Austrian public library system as a whole.