

# WORKERS' SPORT MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

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## ABSTRACT

*The physical exercise and gymnastics introduced to society and to educational curriculums in the led of some philanthropists like Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. In time, physical education was being practiced at boy's secondary schools and clubs (Turnvereine) being established through the country. In the nineteenth century, after the industrialization in Germany, working class had increased and also the club members' characteristics had changed. Before the World War I, 350,000 worker athletes in various clubs passed the number of 1 million members and became the biggest sport movement in Europe.*

*In 1890's workers' sport movement had begun in Germany by the Workers' Gymnastic and Sport Union even the opposition of German Gymnastic Union-Turnen. The establishments like Workers' Solidarity Cycling Club and Friends of Nature Walking Association, Workers' Swimming Association (1897), Free Sailing Union (1901), Workers' Chess Union (1912), Free Shooting Association (1926) had followed in ordering. So, Germany had accepted the beginning and development place of Workers' Sport Movement in the sport history. Because Workers' Sport Movement in Germany had reached deep social dimensions rather than the other European countries. In Weimar or Nazi regimes, workers always keep on going to the sport clubs and continued their sportive struggles even they had hard times.*

*In this study, workers' sport movement in Germany was searched by related literature. The aim of the study is to determine the organizational structure of working class sport movement and also adding a new written source to literature of sport science. As a result; while workers' sport movements became a political struggle area in Germany, it also had important contributions to especially other working class sports and general sports in Europe. Trough historical period, workers' sport movement in Germany had risen after the industrial revolution and had a huge impact all around the world by clubs, unions, festivals and Worker Olympics.*

**Key Words:** Physical Education, Workers' Sport Movement, Germany.

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## ALMANYA'DA İŞÇİ SPOR HAREKETLERİ

### ÖZET

*Beden eğitimi ve cimnastik topluma ve eğitim müfredatına Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn gibi bazı filantroplar öncülüğünde girmiştir. Zamanla beden eğitimi ortaöğretim'de erkeklerin müfredat programına konulmuş ve ülke çapında kulüpler açılmıştır. 19. yy'da Almanya'da sanayileşme sonrası işçi sınıfı yükselmiş ve kulüp üyelerinin özellikleri de değişmiştir. Birinci Dünya Savaşı öncesi çeşitli kulüplerde 350,000'nin üzerinde işçi sporcu sayısı zamanla, 1 milyon üyeyi aşarak Avrupa'daki açık ara en büyük işçi spor hareketi olmuştur.*

*İşçi sporları hareketi 1890'larda Almanya'da Alman Cimnastik Birliği-Turnen'in muhalefetine rağmen kurulan İşçi Cimnastik Birliği isimli yapının kurulmasıyla başladı. Bunu 1895'te İşçi Dayanışma Bisiklet Kulübü ve Doğanın Dostları Gezinti Derneği, 1897'de İşçi Yüzme Derneği, 1901'de Özgür Yelken Birliği, 1912'de İşçi Satranç Birliği, 1926'da Özgür Atıcılık Derneği gibi kuruluşlar izledi. Almanya bu yüzden spor tarihi içerisinde önemli bir yeri olan işçi spor hareketinin kurulup yayıldığı yer olarak kabul edilir. Çünkü diğer Avrupa ülkelerinde bu tür gelişimler olmasına rağmen, işçi spor hareketleri (ya da işçi hareketin kurumsallaştırdığı spor hareketi), hiçbir ülkede Almanya'da olduğu kadar derin sosyal boyutlara ulaşmamış ve sınıf mücadelesi o alanda da sürdürülmemiştir. Weimar ve Nazi rejimlerinde çok zor zamanlar geçirseler de işçiler spor kulüplerine gitmeye ve sportif mücadelelerine devam ettiler.*

*Bu çalışmada Almanya'daki işçi spor hareketi ile ilgili literatür taranmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı, Avrupa'nın en büyük işçi sporları hareketi olan Almanya işçi sınıfının spor hareketinin organizasyonel yapısının açığa çıkartılması ve ayrıca spor bilimleri literatürüne yazılı yeni bir kaynak kazandırmaktır. Sonuç olarak, Almanya'daki işçi spor hareketleri siyasal açıdan bir mücadele alanı olurken, aynı zamanda özellikle Avrupa'da diğer işçi sınıfı sporlarının ve genel anlamda sporun gelişmesine önemli katkılar sağlamıştır. Tarihsel süreç içerisinde, endüstri devrimi sonrasında işçi sporları gelişerek; kulüpler, birlikler, festivaller ve İşçi Olimpiyatları ile bütün dünya'da önemli bir etki bırakmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Beden Eğitimi, İşçi Spor Hareketi, Almanya.*

### INTRODUCTION

Games and dances, physical activities, performances and movement cultures have always existed and continue to exist in all societies. In various European countries at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, concepts of physical education emerged that were significantly different from each other. The new interest in the body and in physical education may be interpreted in the light of the 'revolutions' taking place in European societies, marking the transition from the feudal (ancien régime) to the modern achievement-oriented nation state<sup>(6)</sup>. In Germany, working class participation in sports were tied to a gradual improvement in wages and hours. That more and more workers increasingly found time, money and energy to participate in sport was in no small

measure related to the growth of organized labour<sup>(13)</sup>. Sport increases the physical as well as spiritual forces of the human being as a whole. The beneficial effects of sport activities on a mass scale would have a significant impact on the ongoing class struggle in society. Its practice is particularly important for workers, since it can help free their bodies from their oppressive and monotonous daily physical work<sup>(2)</sup>.

Workers' sport associations were first formed in central Europe in the late nineteenth century as reaction to the increasing conservatism of the traditional gymnastic societies. By 1900 workers' sport organizations existed in Germany, Switzerland and the Czech lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; shortly after the turn of the century similar organizations were founded in Belgium, France and England<sup>(12)</sup>. Germany concluded that it was imperative to create separate proletarian sport organizations, which would address the physical education of the workers and develop sport activities under completely different principles and atmosphere. Unlike bourgeois sport, which reflects the values of capitalism and promotes individualism, competitiveness, nationalism, and economic profit, workers' sport must be "collectivist," and seek improvements in performance by means other than competition. Workers' sport should not focus exclusively on the training of young athletes who show the potential to be future champions, nor should it make record breaking its main goal. Instead of specialization and the development of certain muscles at the expense of the others, workers' sport must have as its ideal the harmonious development and strengthening of the whole body. Workers' sport should be practiced in a communal and friendly atmosphere and reject any manifestation of violence or brutality. Finally, the main objective of proletarian sport was to mobilize the masses<sup>(2)</sup>.

Worker sport is in the service of the improvement of the working class. It wants to awaken the self-consciousness of the proletarians and the physical health and well being. Sport is an instrument of class hygiene, the strengthening of its health and resistance. It is a means of the upbreeding of the class. It does not need many words to point out the relationship between the health of proletarian class and the class struggle. Tired, weak and sick men are poor fighters in the class struggle. It has to do everything to create such a healthy generation-as far as the current capitalist society with its hindering conditions gives such a chance at all. Worker sports is the movement which assures the provision of the health to the proletarian youth and strengthens the chances of the proletarian class to be physical prepared for the class war<sup>(3)</sup>.

National regeneration was only one of the two most important topics that mass gymnastic displays were used to 'embody'. Social justice was the other. Social Democrats, and later Communists, considered nationalist gymnastics a trick of the bourgeoisie against the workers, whose purpose was to mask – behind the harmony of body movements of the gymnasts – the anarchy and the class struggle within the society. Instead of rejecting such practice they created their own gymnastic associations at the end of the 19th century and organized their own mass gymnastic displays. These displays offered a practical realization

of the political and aesthetic dream of the avant-garde theatre, in which the masses were both directed and free to act. In mass gymnastics, the gymnasts became the artists and still remained true to the original design. There was another reason why the left embraced gymnastics. The Proletkultists despised competitive sport and fair play as 'remnants of the decadent past and emanations of degenerate bourgeois culture.' They called for a fresh start, through the 'revolutionary innovation of proletarian physical culture, which would take the form of labour gymnastics and mass displays, pageants and excursions.' It was in this context that the name Spartakiad emerged<sup>(8)</sup>.

The aims of worker sport differed from country to country. All the countries agreed, however, that worker sport should give working people the chance to take part in healthy recreation and to do so in a socialist atmosphere. Worker sport differed from bourgeois sport because the former was open to all workers, women as well as men and black as well as white. It provided a socialist alternative to bourgeois competitive sport, to commercialism, chauvinism and the obsession with stars and records. It replaced capitalist with socialist values and set the foundation for a true working-class culture. Worker sport, therefore, initially emphasized less-competitive physical activities, such as gymnastics, acrobatics, tumbling, pyramid-forming, mass artistic displays, hiking, cycling and swimming<sup>(7)</sup>.

### **Organizational Structure of the Movement**

It is well known that gymnastics formed the dominant mode of physical culture in nineteenth-century Germany, but the heterogeneous nature of the activity is less well recognized. Aside from the figure of Jahn, who looms large in general accounts of the period, gymnastics was long influenced by the work of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pedagogues of the Philanthropic school such as Villaume, Vieth and GutsMuths. While the politicized variety was suppressed in 1819, other strands continued and taken together with dancing in social clubs, dietetic regimes in spas, and promenading in urban parks, contributed to the rise of the educated middle class<sup>(10)</sup>. On the trace of developing the modern German physical education, the name of Friderich Ludwig Jahn is very important. Jahn formed a gymnastic association in 1811 which grew quickly in the various German States to include over 150 affiliate clubs and over 120.000 members, drawn from school children, university students, artisan apprentices and merchant trainees. This development occurred during a period of tumult in Central Europe. In this climate Jahn's movement developed in a nationalist, liberal mode of political thought. The establishment of Men's Gymnastic Clubs (Männerturnvereine) in the 1840's confirmed the role of gymnastic in bourgeois political culture that had been initiated by Jahn through fostering political aims under the aegis of physical education (a cultural activity). From its inception therefore, German physical fitness contain a distinct political and ideological component and its character was accordingly marked by more than pure athleticism<sup>(11)</sup>.

The first site in Germany for modern sports exercises - leaving aside the *Drehbergspiele* for the moment - was created during the Napoleonic occupation. In the summer of 1811, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn opened the gymnastics square (*Turnplatz*) on Berlin's Hasenheide. Together with Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Ernst Moritz Arndt, Jahn was one of the protagonists of anti-Napoleonic agitation, which was in part aggressively nationalist and also antisemitic. Through his anthropological, linguistic and educational writings, Jahn wanted to create a German national consciousness and thus support the struggle against Napoleonic rule and later for a nationally constituted state. The strengthening of the body - 'gymnastics' - is here the complement to a mental mobilization on the basis of a *völkisch* notion of the nation. It was to be more than merely exercises of future soldiers and guerrilla fighters, which is how it was perceived by Jahn's contemporaries<sup>(9)</sup>.

In Germany, the *Turnen* movement was the precursor of and model for popular sports in Europe and North America. During the 1848 Revolution, members of the *Turnen* organizations around Germany founded guerrilla groups that fought in favor of democracy and republicanism. In the statutes of the German *Democratic Turnerbund*, it was stated that giving spiritual and physical education to all Germans would ensure the liberation of the fatherland and its unification as a free, democratic, and republican state. This spirit lasted into the 1860s and 1870s, but ended in the 1880s, when, in German words, "the bourgeoisie made peace with the nobility." From this point on the *Turnen* movement gradually became reactionary<sup>(2)</sup>.

**Table 1. Turner Movement Membership<sup>(3)</sup>**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Members</i>
1893-4	9,096
1894-5	10,367
1895-6	13,964
1897	18,523
1898	27,544
1899	32,454
1900	37,371
1901	41,779
1902	50,964
1903	61,665
1904	70,681
1905	80,147
1906	105,056
1907	120,076
1908	123,802
1909	134,104
1910	153,382
1911	169,308
1912	183,383
1913	186,958
1915	96,743

The worker sport movement in Germany regards Democratic Turnerbund as its forerunner, although it is doubtful whether any sizeable number of workers actually took part in it. Most revolutionaries left Germany after the failure of the revolution. At the height of revolution there were 300 Turner clubs actively organizing their exercises and political activities within their communities. When reduced to only gymnastics after the revolution, the number gradually diminished until about a hundred were left 10 years later. With the rising national enthusiasm after 1859, the Turners formed a new and rapidly growing association-the Deutsche Turnerschaft (DT)-that, in 1864, had as many as 1934 clubs with 168,000 members. Insofar as the clubs were open to all, they also included leaders of the social democratic Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein<sup>(3)</sup>.

In 1892, the *Democratic Turnerbund* purged all members suspected of being social-democrats. As a consequence, a workers' sport organization was founded, the *Arbeiter Turner Bund -ATB-* renamed *Arbeiter Turn- und Sportbund -ATSB-* after World War I, with which the *Democratic Turnerbund* maintained a fierce struggle<sup>(2)</sup>. The Workers' Turner Movement (*Arbeiter Turner Bund-ATB*) doing exercises and proclaiming international brotherhood against the nationalistic bourgeois movements<sup>(4)</sup>. This workers' sport federation became the model for many others in other countries. After the Great War, the *Democratic Turnerbund* became aggressively nationalist<sup>(2)</sup>.

The nationalist German Gymnasts' Association (*Deutsche Turnerschaft-DT*), which had organized approximately 1.2 million members before the war, approached 1.75 million in 1924. During the same period the Workers' Gymnastic and Sport Union (*Arbeiter Turn und Sportbund-ATSB*) increased its membership from fewer than 190,000 to 650,000. Consequently, athletes who were interested in competitions avoided the *Stadtwaldfest* - and visited a sporting festival that took place on the same day in Duisburg, as the *Volkszeitung* noted sourly<sup>(5)</sup>. Not surprising the greatest expansion of the workers' sports movement in the 1920s and 1930s came about in central Europe where the foundations were most substantial. For example, membership in the ATUS - the umbrella organization for all labour gymnastics and sports in Germany - skyrocketed during the Weimar Republic despite the death of 18 percent of the 1914 members during the first World War<sup>(13)</sup>. The workers' sport and gymnastics club played a significant role in the lives of many young Germans during the Weimar Republic, with or without victory in the political arena<sup>(11)</sup>.

At its peak (1929), the ATUS enrolled some 1.2 million working people and provided athletic opportunities in over a dozen different sports (not included in this figure were another 250,000 people in communist sport groups that had been expelled from ATUS in 1928). In 1926 the ATUS opened the most modern sports facility in all Germany, the 1.25 million mark *Bundesschule* in Leipzig. An affiliate, the Workers' Cycling Association (*ARS*), not only boasted 320,000 members (1929)- the largest cycling organization in the world - but also maintained a cooperative bicycle factory. A final indicator of the German movement's vitality were the sports festivals held by the ATUS in Leipzig (1922)

and Numberg (1928), and by the communists in Berlin (1929), all of which attracted in the vicinity of 100,000 participants<sup>(13)</sup>. In Germany alone, the centre of the movement, there were over 350,000 worker sportsmen and women organized before the First World War. There were social - democratic chess, smoking, drama, skittles, sports and gymnastics clubs, the Naturfreunde (ramblers), educational associations and choral societies, which usually carried the prefix Arbeiter - (workers') before their name<sup>(1)</sup>

**Table 2. Member Organizations in the Social-Democratic-Oriented “Zentralkommission für Arbeitersport und Körperpflege” (1928)<sup>(3)</sup>**

<i>Federation</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Clubs &amp; Locals</i>
ATSB	738,048	6,886
Solidarity (Cycling)	320,000	4,951
Friends of Nature	81,734	1,000
Arbeiter Athletenbund	52,000	960
Worker Chess	12,850	460
Worker Shooting	5,579	412
Free Sailing	1,660	25
Worker Angling	6,500	142
Worker Bowling	8,216	835
Worker Samaritans (First Aid)	42,757	1,209
Union for People's Health	15,393	112
Total	1,284,737	16,992

The First International Worker Olympics in Frankfurt in 1925 is of particular importance. The First Worker Olympics took place in the newly built Frankfurt stadium in front of 150,000 spectators. At the opening ceremony, a choir of 1,200 people sang, giving the sports festival a cultural content. In a festive drama presentation, 60,000 actors took part in the “Worker Struggle for the Earth”. The winning German women's sprint relay actually beat the world record (the achievement was ungratified because it was not sanctioned by the IAAF). All participants were required to take part in the cultural festivals and all were permitted to compete in individual events to stress the performance of the general athlete rather than the specialist. This compromise position was adopted because the athletes of most countries wanted elite performances, while the athletes of some others preferred versatile participation. Athletes from 10 countries participated. All this took place 3 years before German reappearance in the bourgeois Olympics because the aggressor of World War I had been excluded until 1928. the Finnish TUL athletes were the stars at Frankfurt<sup>(3)</sup>.

## Conclusion

A possible explanation for the emergence of worker-competitions may have been worker alienation. Marx argued that in a modern capitalist society, the worker lives in an alienated and dehumanizing existence. Alienation was the historical product of the division of labour and capitalism. Weber extended Marx's argument contending that in modern work, men could no longer engage in socially significant action unless they joined large scale organizations in which they were admitted only upon condition that they sacrificed their personal desires and predilections to the impersonal goals and procedures that governed the whole<sup>(14)</sup>. Sport activity gives the working class an inner spiritual liberation and therefore diverts it from the cares and bothers of life. The workers won shorter working days and longer vacations they would have more leisure time, the sport internationals attempted to organize them during their free time, to isolate them from bourgeois cultural influences and to make them aware that sport could be used to advance the revolutionary movement<sup>(12)</sup>.

The founders of the worker sport movement believed that sport could be revolutionary, that the movement was no less significant to workers than their political, trade union and cooperative movements. Sport played a paramount role in the struggle against capitalist nationalism and militarism that pervaded the so-called "politically neutral" bourgeois sport organizations and through them, corrupted young working people. The formation of separate worker sport organizations shielded youths from bourgeois values. While capitalism fostered mistrust among workers of different nations, the worker sport organizations banded together internationally to create peace and an international solidarity. They turned physical culture into a new international language capable of breaking down all barriers<sup>(7)</sup>.

The aim of the workers' sport movement, while it might vary moderately from group to group, was basically the same everywhere. It tried to provide working people, especially the young, with the opportunity to participate in healthy, enjoyable physical activity and to do this in a positive working class atmosphere. Workers' sports were to be consciously different from "bourgeois" sports in that they were open to all. But beyond presenting equality of opportunity to all workers, the labour sports movement set itself up as a humanistic alternative to the excesses of 'bourgeois' athletic competition. Not only did workers' sports seek to remove the class line from participation, it also sought to substitute socialist for capitalist values in the process and thereby help to lay the groundwork for a uniquely working-class culture. Such thinking contributed to the tendency within the movement prior to 1914 to emphasize less competitive physical activities such as gymnastics, cycling, hiking and swimming<sup>(13)</sup>.



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