



# HITLER DOWN UNDER

Unknown photographer  
*German Club, Adelaide,  
 Decorated for Hitler's 50th  
 Birthday, April 20th 1939*  
 b&w photograph; 28.2 x 37.0 cm  
 Pictures Collection  
 nla.pic-an24460199

Richard Stone uncovers an intriguing collection of songs, swastikas and Nazi propaganda produced in Australia during the 1930s

**A**dolf Hitler turned 50 on 20 April 1939. In Berlin, the event was marked by huge parades, swathes of gifts delivered to Der Führer. Australian newspapers which reported these events mostly repeated stories from the same AAP correspondent. The *Advertiser* in Adelaide, however, sourced its own 'Special Correspondent' with reports appearing over three days. A front page story, 'Birthday for Hitler in Nazi way', gave a detailed account of the Berlin celebrations. Also included was a local story headed 'Adelaide Germans Honor Hitler's Birthday'.

It was reported that 'about 150 German residents of Adelaide' gathered at the German Club in Flinders Street where the Australian and German national anthems were sung as well as the 'Nazi Party's song'. This last named song, a bombastic Nazi paean, was increasingly used at official German events in Australia in the late 1930s. It was commonly known as the 'Horst Wessel-Lied', or 'Wessel song', after Horst Wessel who wrote the original poem.

Horst Wessel was a storm trooper in the SA, the Sturmabteilung or Brown Shirts, a para-military group of street fighters that was part of Hitler's early power base. Wessel's mysterious death in 1930 was blamed on the Communists by the Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels and Wessel's funeral was staged as a pro-Nazi propaganda exercise. Music was soon added to Wessel's jingoistic words and it became both the marching song of the SA and the Nazi Party's official song. The National Library holds sheet music for

the Wessel song published in the early 1930s in Leipzig, with a vivid cover depicting the martyred Wessel.

Setting the scene, the *Advertiser* described the most important decorative elements thus: 'Flanked by large German and Australian flags, a portrait of Hitler stood on the platform'. An unknown photographer captured this setting and a copy of the photograph is in the National Library's Pictures Collection. The image is carefully composed with the viewer's focus being led up from the highly polished floor to the steps between the flowered balustrade and the artificial bower framing the portrait of Hitler, the spiritual centre of the total composition. The symmetrical angles of the ceiling lines and the table corners add to the directed line of vision. The two national flags flanking the stage provide an additional frame within the photograph, although the German flag is larger and dominates with the bold geometry of the swastika. The Nazi imagery is reinforced by an extra swastika banner draped over a lectern from where the acting German Consul, Mr P. Beckman, delivered a rousing speech, reported by the *Advertiser*, in which he claimed that, 'Hitler was supported by the affection and loyalty of the whole German people ... (who) ... knew that everything he did was for the good of the country and themselves'.

The provenance of the photo in the National Library is unknown, but it probably came to the Library through the dispersal of property seized from the German Club in Adelaide at the outbreak of World War II.

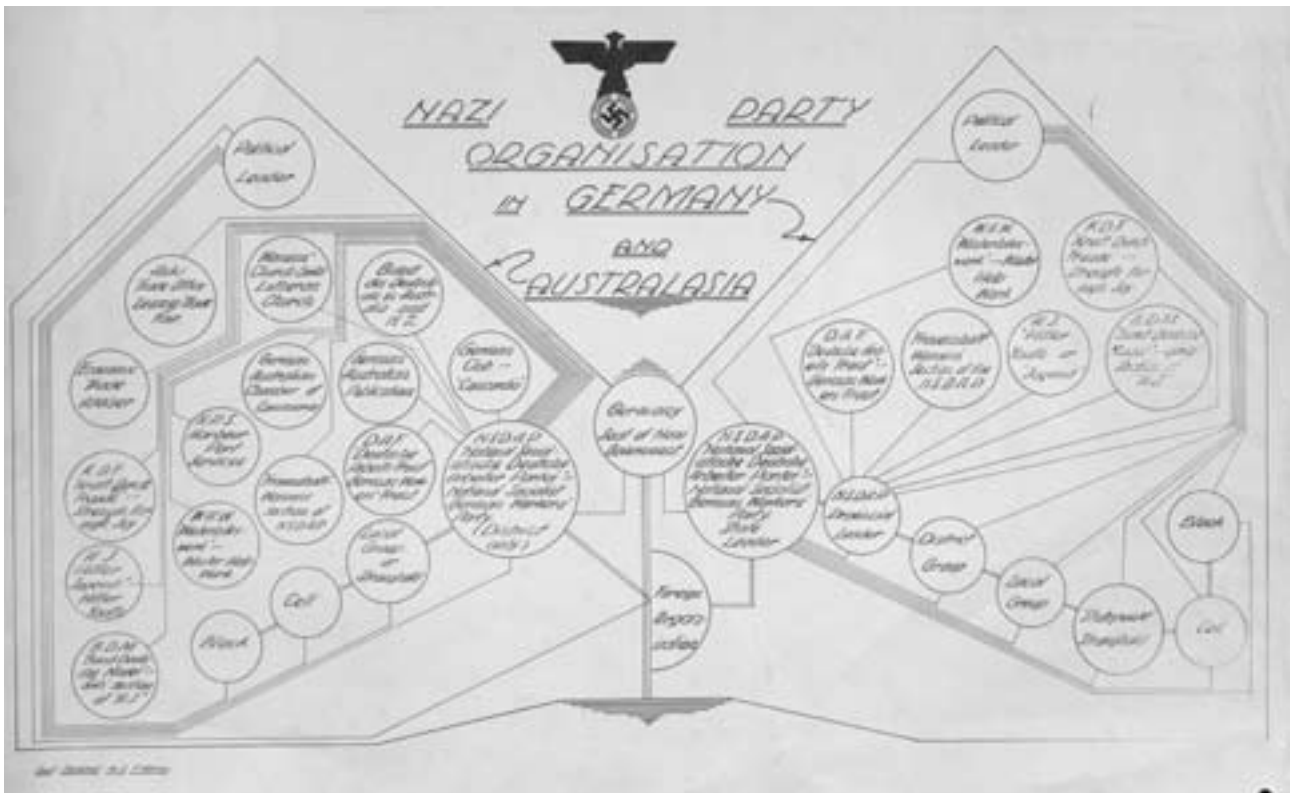


Cover of 'Horst Wessel-Lied: Kampflied der N.S.D.A.P.' (Leipzig: Verlag für Nationale Musik, c. 1929)  
National Library of Australia  
MUS mba 783.2421599 H693

The Library has a manuscript item which is documented as coming from this source. The Australian War Memorial has photos with German-Australian connections which have the source recorded as 'removed from the South Australian German Club, upon the outbreak of hostilities, 1939–45 war, by the Commonwealth Investigation Service'. One of these photos is the same image of Hitler as that in the National Library's photo of the decorated German Club. It is intriguing to speculate that the photograph in the War Memorial may well be the same photograph which was featured in Adelaide in April 1939.

The Sued-Australischen Allgemeinen Deutschen Vereins, or South Australian German Association, which included the German Club in Adelaide, had celebrated its own 50th birthday only three years earlier in March 1936. The association had been a vital presence in the local community with a busy program of social, musical and sporting activities. Political factors reflecting events in Germany had, however, a habit of disrupting life. During World War I, anti-German sentiment in Australia ran high and the German Club had closed with many members of the community interned as aliens. As well, German town-names were anglicised. In the 1920s, the association had lobbied successfully to have the German names restored.

With the rise to power of Hitler and the Third Reich, the German Club in Adelaide, along with other German societies in Australia, had been infiltrated by consular representatives of the Third Reich spreading their government's propaganda. These activities were monitored by the Australian government, and the Library has copies of two charts detailing the elaborate structure of command and trails of influence reaching back to Berlin which the Third Reich constructed in order to influence Germans far away from the Fatherland. The charts were prepared at Sydney Police headquarters and presented to Australian Army Headquarters in January 1940, along with information from other states on Nazi activities in Australia. The comprehensive detail in the NSW charts shows how closely the authorities monitored three key Nazi outlets based in Sydney: the German Consulate General, the central office of



Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei  
*Nazi Party Organisation in Germany and Australasia*  
 c.1930  
 illustrated broadside;  
 48.0 x 76.0 cm  
 National Library of Australia

the Australian branch of the Nazi Party and a local German newspaper, *Die Brücke*.

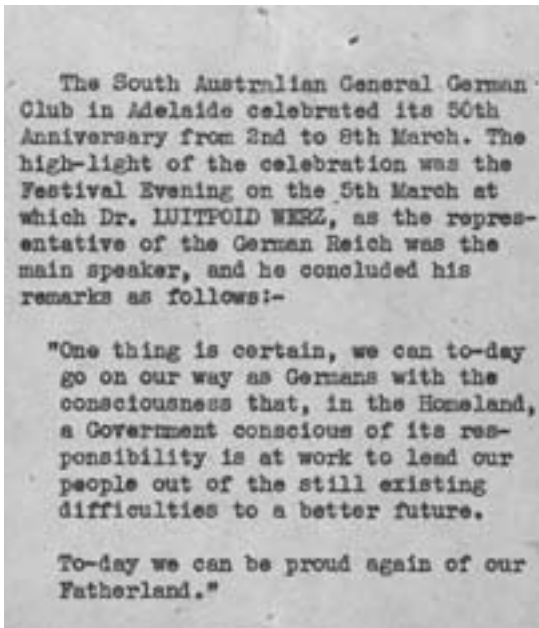
*Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*), published monthly in German and English between 1934 and 1939, reportedly had only a small distribution and lost money. Its survival was ensured through the support of the German Consulate General and, as such, it became one of the public faces of Nazi propaganda in Australia. The National Library holds complete sets of *Die Brücke* in hard copy and microfilm. Trade and economic news, political reports and favourable accounts of life under the Third Reich featured along with images of traditional German culture. Significantly, *Die Brücke* regularly included reports on German clubs and societies around Australia. As a result, generous space was given to the 50th-anniversary celebrations of the South Australian German Association in March 1936. Thanks to these lengthy reports, a short report in the *Advertiser* and two pieces of ephemera in the Library's collection, this important event can be reconstructed.

Anticipating the celebrations in March, the German Consul in Adelaide, Dr Hellenthal, visited the German Club on 20 February 1936. He delivered a rousing speech urging expatriate Germans to appreciate the 'New Germany', hoping that the 50th-anniversary celebrations would unite all German

comrades. The Wessel song was sung and a threefold Sieg Heil salute was given to Hitler.

A week of celebrations followed including a concert and ball, a card evening, an occasion variously described as a 'gentlemen's evening' or 'smoke social' and, finally, a family excursion to Hahndorf for a picnic. The feature of the all-male social evening on 5 March was a lengthy speech by Dr Luitpold Werz, the attaché from the German Consulate General in Sydney. A small typed card in the Library's collection gives a brief summary of the speech. *Die Brücke* quoted the speech at length, highlighting his appeal to overseas Germans to unite and appreciate the Fatherland. *Die Brücke* duly reported the performance of the Wessel song and a threefold Sieg Heil salute to the Führer, the German People and the Fatherland. Congratulations were delivered from the Third Reich's Minister for Foreign Affairs in Berlin.

The opening 'grand' concert and ball was reported only briefly by *Die Brücke*. It did, however, specifically mention the program handed to guests—'The tastefully printed anniversary programme was decorated with the swastika flag in the German colours of black-white-red.' It is not often that a piece of ephemera such as a program warrants specific mention in print. One can assume



to the club's premises as a home for German culture. Other musical items included a patriotic Prussian march by Richard Wagner, the romance of a Strauss Viennese waltz, Schubert's *Serenade* and two compositions by popular contemporary composer Robert Stoltz, including the title song from his hit operetta *White Horse Inn*. Stoltz's lilting music would have been familiar to members of the German Club as the show had been staged in Adelaide by J.C. Williamson's company only four months before the club's anniversary.

Note describing the visit of Dr Luitpold Werz, representative of the German Reich South Australian German Association  
*50 Stiftungsfest des Sued-Australischen Allgemeinen Deutschen Vereins Inc., 1886-1936*  
 nla.aus-vn875770

The two national anthems were included in the concert but, for once, there were no reports of the Wessel song or Sieg Heil salutes being performed. Perhaps the intrusion

of Nazi propaganda had its limits as far as some local German-Australians were concerned. that the prominent inclusion of the swastika, and thus the promotion of the Third Reich, merited the paper's attention. As this program is the only source of details of the concert, it is fortunate that a copy is in the Library's collection.

Members of the German Association and club delivered four important speeches at the concert but, notably, there were none by German consular representatives. Reflecting the strong musical traditions of the club, there were no less than 11 musical items with instrumental solos, bands and singers performing Austrian and German music. Mozart was represented with the famous bass aria from *The Magic Flute* 'In diesen heiligen Hallen' paying tribute to a hallowed hall; no doubt it was an emotional reference

The Third Reich's propaganda machine in Australia, aimed at selling Hitler and the 'new' Germany to expatriate Germans, was a highly organised and persistent operation. Several key items in the Library's collection provide intriguing evidence of this aspect of the political and social mosaic in Australia in the years leading to World War II.

RICHARD STONE is a consultant on ephemera and Australian performing arts. His book, *Fragments of the Everyday: A Book of Australian Ephemera*, was published by the National Library in 2005

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