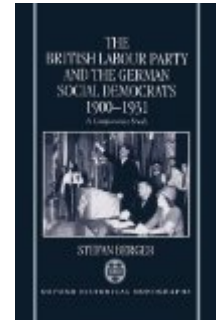


**Stefan Berger.** *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931: A Comparative Study.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. 306 S. \$195.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-820500-5.



**Reviewed by** Fergal Lenehan

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Stefan Berger's *The British Labour Party And The German Social Democrats 1900- 1931*, published first in 1994 and republished in 2002, is an extensive and very well-researched, if, at times, somewhat dull, comparative study of what he terms the 'working class parties' of both Britain and Germany. His main argument, that both parties have more in common than the *sonderweg* historiography of both countries would suggest, is thoroughly convincing and repeatedly well argued. The publication suffers, though, from an occasional overloading of detail, slowing down the narrative.

Berger sticks slavishly to the nation-state as a structuring agent for his study, which becomes problematic in the British case as the state with which he is dealing is not a classical nation-state but a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and, post 1922, of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Berger evades this complexity by simply ignoring Irish socialism. He states that the "various labour movements all took shape as national movements" noting in a footnote that "for Britain it has to be said that the Labour Party never really

penetrated Ireland" (p 20). While the British Labour Party, indeed, never penetrated Ireland, the Irish Labour Party was successfully founded by the Edinburgh born James Connolly, was strongly connected to the trade union movement and dealt in an unusual mix of socialism and Irish republicanism and, after the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, became the main opposition party in the Dáil (the Irish parliament), until the entrance of the Fianna Fáil party in 1927. Thus, Berger conveniently ignores the substantial Irish Labour Movement, whose early leaders, Jim Larkin and James Connolly, were both British born of Irish extraction and who, especially the prolific essayist Connolly, were influential in both Britain and Ireland. The specific Irish context is, of course, separate but yet still wedded to the British context, and Ireland, until 1922, was a constituent part of the United Kingdom and it thus beggars belief that its substantial Labour movement is reflected merely in an ill informed footnote, rather than having a chapter of its own or, at the very least, being consciously left out of the narrative for reasons of space.

Apart, however, from this fairly substantial criticism of what Berger leaves out, his publication is well argued, at times extremely interesting and, indeed, is an important contribution to British-German studies.

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