

JÖ'rgen Zarusky. *Die deutschen Sozialdemokraten und das sowjetische Modell: Ideologische Auseinandersetzung und außenpolitische Konzeptionen, 1917-1933.* Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1992. 328 pp. DM 68,00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-55928-6.



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Originally written as a Munich dissertation under the supervision of Gerhard A. Ritter, this study focuses on a central problem in the history of German socialism: how the Social Democratic Party (SPD), at one time the world's most prestigious socialist movement, responded after 1917 to the new challenge posed by the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia. The author covers a great deal of familiar territory in his book, and the informed reader will encounter relatively few surprises in its pages. Zarusky has consciously limited his analysis to the highest levels of the Social Democratic party leadership and the party press; the grass roots, the *Parteibasis*, receive relatively little attention. Still, it offers an opportunity, from the perspective of the late 1980s and early 1990s, to reflect critically on the older works of such scholars as Harvey Leonard Dyck, Peter Loesche, David W. Morgan, Jakob Schissler, Robert F. Wheeler, and many others.

According to the author, the Social Democratic response to the Soviet model was conditioned by two factors. First, the Social Democrats were victims of their own "traditional deficits in foreign policy" (59); thus they found it difficult to develop a clear strategy toward Soviet Russia, where the Communists had loudly proclaimed their devotion to proletarian revolution. Second, that foreign-policy strategy was largely dictated by domestic considerations, especially the party's vexed relationship

with the USPD and the KPD. In short, Social Democratic perceptions of the Soviet state were "influenced by ideological traditions, inner-German concerns, and the necessity of reacting to the challenge posed by a state that understood itself to be socialist" (288). Despite such limitations, Zarusky argues, Social Democrats' hostile perceptions of the Soviet experiment were mostly justified. As a result, he calls into question Peter Loesche's well-known critique of the SPD's supposedly exaggerated and self-defeating anti-Bolshevism during the Weimar years.

The author's analysis proceeds chronologically rather than conceptually. The first section of the book focuses on the development of a negative Social Democratic perception of the Soviet regime in the context of the November revolution, internecine disputes with the USPD, and the political disillusionment of many German socialists with the outcome of Germany's own democratic experiment. By 1923, the political fronts within Germany's labor parties had become relatively stabilized. The SPD and the KPD remained deeply antagonistic; these feelings were exacerbated by the KPD's notorious and opportunistic espousal of the "Schlageter line" in 1923 and by the failure of the "German October" uprising in that same year. Finally, the Soviet regime's own increasingly authoritarian and intolerant behavior toward its foes, manifested by such incidents as the trial of the Socialist Rev-

olutionaries in 1922, suggested that, as Otto Wels put it some years later, the Soviet experiment had already become an example of how not to build socialism. Even left-wing Social Democrats who had initially sympathized with the revolutionary zeal of the Russian proletariat had become disillusioned with the Soviet state. As a result, Zarusky contends, by 1923 Social Democratic critics had already begun to liken Communism to fascism, thus anticipating subsequent theories of totalitarianism – an analysis with which he himself sympathizes.

Although they rejected attempts to isolate or punish the Soviet state, after 1923-24 party leaders had become firmly committed to a “Western orientation” in German foreign policy; at the same time they spurned repeated efforts by the Soviets and their KPD allies to encourage grass-roots “united-front” efforts within the German working class. Indeed, some of the most interesting sections of Zarusky’s book concern the SPD’s vehemently negative responses to Soviet-supported visits by German “workers’ delegations” to the homeland of proletarian revolution. Equally interesting is his judicious assessment of the Social Democrats’ complex reaction to Soviet-German military cooperation during the middle years of the Weimar Republic. The SPD’s hostility to the Soviet regime intensified after 1927, with the final triumph of Stalin (the “Red Duce,” as some Social Democrats styled him), the Comintern’s shift to its notorious “social fascism” line, and domestic disputes with the KPD. To be sure, many prominent Social Democrats, such as Friedrich Stampfer, realized after 1930 that National Socialism represented a significantly greater danger than “Bolshevism,” either of the home-grown or Soviet variety. At the same time, the left wing of the SPD remained divided in its assessment of Soviet industrialization and collectivization strategies; these divisions, as the author rightly notes, contributed to the establishment of the short-lived SAP during the Republic’s last years. And so, Zarusky concludes, SPD views of the Soviet state remained essentially negative until the end, despite the

continued ambivalence of left-wing Social Democrats.

Critical to the development of Social Democratic perceptions of Soviet Russia was the influence of exiled Mensheviks; and the author does a particularly good job of assessing their role within the SPD. So, for example, he convincingly emphasizes the extremely important activities of Alexander Stein, a Russian socialist who had arrived in Germany before the First World War and was thoroughly familiar with both countries. He has thoroughly studied the papers of other Mensheviks located at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam; and he frequently cites *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, the journal of the Menshevik exiles, in addition to the German Social Democratic party press. Still, one wonders if he could not have made more effective use of Russian-language documents, especially of Soviet provenance. To be sure, Soviet archives were not accessible to him at the time that he wrote this study, and this reviewer does not know if recently available archival materials would have been helpful.

In sum, Zarusky’s study is competent, thorough, and interesting, though it contains few surprises. In the end, however, it is a bit disappointing. Many German monographs conclude with a summary that offers a *Rueckblick und Ausblick*. This book, however, does not incorporate an *Ausblick* into its conclusion; and thus the reader does not learn about the ways in which Weimar-era experiences might have affected subsequent Social Democratic perceptions of the Soviet Union. Such perceptions were of great significance, both during the years of exile and persecution after 1933 and during the Cold War after 1945. One only has to think of Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* or of the conversations between the SPD and the SED in the late 1980s to be reminded of their importance.

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