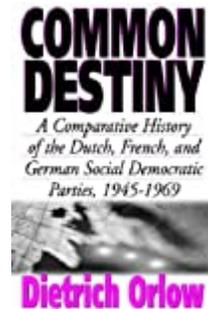


Dietrich Orlow. *Common Destiny: A Comparative History of the Dutch, French, and German Social Democratic Parties, 1945-1969.* New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000. xi + 370 pp. \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-185-1; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57181-225-4.



Reviewed by William G. Gray (Department of History, Purdue University)

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Social Democracy's March to the Mainstream

At a time when historians of Germany are pondering what to do about the classic narrative of the nation-state, Dietrich Orlow's recent solution is to write comparative history. The approach has often been applied to the era of dictatorships, with the "common destiny" of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy finding particular resonance.[1] Scholars writing on the GDR have also explored significant parallels with the experience of "people's democracies" in Eastern Europe.[2] Among the burgeoning literature on West Germany, however, there seems only one standard point of reference: East Germany. Surprising as it may sound, Dietrich Orlow is one of the first scholars to produce a detailed, archivally researched comparison between West German developments and those of its Western European neighbors in the decades after 1945.

Orlow is best known as a political historian, with multi-volume studies of the NSDAP and Weimar Prussia to his credit. In this monograph he turns his attention to three Social Democratic parties: the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO); the Labor Party (PvdA) in the Netherlands; and the classic Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). All of them entered the

postwar era with class-based political programs; by the end of the 1960s, all of them had mastered the transformation into less ideological mass parties. This, presumably, is the "common destiny" projected in the title. Yet there is nothing monotonous about this tale of transition. Orlow's three cases develop along distinctive trajectories, reflecting differences in party structure, coalition choices, and of course the contrasting postwar experiences of the countries in question.

It was the Dutch PvdA that first abandoned Marxism. In a useful background chapter outlining the "parallel pasts" of the three parties, Orlow points out that the PvdA's predecessor had already started moving toward the mainstream in the late 1930s. In an effort to break down the "pillarization" [*verzuiling*] of Dutch politics, Protestant theorist Willem Banning reached out to liberal Catholics with an ethos of ethical, Christian socialism. After liberation in 1945, Banning led the reconstituted Labor Party to endorse a program that would remain remarkably consistent for the next two decades: pronounced anti-communism; an end to anti-clericalism; and advocacy of the welfare state. The Dutch "pillars"

remained stubbornly intact, but the PvdA would—with a few brief interruptions—proceed to govern comfortably in coalition with liberals or the Catholic People’s Party for much of the 1950s. In the person of Willem Drees, a cynical but pragmatic tactician, the Labor Party actually held the prime minister’s post throughout the decade.

To the south, France’s SFIO also advanced to become a key player in the ever-shifting coalition politics of the Fourth Republic. Orlow characterizes the party as hopelessly divided on major issues—above all decolonization and German rearmament. Helped by an immense literature on this topic in French, both analytical and autobiographical, the author does a superb job of illuminating the structural tensions within the SFIO. When the Socialists shared in power, who actually represented the party—the cabinet ministers, the parliamentary delegation, or the party bureaucracy? The lattermost body, under the jealous guardianship of Guy Mollet, successfully asserted its primacy on most occasions. As prime minister of France in 1956–57, Mollet could be as opportunistic as the next politician; but as general secretary of the SFIO, he clung stubbornly to the maxims of anti-clericalism and “socialisme pur et dur.” Orlow scarcely disguises his impatience with Mollet, and indeed the reader is left wondering how this rigid figure retained control of the SFIO apparatus into the late 1960s. Ultimately, renewal came from outside, as the eternally malleable François Mitterrand swept the SFIO into a more all-encompassing party of the left, the Parti Socialiste (PS).

For most readers, Orlow’s discussion of the SPD will prove less revealing. There are few surprises here. All the same, it is worth learning where the party stood within the broader spectrum of social democratic parties. Kurt Schumacher’s pronounced nationalism aroused distaste within the SFIO and especially the PvdA; both of those parties showed considerably more enthusiasm for European integration. Schumacher and his successor, Erich Ollenhauer, reacted negatively to every major European program of the decade 1945–1955: the Ruhr Statute, the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Defense Community, and especially the plan to internationalize the Saar under the auspices of the Council of Europe. Despite obvious tensions among the three Social Democratic parties under consideration, Orlow demonstrates that their special feeling of kinship could have a significant impact on European outcomes. In late 1955, when voters in the Saar rejected a plan for Europeanization (a plan proposed, incidentally, by a Dutch Social Democrat), the SFIO gracefully acceded in that territory’s return to Germany. Two years later, the three So-

cial Democratic parties played a pivotal yet seldom remembered role in founding the European Common Market. The SFIO and PvdA were, after all, leaders of the coalitions that negotiated the Treaty of Rome. For its part, the SPD in Bonn—persuaded at last by the merits of integration—refrained from the kind of obstructionism that had hampered earlier European initiatives. Orlow’s presentation thus serves as a helpful corrective to standard German narratives of the 1950s, which tend to focus on the Christian Democratic (or even Catholic *Abendland*) roots of a common European identity.

In general, the author has less to say about the 1960s, particularly in the case of the SPD. Orlow seems fixated on the achievements of the Godesberg generation: Fritz Erler, Karl Schiller, and of course Willy Brandt. These were pivotal figures, to be sure, and the SPD’s incremental rise to power was undoubtedly a reflection of their success in modernizing the party’s program and structure. And yet this analysis provides little sense of the strains that were to erupt the moment Brandt assumed the chancellorship in 1969. Those new members streaming into the SPD in this period (a clear contrast to the SFIO’s wan membership base) would soon push the party sharply to the left. Orlow’s omission here is all the more curious since he describes the process so well in the Dutch case. A younger generation, the “Nieuw Links,” made significant inroads into the PvdA after 1966—both its leadership council and the parliamentary group. This “new left” stressed quality-of-life issues rather than “beefsteak socialism”; favored government intervention to break down barriers to complete social freedom; and demanded a sharp rise in Dutch aid to the developing world. More problematically, the “new left” sought to polarize Dutch politics by disavowing any further cooperation with the bourgeois camp. In Orlow’s account, Joop den Uyl, a bridge-builder in the Dutch parliament, saved the PvdA from a potentially disastrous slide into complete unelectability.

On balance, Orlow’s exploration of these three parties is successful enough that it leaves this reviewer wanting more—more, perhaps, than can be expected of a single painstakingly researched monograph. It may be true that, given the Continental integration of the 1950s and 1960s, Britain’s Labour Party did not really fit the main themes of this study. Even so, it would have been helpful to learn more about British influence upon these fellow members of the Socialist International—particularly in the 1940s, when the most ambitious Labour government of the century governed in London. Is it a coincidence that the Dutch organization changed its name from

the German-sounding Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) to the Party of Labor in 1946? By focusing on the interaction of three parties, the author leaves the (perhaps unintended) impression that they each functioned as one another's principal conversation partners.

Minor inconveniences detract somewhat from the book's readability. A chart detailing the various coalitions of the period would have been helpful, so that readers could keep track of when these parties came in and out of government. The author's organizational choices are not always clear; chapters 4 through 6 overlap quite a bit, but with just enough new material each time to require a look at each. Those who wish to skip selectively through this work will have to rely heavily on the index. Orlow's prose flows along smoothly enough, but one might wish for more extensive quotations from the source material. One learns much here about the issues confronting the parties and the content of their responses—but not the tenor of their pronouncements.

That being said, this is a solid comparative analysis that will serve historians of Europe well.

Notes

[1]. See MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). It is an unfortunate coincidence that Knox's study and Orlow's appeared in the same year with such similar titles.

[2]. For two prominent examples, see John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998). It may be that the professional structure of the field "East Central Europe" lends itself more naturally to comparative projects.

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