

The belated party. Influences on the British Labour Party in its formative years, 1900 - 1931¹

In comparison with most working-class parties in Western Europe, the British Labour Party can be seen as a latecomer. In Germany the SPD was founded in 1875, in Spain the PSOE in 1879, in Austria the SPÖ in 1888/1889, in Switzerland the SPS in 1888, in Sweden the SAP in 1889 and, finally, in Italy the PSI in 1892. In contrast, the Labour Representation Committee was founded in 1900 changing its name to Labour Party only in 1906. What is more, as a mass party, Labour got off the ground only after a programmatic and organizational renewal at the end of the First World War. By that time, continental working-class parties had been in existence for a quarter of a century and more. The considerable organizational and ideological experience of these parties was available to the Labour Party which joined the International Socialist Bureau in 1908 and maintained close contacts with labour movements in the English-speaking world.

British Labour historians so far have ignored the impact of other working-class parties on the development of the Labour Party after 1900. The prevailing view on the Labour Party is therefore that it was an inward-looking, isolationist, 'little-Englander' party which was influenced almost exclusively by peculiarly British antecedents.² This article will challenge this assumption by establishing both the national and also the international context in which the British Labour Party was developing.

Five groups of organisations need to be looked at: First, the early labour movement organizations in Britain, in particular the trade unions, the co-operative movement and the smaller socialist parties and societies, like the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the Socialist League and the Clarion Fellowships. Prominent members of the Labour Party often began their careers in these smaller organizations. Their experiences naturally influenced the way in which they consigned the outlook of the Labour Party.

Secondly, the other established parties need to be considered. Prominent Labour leaders started their political careers with the Liberal Party. As the second major established party the Conservative Party cannot be left out. Nor can the Irish Party be left out, because its

¹ I am grateful to David Jackson and Keith Laybourn for reading drafts of this article and making a number of very helpful suggestions.

² This has been argued particularly by J. H. Steward Reid, *The Origins of the Labour Party*, Minnesota 1955, p. 45; Stephen Yeo, *Socialism, the State and some Oppositional Englishness*, in: Robert Colls/ Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness. Politics and Culture 1880 - 1920*, London 1986, p. 312; Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought. A History*, 2nd edn., London 1986, p. 17. Also an underlying topic in: Douglas J. Newton, *British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace, 1889 - 1914*, Oxford 1985.

existence as an intra-parliamentary pressure group came to be important for the Labour Party's self-perception before 1914. It is, after all, reasonable to suppose that these older British parties also had an impact on the newcomer trying to establish itself within the national framework of politics.

Thirdly it will further be necessary to look at the non-conformist churches and more specifically at Methodism and Congregationalism as immensely influential organisations for the Labour Party.

Fourthly, we have to consider the United States and Australia and their labour movements. Given that ties of language and culture were very strong, the success of the Australian Labour Party early in the twentieth century ensured that its British equivalent paid close attention to developments on the other side of the globe.

Fifthly, we should remember that Britain is a European country. Fog in the channel did not always cut it off the continent, and the socialist movement there with its wealth of organizational and political experience was too close to Britain not to have any impact at all. The German SPD in particular - as a model party within the Second International - decisively shaped the Labour Party's formative years.

The influence of early labour and socialist organizations in Britain

At the second annual conference of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), the President of the conference, W. J. Davis, in his address, put the LRC firmly into a tradition of British labour leaders and organisations. George Odger, Henry Broadhurst, the National Labour League, the Birmingham Labour Association, the Lib-Lab Members of Parliament, the Progressive Party are all described as stepping stones towards independent labour representation.³ In fact, the LRC was not the first attempt to increase working-class representation in parliament. Another prominent effort had been made in 1887 with the foundation of the Labour Electoral Association (LEA). T. R. Threlfall, its secretary, remained a Liberal, however, whose ultimate aim was not independence, but to force the local Liberal parties to adopt more Lib-Lab candidates. He supported Keir Hardie in the mid-Lanark elections of March 1888 when Hardie found it impossible to win the nomination by the local Liberal Association:

„Of course you will find the Irish party difficult to deal with ... They have become the obedient servants of the official Liberal Party. Defeat the latter and your point is gained.

³ Report of the Second Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 20 February 1902, London 1902, p. 14 f.

May I strongly urge upon you to immediately form in the division you are about to contest, a Labour Electoral Association and at once affiliate it with this centre."⁴

Despite the LEA's ultimately Liberal credentials, this had been a beginning, and those socialists who in 1900 advocated the creation of an independent party of labour had the experience of the LEA to look back to.

It is certainly typical of many trade unionists at the time that Davis (a Liberal who later became a factory inspector) completely failed to mention the socialist groups in Britain which had been a prominent force in bringing about and shaping the development of the LRC. Especially the ILP (founded in 1893) and its forerunner, the Scottish Labour Party (SLP, founded in 1888) had provided inspiration for the LRC. The latter's draft constitution was in fact almost identical to the one adopted for the LRC in 1900. The federal structure of the SLP was to include trade unions as well as socialist societies. Such a conception of a working-class party was born out of the recognition that no socialist party in Britain could hope to establish itself as an independent mass party in its own right.

In the first decade of its existence the LRC concentrated almost exclusively on the all-important task of bringing the trade union movement behind the cause of independent labour representation. This task was completed in 1908 when the last major union, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, affiliated to the Labour Party. Given the unions have formed the backbone of the party ever since, it is hardly surprising that union money and union officers should have remained of central importance for the organisation of the Labour Party. As Ross McKibbin has pointed out, the formal organisation of the Labour Party consistently imitated the big trade union organisations with their national executives, their pyramidal structures and their secretariats.⁵ As early as 1892 Keir Hardie had argued that any independent party of labour had to be based on the model of the TUC: a conference and a national executive which would correspond to the parliamentary committee of the TUC. The high degree of autonomy of local parties from the national party also found its precedent in the autonomy of unions from the TUC.⁶ When trade unionists repeatedly attacked what they regarded as the undue influence of socialists on the National Executive Committee of the LRC at the 1905 conference, J. R. Clynes directly invoked the model of the trade unions to justify party practice: he referred to the General Federation's and the TUC's own practice of allowing representatives of small societies with equal voting power onto their national committees.⁷

⁴ Letter T. R. Threlfall to Hardie of 23 March 1888, in: Correspondence of F. Johnson, 88/6, held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London.

⁵ Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910 - 1924*, Oxford 1974, p. 241.

⁶ Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880 - 1900*, Oxford 1954, p. 113.

⁷ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 26 - 28 January 1905, London 1905, p. 50.

At a local level, the trades councils often had an influential input into the formation of local Labour parties. Until well into the 1920s, the money and personnel of the trades councils dominated labour organisation in many constituencies. Trades councils were often the first permanent Labour organisations in the localities. This meant that by the turn of the century they could look back on considerable organizational experience - in particular in holding recruiting drives for local unions, in helping new union branches getting established, in supporting striking workers financially, in acting as a political pressure group and also in providing labour supporters with a whole range of social activities ranging from trades halls to bands and choirs to local labour newspapers. Trades councils were also important sponsors of some of the most well-known regional labour papers, e.g. the Leicester Pioneer, the Woolwich Pioneer and the Bradford Pioneer. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the ILP and, later on, the local LRCs learnt that they could only be successful if they tapped both the organizational experience and the financial and electoral support of the local trades councils.⁸ The official policy of the Labour Party's headquarter recognized the importance of trades councils for any local Labour organisation and recommended local mergers between the industrial and political organisations so as to streamline the party organisation and make it more efficient.

The national leaders of the Labour Party were keen to see the development of local Labour parties. When MacDonald and Henderson published an agent's handbook as guidance for local party organisers in 1903, they picked out MacDonald's own constituency, Leicester, as a model. Whilst the ILP and the trades council in particular were seen as providing labour supporters with social, educational and cultural activities,⁹ the LRC was meant to

⁸ On the relationship between trades councils and local Labour parties see especially Alan Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain 1900 - 1940*, Manchester 1977, p. 51 f.; K. O. Fox, *The Emergence of the Political Labour Movement in the Eastern Section of the South Wales Coalfield, 1894 - 1910*, University of Wales M.A. 1965, p. 24; K. Laybourn, *The Trade Unions and the ILP: The Manningham Experience*, in: J. A. Jowitt and R.K.S. Taylor (eds.), *Bradford 1890 - 1914: the Cradle of the ILP*, Bradford 1980, p. 41; G.W. Jones, *Borough Politics, a Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888 - 1964*, London 1969, p. 123 f.; *Bedford Politics 1900 - 1924*, Bedford 1986, pp. 4 - 6; Keith Teanby, 'Not Equal to the Demand': Major Concerns of the Doncaster Divisional Labour Party, 1918 - 1939, University of Sheffield M.Phil. 1985, p. 15 f., 62 f.; Celia Minoughan, *The Rise of the Labour Party in Northumberland: Wansbeck Labour Party 1918 - 1950*, and David Clarke, *South Shields Labour Party*, both in: *Working Class Politics in North-East England*, ed. by M. Callcott/ R. Challinor, Newcastle upon Tyne 1983, pp. 80 f., 99; John Boughton, *Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield, 1918 - 1931*, University of Warwick Ph.D. 1985, p. 155; Edmund and Ruth Frow, 'To Make that Future. Now!' A History of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, Manchester 1976, pp. 68 - 70; W. Hamling, *Short History of the Liverpool Trades Council*, Liverpool 1948, p. 27 f.; Rex Pope/Frank Sherritt, *Ipswich and District Trades Council 1885 - 1967*, Ipswich 1969, p. 13.

⁹ David Howell, *British Workers and the ILP 1888 - 1906*, Manchester 1983; Stephen Yeo, *A New Life: the Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883 - 1896*, in: HWJ, no. 4, 1977, pp. 5 - 56; J. A. Fincher, *The Clarion Movement. A Study of a Socialist Attempt to Implement the Co-operative Commonwealth*, University of Manchester M.A. 1971. For the lasting influence of the Socialist League on the Norwich labour movement, for example, see Stephen Cherry, *Doing Different? Politics and the Labour Movement in Norwich*, Norwich 1989. Often it had been the working class radicalism of the first half of the 19th century which had served as

concentrate on electoral politics.¹⁰ Leicester was fairly typical. Despite the efforts of Henderson and MacDonald in 1912 to introduce individual membership, the Labour Party did not follow their advice until after the First World War, when the Labour Party sought to establish a dense network of local parties. Neighbourhood-based educational and cultural activities were developed and in some of these local parties individual membership was energetically promoted. In the case of Leicester Bill Lancaster found a continuity between the social activities of the ILP in the late 19th century and the Labour Party at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹ The Labour Clubs of the 1920s could build on the experience of earlier clubs founded by the the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (CIU) and the ILP.¹² James Middleton, assistant party secretary at the time, referred directly to the Clarion movement as a potential model for the post-war Labour Party:

„Labour is not so well on the way to the Socialist state that it can lightly let go the plain talk and cheerful fellowship that gave The Clarion its influence in the old days.“¹³

Efforts to establish a Labour Party press in the 1920s could also look back to earlier working-class papers like The Clarion, Beehive, Miner, Workmen's Times, Workers' Cry, Labour Elector and Labour Leader.¹⁴

Many local studies of Labour politics seem to confirm the picture that the ILP activists often formed the nucleus of the new Labour Party branches in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In Manchester party structure, programme and all officials of the new local Labour Party after 1918 were adopted from the ILP.¹⁵ Ramsay MacDonald argued in 1922 that the ILP remained the backbone of local Labour Party organisation:

„It [the ILP] has created the more comprehensive political organisation, it largely mans and officers its [the Labour Party's] local branches as well as Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, its members are immersed in the responsibilities of local government“.¹⁶

a model for the socialist groups of the 1880s and 1890s. For the West Riding this has been argued by E. P. Thompson, *Homage to Tom Maguire*, in: Asa Briggs/John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History*, London 1960, p. 280.

¹⁰ Arthur Henderson/ Ramsay MacDonald, *Notes on Organisation and the Law of Registration and Elections*, London 1903. This picture is largely confirmed by D. Cox, *The Labour Party in Leicester: a Study in Branch Development*, in: *International Review of Social History* (= IRSH) 6 (1961), p. 210.

¹¹ Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism. Leicester Working Class Politics 1860 - 1906*, Leicester 1987.

¹² T. G. Ashplant, *The Working Men's Club and Institute Union (CIU) and the ILP: Working Class Organisation, Politics and Culture c. 1880 - 1914*, University of Sussex Ph.D. 1983.

¹³ J. S. Middleton, *Distant Echoes of the 'The Clarion'*, in: *The Labour Magazine* 2 (1923/1924), p. 259.

¹⁴ Those working class papers and journals in turn were vigorously demanding the setting up of an independent party of labour throughout the second half of the 19th century and particularly in the 1880s and 1890s.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Hill, *Manchester and Salford Politics and the Early Development of the ILP*, in: IRSH 26 (1981), p. 197. See also: Cyril Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics. A Study of the Liberal and Labour Politics in Gwynedd 1900 - 1920*, Hull 1970, p. 69.

¹⁶ Ramsay MacDonald, *The 'Socialist Review Outlook*, in: *The Socialist Review* 19 (1922), p. 226 f.

Egerton Wake, the national organiser of the Labour Party after 1918, for example, first worked as an organiser and propagandist for the ILP and later on for the Barrow Labour Party.¹⁷

Apart from trades councils and socialist groups, another influence on the post 1918 local Labour Parties were those few parties with an active party life, like Barnard Castle, Barrow, Clitheroe and Woolwich. Such parties had already developed permanent ward committees, an individual membership and women's sections before the First World War. The Woolwich Labour Party, for example, built up ward committees to look after individual members as early as 1903, and an average of 150 ward meetings were held each year. The ward parties stressed the importance of a developed and large social life, including concerts, choir singing, entertainment nights and the invitation of guest speakers.¹⁸ The Labour Party head office in 1924 publicised a pre-war scheme of the Barrow Labour Party to raise more money locally by appointing collectors in each ward who were responsible for one or two streets.¹⁹ Barnard Castle was Arthur Henderson's constituency before 1918, and he was important in establishing the impressive electoral machine there. When he succeeded MacDonald as secretary of the Labour Party in 1912, Henderson made sure that Barnard Castle became a kind of model constituency for others to emulate. Thus, even before 1914, he put into practice many of the features of local party organisation which then became formalised in 1918 with the adoption of the new Labour Party constitution.

Another, albeit less important, influence on the Labour Party was the co-operative movement. Like the trade unions, it preceded the politically independent Labour Party, indeed often by as much as half a century. Right from its foundation in 1900 the LRC recognized the potential of the co-operative movement and invited co-operators to join it. The response of the co-operative movement to the formation of the LRC was however largely negative.²⁰ Only the Tunbridge Wells Co-operative Society affiliated to the Labour Party during the first decade of its existence.²¹ The voluntarist ideals of the co-operative movement, many of their national leaders' attachment to political Liberalism and the resistance of many others to commit themselves politically to any party meant that the Labour Party could not win the support of the co-operative movement. The situation only changed due to the co-operatives' war-time experience, when they found themselves largely ignored by the government. In 1917 it created its own political party, the Co-operative Party in order to contest national and municipal elections - often in close alliance with the Labour

¹⁷ Herbert Tracey, Egerton Wake, in: *Labour Organiser*, April 1926, p. 62 f.

¹⁸ *25 Years History of the Woolwich Labour Party 1903 - 1928*, Woolwich 1928.

¹⁹ *The Labour Organiser*, September 1924, p. 4 f.

²⁰ Frank Bealey/ Henry Pelling, *Labour and Politics*, p. 38 f. Only in Scotland, Wales and the Bristol area was there support for an independent party of labour.

²¹ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The Consumers' Co-operative Movement*, London 1921, p. 267.

Party. With six and a half million members in 1931 the co-operative movement's support for the Labour Party was obviously of immense importance to the fortunes of the party.

Co-operative societies had often established a network of institutions for workers to spend their leisure time in. These included reading rooms, working men's clubs, libraries and halls. In many places the Labour Party could not only use these institutions as meeting places; it could also build on the established co-operative networks to support the Labour Party financially and organizationally. In Faversham for example, the local Labour Party met regularly at the co-operative library.²² The London Labour Party reported in the mid-1920s cordial relations with the Co-operative movement which resulted in the later giving „substantial support“ to the LLP.²³ The Co-operative Women's Guild (1883) was an important inspiration to the Women's Labour League, founded in 1906, as well as a constant advocate of a closer alliance between co-operators and the Labour Party. By 1914 it organised 32.000 women in 611 branches up and down the country.²⁴ The extensive recreational, social and educational activities of the co-operative movement often served as an inspiration to the Labour Party's own activities after 1918.

To summarise so far: if the Labour Party can be seen as both a latecomer and a late developer, the labour movement in Britain was decidedly not. Therefore the Labour Party had a number of organisations and their experience to look back to in its own efforts to get itself established as a major political party in Britain. The most important influences were the socialist parties and groups founded in the 1880s and 1890s, the trade unions, the trade councils and the co-operative movement. In fact, it could be argued that it was the very strength of the British labour movement, and especially the strength of British trade unionism, which postponed the emergence of an independent working-class party in Britain in comparison with its continental neighbours.

The influence of other British parties

Once established, the Labour Party had to look towards replacing one of the two major parties in the two-party political system of the United Kingdom. Its leaders, therefore, looked towards the existing parties to see whether or not they had something to learn from them.

The Conservatives' ability to adapt to modern mass politics not only made the working class Tory a persistent phenomenon in British politics, it also influenced the Labour Party's efforts to create institutional structures for electoral mobilisation. This was true in particular

²² Labour Party Archive, Minutes of the Faversham Labour Party, 1918.

²³ Annual Report of the E.C. of the LLP, 1927/1928, p. 13.

²⁴ Christine Collette, For Labour and for Women. The Women's Labour League, 1906 - 1918, Manchester 1989, p. 25.

of places like Preston where working-class Toryism was strong in the late 19th century.²⁵ In the inter-war years, the Conservative Party was a comprehensive, well-oiled electoral machine, training 450 professional organisers between 1924 and 1937.²⁶ The Conservatives also made effective use of the radio and of motor transport very early. Although precise figures for the Conservative Party are missing, it is probably a fair guess to say that individual membership figures in the local Conservative Associations were much higher in the 1920s than individual membership in the local Labour Parties. In the 1880s and 1890s the Primrose League, acting as a Conservative Social Club, was the largest political organisation in Britain and especially successful in mobilising women.²⁷

The Labour Party League of Youth in its efforts to win support for the idea of a Labour Party youth movement in Britain consciously referred to the Primrose Buds, the Junior Imperial League and Young Britain, all of which were Conservative youth groups with a membership running into the tens of thousands in the inter-war years. These organisations were seen as examples of how beneficial youth organisations could be to political parties:

„The activities of the Primrose League, Junior Imperial League, and many another anti-Socialist body which propagates its beliefs among the young, clearly showed the desirability for the speedy prosecution of the work [i.e. foundation of a Labour Party youth movement].“²⁸

At the end of the 19th century the majority of enfranchised workers, however, continued to support the Liberal Party. In those constituencies where the Liberal Party was dominant the Labour Party tended to be influenced by the former's organisation and appeal. Already in the 1880s the National Liberal Federation, the brainchild of Joseph Chamberlain, served as inspiration for the foundation of the Social Democratic Federation.²⁹ Many leading figures of the Labour Party had started their political careers as Liberals. Probably the most important one was Arthur Henderson. His in-depth experiences as a Liberal agent were certainly important in his handling of the organisation of the Labour Party as secretary between 1912 and 1934. One example is the stress he put on the importance of paid registration agents in the constituencies. Whilst MacDonald initially argued that voluntary workers would normally suffice for the registration work, Henderson, on the basis of his own experiences as a Liberal agent, objected vigorously:

„I would like you to consider for a moment the immense advantage it would be in the event of a sudden by-election, to be in a position to bring a dozen of these paid agents into the

²⁵ Michael Savage, *The Dynamics of Working Class Politics. The Labour Movement in Preston 1880 - 1940*, Cambridge 1987, p. 189.

²⁶ Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867 - 1939*, Oxford 1982, p. 249.

²⁷ Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880 - 1935*, Oxford 1985.

²⁸ W. Arthur Peacock, *Labour and the Coming Nation*, in: *The Labour Magazine* 5 (1926/1927), p. 306.

²⁹ Henry Pelling, *The Origins*, p. 17.

contest, giving one to each polling district, it would mean the difference between winning and loosing.³⁰

In Bermondsey, the founding figures first of the ILP and later of the local Labour Party, Alfred Salter and Charles Ammon, were deserters from the local Liberal Association.³¹ Their early experiences in the Liberal Party shaped their view of the Labour Party. The latter inherited not only a non-revolutionary tradition of working class politics from the Lib-Lab tradition, it also took over from that tradition the belief in parliamentary socialism.³² Indeed, in its appeals to the electorate, the Labour Party was always particularly careful not to attack Gladstonian Liberalism. On the contrary, it was argued time and again that the mantle of Gladstone had fallen on the shoulders of the Labour Party, that the Liberal Party was betraying Gladstone's legacy, and that the real interests of workers in the 20th century lay with the Labour Party. In its stress on 'reason', in its cautious adoption of state welfarism and in its stress on the independence, self-respect and dignity of the working class the Labour Party also modelled its appeal on the Liberal Party.³³ It is significant that in an article for the Labour Magazine, B.T. Hall should approvingly quote an 1875 speech of the Liberal Lord Roseberry:

„The principle upon which the Working Men's Club and Institute Union is based is that working men are to be raised by their own endeavours and are not to be patronised, fostered or dandled. All that is to be done for the working man is to be done by themselves.“³⁴

Efforts of the Labour Party in the late 1920s to build up a strong individual membership and separate organisations for women and the young were undoubtedly influenced by earlier efforts of the Liberal Party in the first decade of the twentieth century. The foundation of the Women's Labour League referred to the organisation of Liberal women in the Federation (1886) and the National Association (1892).³⁵ The aim of the Liberals was to make the party less dependent on wealthy benefactors, whereas the aim of Labour was to make the party less dependent on the trade unions. Neither, incidentally, was to be wholly successful. Equally, H. M. Richardson, secretary of the National Union of Journalists, writing about the necessity of building up Labour's own press empire in 1922, consciously referred to both

³⁰ Letter Henderson to MacDonald of 6 June 1903, in: LRC papers, BLPES, London.

³¹ Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, London 1949, p. 32.

³² John Shepherd, *Labour and Parliament: the Lib.-Labs. as the First Working Class MPs, 1885 - 1906*, in: E. Biagini/ A. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 187 - 213.

³³ Duncan Tanner, *Ideological Debate in Edwardian Labour Politics*, in: E. Biagini/ A. Reid, *Currents of Radicalism*, pp. 271 - 293. For Glasgow see Joan Smith, *Labour Tradition*, pp. 33 - 35.

³⁴ B.T. Hall, *Workmen's Clubs. An Organ of Democratic Reform*, in: *Labour Magazine* 1 (1922/23), p. 84 f.

³⁵ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge 1990, p. 289 f.

the Liberal and Conservative Parties which financed weekly papers. According to Richardson, Labour would do best to follow in their footsteps.³⁶

A professional organisation for party agents was established by the Liberals in 1882 and by the Conservatives in 1891. The Labour Party followed suit in 1915. Already by the 1880s both the Conservative and Liberal Parties sponsored local associations which often had their own premises complete with lecture hall, reading room and bar. Mass picnics and excursions were organized as a conscious effort to bind voters to the party through organizing social activities. Many of the Labour Clubs that were founded in the 1890s (and later) modelled themselves on Liberal and Conservative Clubs already in existence in a particular locality.³⁷ Of Ramsay MacDonald, also active in the Liberal Party in his early career, it has been said,

„for MacDonald the Labour Party was set firmly on the path already trod by the other two parties.“³⁸

The fact that the Labour Party followed that well-trodden path also explains a number of its more peculiar features, most notably the limited influence of the Labour Party conference over the actions of the Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons. Whilst conference decisions in continental working-class parties were clear guidelines for the parliamentary parties and actions against those guidelines the matter of long and strenuous debates, in Britain all Labour Party leaders from Keir Hardie onwards almost took it for granted that conference had no right to dictate policies to the PLP.

Furthermore, the Labour Party's character as a broad church was inspired by the non-programmatic nature of British party politics. Labour's unwillingness to adopt a firm programme until 1918 was directly linked to its leaders recognition that it would only serve to narrow the party's appeal. As David Shackleton's words reminded the stalwards of the 1905 conference of the LRC:

„In regard to the question of a programme for our Party, I think we shall do well to give all our attention to strengthening our organisation in the constituencies, and in that way make our Party more powerful in the House of Commons, rather than in taking up our time in discussing these matters of policy. The resolutions adopted from time to time by the workers of the country through the Trade Union Congress should, I think, suffice for many years. When we are able, by the strength of our Party in the House of Commons, to have a

³⁶ H.M. Richardson, *The Press Problem. How Labour Should Tackle it*, in: *Labour Magazine* 1 (1922/23), pp. 102 f.

³⁷ See, for example, David Clark, *Colne Valley: Radicalism to Socialism*, p. 32.

³⁸ W. L. Guttsman, *The British Political Elite*, London 1963, p. 257 f.

deciding voice in the Legislature of this country, then will it be soon enough for us to promulgate a programme."³⁹

A final example of how the experience of the British political system shaped the outlook of the Labour Party can be found in the Labour Party's effort to set up a whole range of advisory committees for various policy areas after 1918. The idea of obtaining specialist advice from intellectuals sympathetic to the labour movement was born out of Arthur Henderson's experience in the Cabinet and the War Emergency Workers' National Committee. Here Labour's most gifted organiser learnt the importance of research and information for the running of a government, and he transferred this experience to the running of an opposition party.⁴⁰

Whilst the two major parties had a major impact on the Labour Party's development, the Labour Party remained different from the Conservative and Liberal parties in important ways. As Neil Blewett has observed, the overlap between organisers and members of parliament in the Labour Party, the high degree of autonomy and the wide variety of its constituency organisation made the Labour Party organisation more complex than that of its rivals. At the same time, as Blewett also pointedly remarked, it was more rudimentary due to its lack of finance and resources.⁴¹ Until 1914 the national Labour Party was in fact little more than a parliamentary pressure group⁴² and as such looked towards the Irish National Party. One of the early socialists who sought to bring about an independent party of labour, H. H. Champion, amongst whose followers were some of the founding members of the Labour Party, already explicitly referred to the need to organise the Labour vote along the same lines as the Irish vote was organised. As one of the first programmatic manifestoes of Hardie's Scottish Labour Party made clear, it - like the Irish Nationalists - was to act as a pressure group on the established parties, particularly the Liberal Party, so as to achieve very specific demands of the trade union movement.⁴³ At the third annual conference of the LRC reference to the Irish National Party served those in favour of alliances with the established parties as well as those arguing for complete independence from the established parties. John Ward argued:

„take another noted illustration of the formation of a great political party - the Parnellite Party. Everybody admired the way in which Parnell marshalled his forces. Everybody knows that he always kept absolutely clear of any such resolution as this. [the resolution

³⁹ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 26 - 28 January 1905, London 1905, p. 39.

⁴⁰ F. M. Leventhal, Arthur Henderson, Manchester/ New York 1989, p. 102.

⁴¹ Neil Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People. The General Elections of 1910*, London 1972, p. 283.

⁴² Before 1914 it was, however, a rising local political force.

⁴³ Keir Hardie, *The Pioneer of the ILP*, in: *Socialist Review*, 1914.

favoured complete independence from the established British parties] Parnell supported Liberals or supported Tories as the occasion demanded.“⁴⁴

Keir Hardie replied:

„The Parnell movement was organised on an independent basis. Every Irish branch was a strictly non-political organisation, holding its force in reserve to use in any way the council told it. They desired their forces to be used in the same way.“⁴⁵

That Hardie had long thought of the Irish National Party as a model for an independent party of labour in Britain is confirmed by a letter to him of an old Parnellite, D. J. Sweeney who wrote in 1906:

„I remember chatting with you one evening some fifteen or sixteen years ago in the Democratic Club in Chancery Lane, and your telling me your dream was to do for the English and Scottish Labour masses what Parnell had done for the Irish, namely to create an Independent Labour Party in Parliament which would imitate in some respects the methods of the Irish Party“.⁴⁶

The influence of the churches

It has long been noted that there was a strand of Christian Socialism within the Anglican Church, most often connected to the teachings of F.D. Maurice, which fed into the formation of the British Labour Party.⁴⁷ Most writers on religion and socialism, however, have stressed that the stronger connections were between Labour and Nonconformism.⁴⁸ It was in particular the turn away from individualist theology, so characteristic of earlier Nonconformism, which facilitated a rapprochement between Nonconformist ministers and Labour. R. J. Campbell's 'New Theology' is probably the best example of how the new social concerns managed to infiltrate Nonconformist thinking.⁴⁹ Nonconformist ministers were increasingly to argue from the 1880s onwards that the Kingdom of God had to be realised in the present. The 109 nonconformist Liberal MPs sitting in the 1906 parliament formed the backbone of their party's support for Lib-Labism. From the 1880s onwards Nonconformist ministers founded Socialist Societies such as the Christian Socialist Society, the Christian Socialist League, the Free Church Socialist League, the New Church Socialist

⁴⁴ Report of the Third Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 19 February 1903, London 1903, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁶ Letter D. J. Sweeney to Hardie of 12 February 1906, in: F. Johnson correspondence, 06/71, held at the BLPES, London.

⁴⁷ Henry Pelling, *Origins*, p. 128.

⁴⁸ For a useful brief summary see Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Basingstoke 1984.

⁴⁹ R. J. Campbell, *The New Theology*, London 1907.

Society, and the Socialist Quaker Society. Many of those ministers and their disciples found their way into the labour movement and in particular into the ILP after 1893.

The importance attached by the Labour Party to charity and missionary work as well as to efforts to elevate workers to higher moral standards have their origins in the prevalence of the nonconformist conscience amongst many Labour MPs and activists. According to Chris Waters, much of the labour movement culture in Britain was rooted in middle-class Victorian missionary work.⁵⁰ Raphael Samuel has pointed out that the aristocratic ideal of noblesse oblige found its counterpart in the charity activities of local Labour Parties where the better-off workers set out to help their poorer brethren.⁵¹

The impact of evangelical revivalism on the Labour Party's successes is well documented.⁵² It is often linked to charismatic personalities such as Victor Grayson in the Colne Valley who for a time trained as a Unitarian minister in Manchester. He has been described by his biographer as „the spark which set the fire alight“.⁵³ Labour leaders often came from an evangelical, protestant, non-conformist background. Frank Hodges, after being „shot straight into the arms of religion“ by the Welsh revival of 1904, remained a life-long lay preacher for the Primitive Methodist Chapel.⁵⁴ Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden, Arthur Henderson, Ben Tillett and Fred Jowett were similarly influenced by revivalist evangelism. There can be hardly any doubt that the experiences of non-conformist lay preachers were often put to good use when they turned to Labour politics. Arthur Henderson and Ernest Bevin learnt how to speak as a Wesleyan and Baptist lay preacher respectively.

In fact, the Methodist and Congregationalist churches served as a further model for the organisation of the Labour Party. Important organizational features such as the 'class' meeting, the delegate conference and the travelling lecturer were all at home here. Equally the annual conference as supreme institution of the Methodist church anticipated the Labour Party annual conference. As R. F. Wearmouth pointedly remarked:

„Not only did Methodism give pioneers and advocates to the Trade Union movement but it also gave atmosphere and fervour, spirit, tone, and method. ... And it seems to me that ... in the solid membership of every popular movement in the country, from Trade Unionism to Co-operation, from Friendly and Temperance Societies, right up to the rapidly growing

⁵⁰ Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884 - 1914*, Manchester 1990, p. 192.

⁵¹ Raphael Samuel, *The Middle Class Between the Wars*, in: *New Socialist*, March/April 1983, p. 32.

⁵² Christopher B. Turner, *Conflicts of Faith? Religion and Labour in Wales 1890 - 1914*, in: Dean R. Hopkin/G.S. Kealey (eds.), *Class, Community and the Labour Movement*, (without location) 1989; Stanley Pierson, *British Socialists. The Journey from Fantasy to Politics*, Cambridge, Mass./ London 1979, pp. 138 - 147.

⁵³ David Clark, *Colne Valley*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ Frank Hodges, *My Adventures as a Labour Leader*, London 1925, p. 191.

Labour Party - perhaps the largest part is contributed by the various branches of the Methodist community.⁵⁵

The importance of the „ready-made organizational basis“ of Methodism and Congregationalism for the development first of the ILP and later of the Labour Party in County Durham and West Yorkshire is also confirmed by local studies. Bible classes particularly seem to have acted as a focus for the emergence of socialist ideas. Sometimes ex-chapels would be transformed into Labour halls. Congregationalist Sunday Schools turned socialist. Socialist choirs evolved out of church choirs.⁵⁶

How much the early socialist movement in Britain saw itself as a spiritual movement is confirmed by the establishment of so-called Labour Churches and Socialist Sunday Schools in the 1890s and beyond.⁵⁷ Founded by a Unitarian Minister, John Trevor, in Manchester in 1891, the Labour Churches quickly spread throughout the North-West of England in particular and, in its heydays in the mid-1890s, there were about 30 churches in Britain. The movement's journal, the Labour Prophet, edited by Trevor, had a circulation of 4500 copies a month in January 1892. It had been the social conservatism of the established churches and their disregard for the plight of the working classes which led Trevor to found a church for the working men and women which would address itself to their specific problems. In Trevor's view, the labour movement was first and foremost a spiritual movement. His church was a notable attempt to unite the left on the basis of Christian spirituality. Labour church meetings throughout the 1890s served as an important platform for socialist speakers and most of the early Labour Party leaders had been in contact with Trevor and his movement. When the ILP was founded in 1893, a Labour Church service was held and attended by about 5000 people. After 1893, ILP branches were active in setting up further Labour churches up and down the country.

In the Deerness Valley in County Durham and in the textile districts of Yorkshire and the West-Riding as well as in the Black Country, the influence of Primitive Methodists, Congregationalists and Nonconformists generally led to the widespread use of biblical

⁵⁵ R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes, 1850 - 1900*, Leicester 1954, p. 209 and 242. Following Wearmouth, many authors have stressed the influence of Methodism on Labour. However, it should be noted that Leonard Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour. Nonconformity and the Independent Labour Movement in Lancashire and the West Riding 1880-1914*, Keele 1993, p. 12 f. has convincingly argued that Wearmouth might be correct as far as trade unionism was concerned. After all, important unions such as the miners' union and the agricultural labourers' union were Methodist-led. But in regard to socialist organisations, the Old Dissent was more important because it was more democratic, more working-class and more attracted to the ideals of social justice.

⁵⁶ Robert Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics. The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community*, Cambridge 1974, pp. 170, 184 and 187. For the effects of Congregationalism on the ILP and Labour Party in West Yorkshire see Keith Laybourn/J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890 - 1918*, London 1984.

⁵⁷ On the Labour Church movement see K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, London 1963, pp. 215-249.

images and ‘Come to Jesus’ rhetoric in socialist propaganda. Socialism was perceived as a new vehicle for the old Radicalism, a moral crusade, a spiritual movement. The popularity of this type of socialist agitation is exemplified nowhere better than in the words of advice spoken to Fred Bramley, later secretary of the TUC, by the chairman of a meeting at Wibsey, near Bradford:

„Now look here Fred. Tha’ knaws they’re an ignorant lot at Wibsey, so don’t be trying any of that scientific socialism. We want no Karl Marx and surplus values and that sort of stuff. Make it plain and simple. Tha’ can put in a long word now and then so as to make them think tha knaws a lot, but keep it simple, and then when tha’rt coming to t’finishing up, tha’ mun put a bit of ‘Come to Jesus’ in, like Philip [Snowden] does.“⁵⁸

As Wesley Perrins, a Labour organizer in the Black Country recalled many years later: „the Labour movement was, in its origins, very largely a Christian crusade“.⁵⁹ In Scotland not even the ‘Red Clydesiders’ dared to oppose the power of the Church. Religion, W. W. Knox has argued, „continued to give the Labour movement in Scotland its distinctive style.“⁶⁰ And Arthur Henderson summed it all up in 1929 when he argued: „The political Labour movement ... received much of its driving force and inspiration from radical non-conformity. It is a demonstrable fact that the bulk of the members of the Parliamentary Labour Party at any given time during the last twenty-five years had graduated into their wider sphere of activity via the Sunday School, the Bible Class, the temperance society or the pulpit.“⁶¹

However, the many comments that can be found on the Christian origins of the British labour movement have led many authors to overemphasize the importance for the Labour Party of organised religion generally and Nonconformism in particular. British socialism was not simply a straightforward expression of the Sermon of the Mount. Throughout the formative period of the Labour Party the churches remained tightly linked to either Conservatism - in the case of the Anglican Church (often nicknamed ‘the Tory Party at Prayer’) and the Scottish Old Kirk - or Liberalism - in the case of Nonconformism, Roman Catholicism and the Scottish Free Kirk and United Presbyterians. Stephen Mayor has summed up the relationship between Labour Party and churches quite neatly: „In general the Churches remained very suspicious of Socialism, whatever it meant.“⁶² Anglican Christian Socialists were completely unrepresentative of the Anglican Church at large. The

⁵⁸ Cf. Peter d’A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival*, New Jersey 1968, p. 353.

⁵⁹ Eric Taylor, *An interview with Wesley Perrins*, in: *Bulletin for the Study of Labour History* 21 (1970), p. 18.

⁶⁰ W. W. Knox, *Religion and the Scottish Labour Movement c. 1900-1939*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 23 (1988), p. 626.

⁶¹ Arthur Henderson, *British Labour and Religion*, in: Jerome Davis (ed.), *Labor Speaks for itself on Religion*, New York 1929, pp. 144 f.

⁶² Stephen Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement*, London 1967, p. 280.

Nonconformist Anti-Socialist Union, founded in 1909 at Baptist Church House, expressed the hostility of large sections of middle-class Nonconformism to the labour movement. It campaigned heavily against 'political pulpits' and against Socialism as a threat to religion and British institutions.⁶³

In the light of the massive hostility of the churches towards an independent Labour Party and a socialist ILP, it cannot be surprising that the biblical, Christian rhetoric employed by many early Labour leaders was deliberately directed against organized Christianity. Socialists used it to express widespread eschatological sentiments and to win over the nonconformist sections of the working-class. (Anglicanism hardly had any urban working-class followers anyway by that time.) In one of the most widely circulated pamphlets on the question of Labour and religion, Philip Snowden argued that the Christian Church had been „the slave of rich men, and admitting every count in the indictment which the anti-Christian can bring against the Church“ he went on to pitch the biblical message and the teachings of Jesus against organised religion.⁶⁴ In 1892 Hardie formulated the same opposition:

„The reason the Labour party had turned its back on the Church was because the Church had turned its back upon them. ... They forgot the writhing and suffering mass of humanity outside the walls of their churches. ... In the slums of the cities men and women and children, made in the image of God, were being driven down into hell for all eternity, and they had no helping hand stretched out for them. ... It was a disgrace to the Christian ministry of England.“⁶⁵

And Arthur Henderson, the Wesleyan, harshly criticised the Church in 1906 for its many shortcomings and failings. Note also that in the above 1929 quote of Henderson, the Labour parliamentarians 'graduated' into the party, i.e. the move from non-conformity to Labour was described as an upwards one, progressive, towards a higher form of consciousness. „The Labour Party“, Peter Caterall has argued, „for several socialists brought up in the chapel was indeed a much more appropriate vehicle for the bringing in of the kingdom of God.“⁶⁶

The emergence of independent Labour had badly divided many local Nonconformist congregations. Ministers with Labour sympathies had to face the wrath of at least parts of their congregations. Overall, the increased political conflict led to a marked depoliticisation of Nonconformism in the medium term. Despite the decline of the Liberal Party in the interwar period, Nonconformism never even attempted to forge as close an alliance with Labour as it had enjoyed with the nineteenth century Liberal Party. Where socialism had

⁶³ Leonard Smith, *Religion*, p. 100 f.

⁶⁴ Philip Snowden, *The Christ that is to be*, Keighley 1893, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Cf. K. S. Inglis, *Churches*, p. 297.

⁶⁶ Peter Caterall, *Morality and Politics: The Free Churches and the Labour Party between the Wars*, in: *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), p. 680.

managed to intrude tightly knit religious working-class communities, be it in Wales, Durham or Scotland, those communities were ripped apart by the strength of the class cleavages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁷ Often the younger members of those communities were politically radicalised and consequently became alienated from formal religious practice, turning to the Labour Party instead.

As the ILP and the Labour Party increasingly organized their meetings on Sundays, many individuals had to choose between chapel and the Labour Party. There were simple organizational as well as ideological reasons for the rifts. Amongst the latter, one must pay attention to the blatant imperialism and support for the Boer War given by the Nonconformist Churches, whilst the Labour Party (with important exceptions like the Webbs) remained critical of an illiberal imperialism which increased militarism abroad and at home. Temperance had been an early link between Nonconformism and the ILP. Until 1895 every member of the party had to 'take the pledge'. However, the ILP's attempts to move closer to the working-class electorate willy-nilly meant its acceptance of the fact that at the heart of working-class culture stood the pub. If many Labour MPs claimed membership of Nonconformist churches before 1914 it might have been less out of religious conviction and more out of the recognition that they were dependent for their re-election on the powerful Liberal/Nonconformist alliances in the constituencies. Even where there were committed free church Labour MPs like in Durham and Norfolk in the interwar period, this did not automatically mean that chapels in these cities were solidly Labour. Finally, one should not underestimate the degree of secularism and hostility towards religion displayed by British socialists. Robert Blatchford's and George Bernard Shaw's anti-Christian writings in particular were both popular and influential in this respect.⁶⁸ Overall then, the impact of the churches and of Nonconformism in particular was certainly marked in specific geographical, organizational and ideological areas, but it was also confined largely to a specific time in the 1890s and 1910s. Furthermore it was overlaid with eschatological messages and a crusading spirit which was as much at home in continental, allegedly more irreligious socialism as it was in Britain.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Kenneth Morgan, *The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour: the Welsh Experience, 1885-1929*, in: *Welsh History Review*, vol. 6 (1973); Robert Moore, *Pit-Men*; Keith Middlemas, *The Clydesiders*, London 1965.

⁶⁸ In particular Robert Blatchford, *God and my Neighbour*, London 1903; idem, *Not Guilty: A Defence of the Bottom Dog*, London 1906 and G.B. Shaw's play *Major Barbara*.

⁶⁹ For an explicit comparison of the impact of religion on the British Labour Party and the German SPD see Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats 1900-1931*, Oxford 1994, pp. 195-206.

The influence of American and Australian Socialism

Most English-speaking countries adopted at least some of their political structures from Britain, there were no language problems, ideas and people travelled easily across oceans, and often there were cultural affinities between them. Of all the English-speaking countries, the influence of the United States and Australia shall be particularly considered here. In the United States, the era from 1901 to at least 1912, probably to 1916, is often referred to as 'golden era' of American socialism. It managed to win mass support amongst a variety of workers all over the United States. Party membership of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) was well over a hundred thousand. In several policy areas it was more radical than the British Labour Party. Electorally, its percentage of the vote was almost as high as that of the British Labour Party before 1914. As Neville Kirk has recently reminded us, any crude theories of American exceptionalism vis-a-vis the British labour movement do not withstand the acid test of comparative research.⁷⁰

Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* had considerable influence on many of the early leaders of the British Labour Party.⁷¹ Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie, Sydney and Beatrice Webb, and Harold Laski, to mention but a few, all had a profound knowledge of American politics and the American labour movement in particular.⁷² Hardie toured the United States for almost four months in 1895 addressing several labour conferences and meeting most of the important American labour leaders. Taking a keen interest in the development of the American labour movement he retained good contacts especially with Sam Gompers, the influential leader of the American Federation of Labour, and with Eugene V. Debs, the president of the American Railway Union and later leader of the SPA. Hardie returned to the United States twice, in 1908 and 1912.⁷³ MacDonald went to the United States in 1897 and henceforth never lost his interest in American labour politics.⁷⁴ And Sydney and Beatrice Webb had gone to the United States in 1898 to study the municipal administration of the big American cities.⁷⁵

And yet, despite the considerable contact between American and British socialists, there is little evidence of actual influence. No one amongst the later leaders of the Labour Party had much time for the sectarian Marxism of Daniel de Leon. In the isolation of his self-chosen

⁷⁰ Neville Kirk, *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA*, especially vol. 2: *Challenge and Accommodation 1850 - 1939*, Aldershot 1994, pp. 230 - 234.

⁷¹ Peter d'A. Jones, *Henry George and British Labor Politics*, in: *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 46 (1987), pp. 245 - 256. The traffic of progressive ideas between the United States and Britain in particular is also traced by James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870 - 1920*, New York 1986.

⁷² On Laski see Arthur A. Ekirch Jr., *Harold J. Laski: The American Experience*, in: *American Studies* 24 (1983), pp. 33 - 68.

⁷³ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie*, London 1975, pp. 185 - 188.

⁷⁴ David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, London 1977, p. 57.

⁷⁵ Lisanne Radice, *Beatrice and Sydney Webb*, London 1984, pp. 126 - 131.

purism he is best compared with H. M. Hyndman in Britain, although one should also recognise that the two belonged to different strands of the socialist movement.⁷⁶ MacDonald in fact came back from the United States disappointed by the weakness of the American socialists.⁷⁷ Repelled by the violence of American industrial relations and downbeat about the marginal position of American trade unions, MacDonald found little to emulate in American socialism. Hardie seemed to have been more of the opinion that, if anything, Britain could act as a model for American socialism. He urged both Eugene Debs and Sam Gompers to consider a trade-union and socialist alliance along the lines of the TUC and the Labour Party.⁷⁸ And the Webbs, with their prejudicial Englishness and their superior English manners, were far too arrogant and self-conceited to learn from any foreign travel.⁷⁹ In the United States they did not even meet any representatives of the American labour movement. And if they had, they would certainly have dismissed them as incompetent.

American socialism might not have been exceptional and yet in important respects the SPA remained a very different animal from the British Labour Party.⁸⁰ For a start, it never really was a class party. A loose alliance of regional political groups with strong populist appeal and an influential input by various ethnic immigrants to the USA, the SPA remained steadfastly opposed in its majority to any alliance with the AFL. To be the political wing of trade unionism remained anathema to the majority of American socialists at the beginning of the twentieth century. Furthermore, although the SPA joined the Vienna International in 1922 and the Labour and Socialist International in 1923, Internationalism never really took root in the party. On the whole, then, the impression is certainly of widespread contacts and interest in American socialism amongst British Labour leaders but little direct influence on them.

As far as the Australian labour movement was concerned, the difference lay in the early success of the Australian labour parties. In the area of working-class parties Australia was clearly ahead of Britain. With its roots going back to the middle of the 19th century, the labour movement in Australia was exceptionally strong even by continental European standards. By the early 1890s union density in New South Wales was higher than in any other country of the world (at 21%).⁸¹ In 1904 the Australian Labour Party (ALP) formed the first national Labour government of the world. It contributed significantly towards Australia's progressive legislation in the areas of social welfare and education and thus

⁷⁶ James D. Young, H. M. Hyndman and Daniel de Leon: The Two Souls of Socialism, in: *Labor History* 28 (1987), pp. 534 - 556.

⁷⁷ David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, p. 59.

⁷⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie, p. 185.

⁷⁹ Lisanne Radice, Beatrice and Syndey Webb, pp. 127, 135.

⁸⁰ David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America. A History*, New York 1955.

⁸¹ Jim Hagan/ Ken Turner, *A History of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1891 - 1991*, Melbourne 1991, p. 8.

helped to shape the country's reputation as an early laboratory for the welfare state.⁸² The role of the colonial state was extremely important not only in the area of welfare but for the whole development of the economy. The interventionism of the Australian state was well in advance of that of its British counterpart.⁸³

The successes of the Australian labour movement were keenly followed in Britain.⁸⁴ Fred Hammell, a member of the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society in the 1890s, published a little booklet in 1895, in which he called on the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC to take the first step towards creating an independent Labour Party. Significantly, he compared labour representation in Britain with that in Australia and came to the conclusion: „England is far behind other countries in direct Labour representation.“⁸⁵ Isaac Mitchell, at the 1905 LRC conference, also referred to the Australian party's successes as a model for the Labour Party:

„He hoped the claims of the LRC for political organisation would succeed, and that in the very near future they would occupy as high a position in the political affairs of the country as their colleagues in Australia reached some months ago.“⁸⁶

Subsequently we find that British interest in Australian socialism is maintained. In 1926, for example, the ILP Publication Department published a little booklet which enthusiastically reported about the successes of socialism in Queensland.⁸⁷

Many of the leaders of Australia's labour movement were British in origin, and they retained strong bonds of language and culture with the country of their birth.⁸⁸ What Raymond Markey has written about the mining industry in New South Wales rings equally true for the two labour movements: „Patterns of behaviour learned by both miners and managers in Britain were retained in New South Wales.“⁸⁹ Australian Labour leaders like Andrew Fisher, Thomas Glassey and Mat Reid had all grown up with British unionism.

⁸² Asa Briggs, *The Welfare State in Historical Perspective*, in: *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 2 (1961), pp. 221 - 258.

⁸³ Raymond Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1880 - 1900*, Kensington 1988, pp. 108 - 132.

⁸⁴ But not only in Britain. It also generated considerable interest, for example, amongst German socialists who discussed the rights and wrongs of Australian socialism within the context of the revisionism debate after the turn of the century. See: J. Tampke, *Pace Setter or Quiet Backwater? German Literature on Australia's Labour Movement and Social Policies 1890 - 1914*, in: *Labour History* 36 (1979), pp. 3 - 17.

⁸⁵ Fred Hammell, *The Claims and Progress of Labour Representation*, Newcastle upon Tyne 1895, p. 11. The two other parties he mentioned were the Irish National Party and the German Social Democratic Party.

⁸⁶ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 26 - 28 January 1905, London 1905, p. 40.

⁸⁷ S.B.M. Potter, *Socialism in Queensland*, London 1926.

⁸⁸ So, for example, Australian trade unionists generously supported the great London dock strike in 1889. Their contributions, exceeding £ 36.000, were of crucial importance for the London dockers' important victory.

⁸⁹ Raymond Markey, *Making*, p. 81.

Consequently their British views were „to shape the course of Queensland labour politics.“⁹⁰ Two of the most famous socialists were H. H. Champion and Tom Mann. After having done more than most others for socialism in Britain in the 1880s, H. H. Champion, who was estranged from Hyndman as well as Hardie and harrassed by his connections with Maltman Barry, finally decided to go to Australia in 1894. Here he soon became an ardent and active supporter of the socialist movement, publishing the influential *Champion* in Victoria from 1895 to 1897, and holding senior office in the Victorian Socialist Party. Ben Tillett and the Webbs visited Australia in the 1890s. But the greatest influence was Tom Mann. After arriving in Australia in 1902, he immediately went about founding the Victorian Socialist Party, which subsequently became extremely influential in spreading socialism throughout the whole of Australia. With the foundation of the LRC just two years ago, Mann argued that only a strong socialist party would be in a position to influence the ALP. Mann worked as an official of the Victorian Labour Party at Melbourne, extensively touring Queensland and Western Australia for eight years.⁹¹ By the time he returned to Britain in 1910 he had become utterly disappointed with the labour movement there and its brand of parliamentary socialism. His Australian experience can be held responsible in no small part for his conversion to syndicalism which he espoused after his return to Britain. For him the Australian Labour Party was a negative model. In 1913 he wrote:

„Even though the workers in Australia have complete control of the political machinery they ignominiously failed to achieve any betterment in their economic position. ... Nothing but a well organised and revolutionary union movement will ever improve their conditions, let alone obtain emancipation.“⁹²

However, leaders more central to the Labour Party organisation, like Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, held far more positive views. MacDonald spent part of the the winter of 1906/07 in Australia together with his wife Margaret studying closely the country’s labour movement and its social legislation.⁹³ Hardie went there during his world tour in 1907/08 and the articles he published in the *Labour Leader* were enthusiastic.⁹⁴ Both men were clearly of the opinion that the achievements of the Australian Labour Party outweighed its shortcomings by far. In fact, Hardie looked towards Australia as early as the 1880s for the provision of a state-imposed minimum wage for miners.⁹⁵ And in the 1890s Andrew

⁹⁰ D. J. Murphy, R.B. Joyce, and C.A. Hughes (eds.), *Prelude to Power. The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland 1885 - 1915*, Melbourne 1970, p. 224.

⁹¹ On Tom Mann’s influence in Australia see also John Laurent, *Tom Mann, R.S. Ross and Evolutionary Socialism in Broken Hill, 1902 - 1912: Alternative Social Darwinism in the Australian Labour Movement*, in: *Labour History* 51 (1986), pp. 54 - 69.

⁹² Tom Mann, *From Single Tax to Syndicalism*, London 1913, p. 51.

⁹³ David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, London 1977, p. 100.

⁹⁴ Kenneth Morgan, *Keir Hardie. Radical and Socialist*, London 1975, p. 196.

⁹⁵ Fred Reid, *Keir Hardie. The Making of a Socialist*, London 1978, p. 52.

Fisher's fierce commitment to the independence of the Queensland Labour Party and his rejection of any alliance with other parties stiffened Keir Hardie's resolute insistence on a break with traditional Lib-Lab politics in Britain.⁹⁶

In organisation and outlook the British Labour Party closely resembled the Australian Labour parties. In New South Wales unionists of the Trades and Labour Council were vital in setting up the Labour Electoral League in 1891 which sought parliamentary representation in the interest of working men. Like in Britain about ten years later, the unions decided to create a political party, after an employers' counteroffensive had revealed the extent to which the law and the government stood on the side of employers. In Queensland, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) was a central ingredient of the Queensland Labour Party. In some solid Labour areas, trade unions were behind the birth of the Australian Labour Party just as they were behind the British Labour Party's foundation nine years later. Affiliated unions remained the backbone of the Australian Labour Party. Like its British counterpart, it was plagued with parliamentary disunity in its early history, and party discipline remained poor. The New South Wales Labour Party began to set up women's branches in local parties after 1904 with considerable success, a policy adopted by the British Labour Party after 1918. The Australian Labour Party was equally as gradualist, reformist and pragmatic as the British Labour Party was to become later on. With New South Wales adopting one of the most democratic constitutions in the world as early as the mid-1850s, political freedom, religious toleration and education reform all in place, the Labour Party's aim was never to revolutionise but always to civilise capitalism.⁹⁷ If the Labour Party in Australia was a mass democratic party by 1900 the same can be said of its British counterpart by 1929. Having said this, initial conflicts in the ALP in the first decade of the 20th century between those who argued in favour of supporting bourgeois governments and those who favoured outright opposition unless Labour could form a majority government found its parallel in the British Labour Party of the 1920s. But in the end 'Labourism' and a shared belief in parliamentary socialism, not revolutionary Marxism or syndicalism became both parties' trademark. The socialists left the New South Wales Labour Party after they had failed to impose socialism on the party's programme in 1898 just as the SDF left the British Labour Party after similar squabbles in 1901. The ALP like the British Labour Party continued to be ideologically heterogeneous. An explicitly socialist objective was introduced into the programme of the national party only in 1905, some years after its foundation.⁹⁸ Again the British Labour Party's history closely followed the Australian party in this respect - with the adoption of clause four of its constitution in 1918. Hence, it is not surprising that Walter Kendall found:

⁹⁶ D.J. Murphy et al., *Prelude*, p. 191.

⁹⁷ Bede Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism. The Labour Movement in New South Wales 1870 - 1900*, Canberra 1973.

⁹⁸ Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill. The Australian Labour Party 1891 - 1991*, Oxford 1991, p. 56 f.

„In outlook, organization and behaviour the labour movement in Britain is closer to the labour movements of Australia and New Zealand half the globe away, than it is to its nearest neighbours in France, Belgium and the Netherlands“.⁹⁹

However, this is hardly the whole story. Quite apart from the similarities discussed above, there always were substantial differences as well. For a start, whilst the Labour Party in Britain was constrained in its formative years by influential unions which remained suspicious of everything that smacked of socialism, the greatest suspicions against socialism in Australia came from within the ALP. Having won office so early on, the party found that it could not realize many of the ambitious aspirations of organised workers. Hence advocates of more radical, socialist policies could be found in the Australian trade unions rather than in the ALP - a party not renowned for its contributions to socialist theory.¹⁰⁰ In fact, contacts of the Australian labour movement with all European labour movements were relatively few and far between. Partly this was a problem of geography. So, for example, it turned out too costly to send delegates to international socialist conferences, although the Australian Labour Party had recommended such representation in 1912.¹⁰¹ Labour's 'White Australia' policy with the maintenance of racial purity fast becoming the party's first federal objective, set the ALP quite apart from the international socialist movement, as did its role as torchbearer of Australian nationalism in the 1890s and beyond.¹⁰² Add this to the ALP's pro-tariffs stance, the strong support it received in rural constituencies and its early characteristics as a catch-all party, and it seems justified to peak of the ALP's roots lying „deep in Australian traditions“. Australian Labour Party leaders remained determined „to implement their own version of 'socialism in one country', a socialism that was as Australian as its main ingredients“.¹⁰³ Continental European working-class parties in many ways proved to be far closer to home for the British Labour Party. The British Empire might have fostered nationalism in the Labour Party¹⁰⁴ but organizationally and ideologically, the Empire and its socialism was less important to British Labour activists than Europe.

The influence of the German SPD

The British Labour Party became a member of the Eurocentric Second International in 1908. This signalled an early interest in European socialism amongst the leaders of British

⁹⁹ Walter Kendall, *The Labour Movement in Europe*, London 1975, p. 180.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labor. The Left in Australia 1919-1939*, Sydney 1981, p. xiii f.

¹⁰¹ Ross McMullin, *The Light*, p. 90.

¹⁰² On the ALP's nationalism and racism see Frank Farrell, *Socialism, Internationalism and the Australian Labour movement*, in: *Labour* 15 (1985), pp. 125 - 144, and also Verity Burgmann, *Racism, Socialism and the Labour Movement 1887 - 1917*, in: *Labour History* 47 (1984), pp. 39 - 54.

¹⁰³ D.J. Murphy et al., *Prelude*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ Logie Barrow, *White Solidarity in 1914*, in: Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 1: *History and Politics*, London 1989, pp. 275-287.

socialism. The ILP from its very beginnings in 1893 was attracted to continental European socialism despite its programmatic and ideological differences. Its internationalism widened horizons, discouraged nationalism and avoided insularity. And, above all, it gave to the British socialists a sense of being part and parcel of a much stronger and more powerful movement which would march forward inevitably. By 1905, British Labour leaders, like Hardie and MacDonald, had become accepted leaders of European international socialism.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, continental socialist parties with their electoral successes and their strong party organisations seemed to have achieved what their young relative in Britain was still aiming at. In particular the shining model party of the Second International, the German SPD, was an object of keen study for the Labour Party leaders. While they rejected much of the SPD's ideological dogmatism, they were fascinated by the SPD's 'organizational patriotism' and interested in adopting it.

As Henry Pelling has stated for the 1880s, „what interest there was in Socialism sprang very largely from the success of the German Social Democratic Party.“¹⁰⁶ Bertrand Russell, in 1896, published a book about German Social Democracy in which he emphasized the virtues of its organisation, in particular the benefits of a well organised party press.¹⁰⁷ The one British socialist group which most clearly and consistently espoused the German Social Democrats as a model for British comrades was a group which had already disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1902 - the Social Democratic Federation. Although its dogmatic Marxism condemned it to remain always on the fringes of Labour Politics in Britain, it cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. After all, many leading Labour Party politicians started their career in the SDF. If they were soon repelled by its ideological bickering, they did nevertheless learn a lot about the SPD, Sunday lectures about which became a regular feature in many radical workingmen's clubs and branches of the SDF in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁰⁸ Ramsay MacDonald, for one, lectured in the Bristol branch of the SDF in 1885 and he organised a small lending library for members.¹⁰⁹ The monthly journal of the SDF, *The Social Democrat*, reported regularly on the activities of the German comrades. J. B. Askew's laudatio of 1906 is but one example of the way the SPD was portrayed as a shining example:

„The struggle of the Social-Democratic Party in Germany is the struggle of the best organised section of the international army of the proletariat. ... The German proletariat will,

¹⁰⁵ Chris Wrigley, *The ILP and the Second International: the Early Years, 1893 - 1905*, in: David James/Tony Jowitt/Keith Laybourn (eds.), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party*, Halifax 1992, pp. 299 - 313.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Pelling, *The Origins*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Bertrand Russell, *German Social Democracy*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Dona Torr, *Tom Mann*, London 1936, p. 12 mentions the impression these made on the young Mann.

¹⁰⁹ Austen Morgan, *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, Manchester/New York 1987, p. 14.

with their victory, ... open the way to the emancipation, not only of the proletariat, but mankind, from the barbarism of capitalism.“¹¹⁰

Only a month later, in an article on the socialist press in Britain, F. Colebrook in stressing the need to win more subscriptions, retain the papers under party control and train journalists properly, once again held up the SPD model:

„How did Germany’s 40 dailies start? Generally by a few thoughtful men getting together and settling how many subscriptions they could get. ... The papers, and very often the printing offices, in Germany, belong to the party. ... Germany ... founded a journalist training institution in Berlin adequate for about thirty workmen who are recommended by their socialist organisations as promising, able and devoted comrades.“¹¹¹

Whether it be the press or the socialist women’s organisation,¹¹² the SPD was extensively discussed in its various organizational facets, and it is very likely that those Labour leaders who passed through the SDF, retained a good dosis of the pro-SPD view given by the SDF’s various publications, in particular Justice and The Social-Democrat. The ILP published at least four biographical accounts of Karl Marx and his teachings between 1909 and 1920.¹¹³ And the publication of Eduard Bernstein’s Evolutionary Socialism with its explicit attacks on dogmatic and static forms of Marxism sparked off a lively controversy in the British socialist press.¹¹⁴

Almost all leading Labour Party politicians, particularly Herbert Morrison, Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie, George Barnes as well as many lesser known figures, admired and closely studied the SPD. They sought to adopt its methods of organisation and apply them whenever appropriate. Election results of the SPD in Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic were collected by the Labour Party head office and the growth of the German party was closely monitored.¹¹⁵ In fact, it has been pointed out that Keir Hardie’s conversion to socialism in 1887 was in no small part due to his good contacts with Friedrich Engels and his circle in London.¹¹⁶ His willingness to follow the

¹¹⁰ J. B. Askew, Socialism in Switzerland and Germany, in: The Social Democrat, vol. X, no. 11, 15 November 1906.

¹¹¹ F. Colebrook, A Note on the Socialist Press, in: The Social Democrat, vol. X, no. 12, 15 December 1906.

¹¹² Maud Parlow, The German Party Congress and the Women’s Movement, in: The Social Democrat, vol. XII, no. 10, 15 October 1908.

¹¹³ George Nicoll Barnes, Karl Marx, London 1909; John Spargo, Karl Marx: his Life and Work, Manchester 1910; Maurice Eden Paul, Karl Marx and Modern Socialism, Manchester 1911; Max Beer, Life and Teaching of Karl Marx, (location unknown) 1920.

¹¹⁴ Eduard Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism: a Criticism and Affirmation, London 1909, was also published by the ILP as vol. 7 of its Socialist Library.

¹¹⁵ Labour Party Archive, International Department Files, Germany, ID/GER/1 - 19.

¹¹⁶ Frank Reid, Keir Hardie, p. 96.

organizational model of the continental working class parties is described clearly in a letter to Massingham of 1903:

„The Socialist and Labour Parties on the Continent were built up on the lines which we of the Labour Representation Committee are endeavouring to follow.“¹¹⁷

For Pete Curran, the SPD could serve as a model both in its independence from other parties as well as in its tactical alliances with liberal parties. At the Third annual conference of the LRC he argued:

„The German Socialist Movement was built together by the fighting of every Party that disagreed with its programme. Why could it come today and make a bargain with the official Liberals? Simply because they were an organised Party preserving their independence.“¹¹⁸

Ramsay MacDonald was to make good use of similar arguments when he justified his electoral pact with the Liberals to left-wing intra-party critics before the First World War.¹¹⁹ Labour Party publications often referred admiringly to the organizational talent of German Social Democracy. Bruce Glasier, in a widely circulated yearbook of 1913 wrote:

„The German Social Democratic Party is the largest and best organised Socialist Party in the world. Indeed, it may be described as the largest and best governed political organisation in the world. ... Its cohesion and self-control are superb. It goes forward invincibly.“¹²⁰

Eduard Bernstein, who had built up strong links with almost all Labour Party leaders during his years of exile in Britain between 1888 and 1901, received several letters from British socialists, both before and after the first World War, requesting more information on the organisation, structure and nature of the SPD.¹²¹ W. S. Sanders, Executive Committee member of the Labour Party from 1913 to 1915, described the SPD as „the most efficiently organised political party in the whole world.“¹²² In his little booklet on the SPD he extensively surveyed the party's organisation and its activities, portraying it as an example for other working-class parties to follow. He particularly praised the sense of solidarity in the German labour movement and the closely knit personal bonds between its members.

Marion Philipps, chief woman officer of the Labour Party with a seat on the National Executive of the Labour Party after 1918, and William Gillies, head of the international

¹¹⁷ Letter Hardie to Massingham of 30 April 1903, in: F. Johnson correspondence, 03\75, held at the BLPES, London.

¹¹⁸ Report of the Third Annual Conference of the LRC, 19 February 1903, London 1903, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ Ross McKibbin, James Ramsay MacDonald and the Problem of the Independence of the Labour Party, 1910 - 1914, in: *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970), p. 231.

¹²⁰ Bruce Glasier, *The Socialist Yearbook*, 1913, p. 96.

¹²¹ Many of these letters are contained in Bernstein's papers in the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. See, for example, D12, D22, D32, D112.

¹²² W. S. Sanders, *The Socialist Movement in Germany*, Fabian Tract no. 169, London 1913, p. 1.

department of the Labour Party after 1918 were only two of the able Labour Party organisers who had a deep respect for the SPD's organisational abilities. Marion Philipps, herself not British but Australian [sic!], a graduate from Melbourne University, had already been in close contact with the SPD's women's movement before 1914. She retained these contacts (with Clara Zetkin) throughout the difficult war years. The setting up of independent women's sections in the Labour Party was organised with an eye to the socialist women's movement on the continent. In 1927 she collaborated with Toni Sender and Gertrud Hanna to rebuild the Women's International.¹²³ She was also influential in the setting up of the Labour Party League of Youth in the 1920s. As Egerton Wake, the National Agent of the Labour Party between 1918 and 1928, made clear to the 1924 conference, she had been in close touch with the socialist youth movement on the continent so as to model the nascent British movement on the experience of continental parties.¹²⁴ Indeed, the British League of Youth was to have excellent contacts with the Socialist Youth International, and its outlook and activities resembled those of the socialist youth movement in Germany.¹²⁵

William Gillies, who spoke fluent German, was particularly friendly with Rudolf Breitscheid of the SPD. They sat together on the Disarmament Committee and the Commission for the Democratisation of the League of Nations of the Labour and Socialist International. He visited Germany several times in the 1920s and came into contact with most important socialists there. Initially, he was influential in offering shelter and money to SPD refugees from Nazism, including to Breitscheid with whom he was in close contact between 1933 and 1935.¹²⁶ He also invited the SPD executive over to London in 1940, supporting it financially. Only later, after 1942/43, did the relationship turn sour, when Gillies revealed himself as a rabid nationalist and racist.¹²⁷

The importance of the SPD for the creation of Herbert Morrison's London Labour Party after 1918 is beyond doubt. When, for example, the London Labour Party tried to boost the sales of its local paper, *The London News*, it looked over its shoulder towards the SPD's press empire:

¹²³ Marion Philipps, *Socialist Women Meet in Switzerland*, in: *The Labour Magazine* 8 (1929/30), p. 54 f.

¹²⁴ See the report of Egerton Wake on the establishment of a socialist youth movement in Britain on the 1924 Labour Party Conference, in: *Report of the Proceedings of the 1924 Labour Party Conference*, London 1924, p. 118.

¹²⁵ International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, papers of the Socialist Youth International contain the exchanges of letters between Erich Ollenhauer, the president of the International, and representatives of the British Labour Party and its youth movement.

¹²⁶ Labour Party Archive, Manchester, International Department Files, Germany, Correspondence.

¹²⁷ For the relationship of the SPD exiles with the Labour Party during the Second World War see Anthony Glee, *Exile Politics in the Second World War. The German Social Democrats in Britain*, Oxford 1982. Gillies' obstinacy and lack of expertise is also highlighted by Christine Collette, *British Labour Attitudes to Europe, 1918-1939, with Special Reference to the Role of the Labour Party International Secretary*, University of Oxford M.Litt. 1992.

„It is small wonder that the British Labour Movement hears with some degree of envy of the multiplicity of publications which the German Socialist Party ... finds itself able to maintain.“¹²⁸

The influence of the SPD not only on the London Labour Party but on the Labour Party at large in the inter-war years can be seen especially in the areas of local party organisation, individual party membership, the party press and the party's educational and cultural activities. The adoption of membership canvassing, the idea of a mass membership as a means of financing the activities of local parties thereby reducing its dependence on well-meaning trade unions, the efforts of building up a local and national Labour press, the emphasis on 'scientific organisation' and 'machine-building' of the party apparatus, the development of a labour movement culture in inter-war Britain, the establishment of a Labour youth movement, the bureaucratisation and professionalisation of the party, albeit incomplete and patchy, at all levels of the organisation, all these trade marks of the Labour Party organisation were deeply influenced by the Labour Party's interest in the German SPD.

The German social democratic sports' movement also influenced the setting up of a Labour sports' movement in Britain. F. O. Roberts who attended the workers' olympiad in Frankfurt in 1927 reported enthusiastically about the event and British participation in it. He explicitly called on the labour movement to follow the examples set by the continental parties in building up a sports' movement.¹²⁹ In October 1930 George Elvin, the General Secretary of the National Workers' Sports Association, wrote:

„there is no reason at all why this country should not organise a successful and enthusiastic Workers' Sports Movement as our Continental comrades have done.“¹³⁰

And indeed, after the Second World War, it was the British labour movement sports' groups which were pre-eminent in recreating the Workers' Sports International. Establishing itself within neighbourhood communities by setting up a range of social, recreational and educational activities, the Labour Party again was influenced by the SPD's similar undertakings.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the national political environment played an important role for the shape, the Labour Party was eventually to take. It adopted many of its organizational features from trade unionism. It certainly never ignored the examples provided by the

¹²⁸ Annual Report of the E.C. of the London Labour Party, 1928/1929, p. 14.

¹²⁹ F. O. Roberts, Impressions of the Workers' Olympiad, in: The Labour Magazine 6 (1927/ 28), pp. 151 - 154.

¹³⁰ George H. Elvin, The National Workers' Sports Association, in: The Labour Organiser, October 1930, p. 189.

traditional British parties. In its long programmatic abstinence as well as in its organizational techniques it did learn from its opponents as well as from Methodism and Congregationalism, whose influence upon the labour movement in Britain should not be underestimated. It also remembered the efforts of the smaller socialist groups and organisations to create a genuine labour movement culture in the inter-war years.

But right from its very beginnings, it would be wrong to assume that the Labour Party had an entirely and peculiarly British tradition. Outside Europe, the Australian Labour Party had been founded in the 1890s along lines which were to become influential with Labour Party leaders like Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald. But, most importantly, in its zeal for an efficient party organisation and in its struggles to keep the Labour Party independent from the advances of the Liberal Party, Labour Party leaders found the model provided by the German Social Democrats extremely congenial. Particularly after 1918 the German socialists had a strong influence on the shape of the Labour Party. The machine men who gained increasing prominence in the ranks of the Labour Party were broad-minded enough to look abroad for inspiration and ideas. Whilst of necessity the national framework of politics played a major role for the way in which the Labour Party emerged in Britain, the influence of non-British working-class parties on the shape of its organisation and outlook has often been neglected by its traditionally British historians.