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The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas And Politics In The Making Of Interwar Europe



Synopsis

In addition to revising our view of the interwar period and the building of European democracies, this book cuts against the grain of most current theorizing in political science by explicitly discussing when and how ideas influence political behavior. Even though German and Swedish Social Democrats belonged to the same transnational political movement and faced similar political and social conditions in their respective countries before and after World War I, they responded very differently to the challenges of democratization and the Great Depression--with crucial consequences for the fates of their countries and the world at large. Explaining why these two social democratic parties acted so differently is the primary task of this book. Berman's answer is that they had very different ideas about politics and economics--what she calls their programmatic beliefs. The Swedish Social Democrats placed themselves at the forefront of the drive for democratization; a decade later they responded to the Depression with a bold new economic program and used it to build a long period of political hegemony. The German Social Democrats, on the other hand, had democracy thrust upon them and then dithered when faced with economic crisis; their haplessness cleared the way for a bolder and more skillful political actor--Adolf Hitler. This provocative book will be of interest to anyone concerned with twentieth-century European history, the transition to democracy problem, or the role of ideas in politics.

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Customer Reviews

[Berman's] work is convincing and well written, and her discussion of the role of ideas is spirited and

welcome. Chapter 2 should be required reading for all political scientists who are unwilling to look beyond numbers to see the force of ideas. (Foreign Affairs)[The Social Democratic Movement] is a comparative analysis of the developments of two of the most important social democratic parties in Europe, the SPD of Germany and the SAP of Sweden. It sets out to explain how the German Social Democrats, at the largest interwar party, could not effectively prevent the collapse of Weimar Germany, whereas at the same time the Swedish Social Democrats were establishing political hegemony in their own country...The book outlines the contrasts between the Swedish and German developments through well-contextualized country-specific chapters, first on long-term political development, then on national transitions to (full) democracy, then on responses to the depression. The book is thoroughly researched and clearly written, with each chapter beginning with an insightful and very fitting quotation. (Alan Siaroff Recensions [Italy])

Sheri Berman is Assistant Professor of Politics at Princeton University.

This first rate study of the struggles of pre-WW 2 democratic parties in Europe casts an illuminating light on the problems of emerging democratic societies in the post-Soviet period. It is thoughtful and well written.

If you want to know what political science can and should be, read this book. It takes important questions and answers them clearly and intelligently, with learning but not jargon. I wish all scholarly books were like this.

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