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This is a re-issue of a book first published in 1986, which studies the way in which labour law took shape in nine European countries (the Member States of the EEC in 1979)—Belgium, Britain and Ireland, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – from the beginning of the industrial revolution up to 1945. The book explains similarities and differences between modern systems in these countries as the outcome of continuing struggles between different social groups and competing ideologies in the context of industrialisation and economic development. The book thus provides the essential underpinning to its companion, the new book, *The Transformation of Labour Law in Europe* (Hart: 2009, ISBN: 9781841138701), which continues the historical comparative study of the development of labour law in Europe since 1945.