

trails. He offers some bold conjectures, necessarily hazardous where evidence is so faint, but always intriguing. 'Of all nationalities', he begins, 'the Scots are one of the most difficult to explain', because of their very mixed ethnic origins, yet they alone among the Celtic peoples built 'their own independent feudal state' (pp19-20). He



SCOTTISH CAPITALISM: CLASS, STATE AND NATION FROM BEFORE THE UNION TO THE PRESENT
 ed Tony Dickson

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In recent years, thanks to the researches of a widening number of scholars, Scotland has become considerably less than it used to be a *terra incognita*, a blank on the historian's map. *Scottish Capitalism* is a critical examination of what is now known, from a Marxist but undogmatic standpoint. The subtitle of this very substantial work tells more of its purpose than the title; it is a general interpretation of Scottish history from the outset of modern times, centering round a long-drawn process of economic transformation, the rise and then decline of industry, bringing with it new social classes and new discords. Seven contributors have come together in the enterprise, on a more genuinely collective plan than most collaborators, each chapter being drafted by one of them, or a pair, but revised in the light of a joint review.

For the introductory background the spokesman is John Foster, who has shouldered the most exacting task, the **ferreting out of remote antecedents, long-lost**

argues that Lowland Scotland, though not incorporated into the urbanised society of imperial Rome, was deeply enough affected by trade and other contact with it for Celtic kingdoms to arise which were capable of long survival. From one of these, in the struggle against Viking invasion, emerged 'that strange hybrid, the Scots nation', with a clan nobility already feudalised before the calling in of an Anglo-Norman baronage (pp25, 36).

What may be more questionable is the contention that the people's share in the Wars of Independence, and the disappearance of strict serfdom in the next era, led on in the 15th and 16th centuries to 'defeudalisation', including, besides commutation of feudal services, 'something far more fundamental: the permanent "feuding" of land.' By virtue of this novel tenure land became an 'absolute possession', and the way was open to 'capitalist landownership' (pp21-22). Absolute property rights, as defined by Roman law, are held up as the 'touchstone of capitalist relations' (p25). In Rome, on the other hand, they went with slavery, as they did again in modern Europe's tropical colonies. Feuding did help to expand the class of lairds, with weighty long-term consequences. The old feudal superstructure was indeed crumbling, but so it was everywhere in Europe, whether capitalist

farming and industry followed or not. One is a political category, the other an economic. Quasi-feudal forms of landlord authority were protean, and extremely persistent. Later chapters furnish illustrations of them. In the 16th and 17th centuries landlord-tenant relations were determined mainly by 'the armed seigniorial power of the local potentate' (p66). In the 18th century his descendants held sway over their districts as land-monopolists, heritors, JPs, and they still 'sat in judgement of their own tenants in the barony courts' (p95-6). There may be a tendency here and there in the book to see feudalism and capitalism too much in antithetical terms, instead of recognising the degree to which the second grew out of the first, and could not have come into the world by any other route.

Whatever potential for development Scotland may have had, in fact only the accession of a Scottish king to the English throne in 1603 gave the government strength enough to keep order, and make economic progress practicable (p68). In 1707 Union with England rescued Scotland from the doldrums again. It was, as Willie Thompson writes, 'an eminently rational choice', a 'possibly unique' case of a bourgeoisie voluntarily renouncing state independence 'in order to survive as a bourgeoisie' (pp86-7).

One may be tempted to think of the British entry into the Common Market as an analogous case. Economic advance did come, though not quickly. One success due to the Union was the linen industry, 'a classic case of state-assisted capitalist enterprise' (p101). A good point made later on is that Scotland's early struggling industrialists sometimes benefited by the stronger pull of their English compeers at Westminster, and would have been worse off in a revived Scottish parliament (p147), in face of the more crushing ascendancy of the landed aristocracy in Scotland.

How industry got going, between 1780 and 1830, later but then faster than in England, is well described in chapter 4. In the next four decades Scotland, so far from being limited to a merely 'colonial' role, came to have in and round Glasgow Britain's foremost heavy industrial centre. One valuable observation is that bourgeois class consciousness has received less attention than working class, but that the two ought to be investigated together, because 'dialectically interrelated' (p204). In some ways they would seem to have been closer than in England. Middle class radicalism could draw many workers along with it and impart to them its creed of economic liberalism. Scottish literacy helped in this; so did a national Church more

inclusive than England's. Estimates of how much militancy and readiness for action the industrial revolution engendered have been very discrepant; it is sensibly pointed out that conditions varied widely with regions and communities (Irish immigrants coming off worst), and also with violent trade fluctuations. In sum, class consciousness was taking shape, but 'inconsistently or incompletely' (p197).

Against the workers, the bourgeoisie could hold its own; on its other front it shared with England's Nonconformist manufacturers an antagonism towards the landed magnates and their allies in the City (p205). Had the two progressive groups combined more firmly, they could have defeated the others, and given Britain something like the modern bourgeois revolution it failed to achieve. From this angle it may be regrettable that the Union had not gone further, and that the Border still formed a line of division between the two regions in the British Isles with most in common, southern Scotland and northern England, to the detriment of both. A summary on p213 of the 'working alliance' reached by all the propertied classes gives less than adequate prominence to the noxious primacy retained by the more parasitic interests, land and finance.

If these explorers find very little reason to

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regret the Union, their later chapters supply many reasons for regretting its consequences in our century. These have come about not as a direct result of the Union, but through its involvement of Scotland in British imperialism. Into this Scotland was not innocently inveigled or decoyed; it plunged in with headlong eagerness, and played to the end a vigorous part. Its last separate effort to achieve prosperity had been the Darien scheme, and its first solid gain from the Union was access to England's possessions in America; the tobacco trade, based on plantation slavery, Glasgow made very much its own. A special chapter might properly have been devoted to Empire questions, but a long section of chapter 6 makes partial amends. It shows for instance that between 1870 and 1900 Scotland was exporting proportionately more capital than England, and that no area in Britain was more fully integrated into the imperialist economy than Clydeside. Meanwhile investment at home was being neglected, industries allowed to sink into obsolescence. Here and elsewhere there is much, probably too much, reliance on the theory of a 'product cycle', much akin to Hobson's prediction of capital export leading to industrialisation abroad and deindustrialisation at home. This has been a mainly British phenomenon, brought about by imperialism of the peculiarly British type, conditioned by the dominant partnership of landowning and finance.

Many other important themes and valuable ideas come up. Kirk influences are given all the weight due to them. Calvinism is regarded throughout as 'a perfect incubator for germinating the capitalist ethic' (p74); a view with much to be said for it, but it may be as well to recall that in eastern Europe Calvinism, like Roman law, harmonised equally well with neo-feudalism and enserfment. In the survey of the 18th century (by Keith Burgess) there is an illuminating commentary on Scottish law, and its evolution into 'a uniquely flexible form of

social control', 'an instrument of "social engineering"' (p110). Towards the end the decay of the Scottish economy in our own day is discussed, along with the reawakening of Scottish nationalism. Prudently, no attempt is made to predict the outcome. But for everyone to whom Scotland's future is a matter of concern, the effort made in this volume to trace the path it has travelled hitherto will be an indispensable help.

Victor Kiernan

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