

## REVIEW: L'ECOSSE CONTEMPORAINE

*James Kellas*

Jacques Leruez and Pierre Morère **L'Ecosse. Politique-societe-economie-culture**, Paris: Ophrys-Ploton, pb, 1995, ISBN 2-7080-0763-7 (Ophrys), ISBN 2-84120-101-5 (Ploton-Editeur).

The 'Auld Alliance' between France and Scotland celebrated its 700th anniversary in 1995, and it is appropriate to have a new book by French authors (in French) on contemporary Scotland. It will make its readers in France aware that Scotland is not England, a fact they know only in the sphere of rugby, despite the existence of a Franco-Scottish Society and a few academic specialists on Scotland working in France, mainly in the area of language and literature.

Jacques Leruez of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales of the Fondation nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris is a partial exception to this tendency, for while he started as a linguist, he has long specialised in Scottish and British politics, and his book **L'Ecosse : une nation sans Etat** was published in 1983 (Presses universitaires de Lille. ISBN 2-85939-223-8). Pierre Morère is a university professor at Grenoble in 'Anglophone studies' and directs a government-sponsored research group in Scottish studies. He specialises in literature and the history of ideas.

Jacques Leruez spent several years in Edinburgh in the 1950s as a lecturer in French at the University, and, as happens in France, his study of the language and *civilisation* of Britain included political affairs as well as literary ones. I got to know him in the 1970s, and we correspond frequently on French and Scottish politics. He is an intensely meticulous scholar, who keeps his own extensive archive of materials on Scotland, augmented during visits to Scotland at election times and at conferences. So this is no general essay in

---

*James Kellas is professor of politics at Glasgow University.*

*Review: L'Ecosse Contemporaine*

belles-lettres, rather a text full of information, tables, and narratives of events such as the devolution legislative process in the 1970s, and the local government reforms up to the most recent. Indeed, there is perhaps more history here than is desirable in something described as 'contemporary Scotland'. Already, events have overtaken the text in the re-organisation of the Scottish Office in late 1995, but otherwise it is still a factually correct description of the system of government today. As far as Scottish political behaviour is concerned, I was sorry that there was nothing from the Scottish Election Study of 1992, or from surveys after 1979 on the constitutional issue.

What does 'the French mind' make of it all? Does this account of Scotland differ from those being produced in Scotland today? An interesting comparison can be made with the new book by Alice Brown, David McCrone and Lindsay Paterson (**Politics and Society in Scotland**, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996. ISBN 0-333-64291-0), which is destined to become a textbook in many Scottish education institutions, and so will be quite influential in shaping 'the Scottish mind'.

Both books are similar in length, and there is a considerable overlap in material. But they differ greatly in their methodologies, and even more in their analyses about Scotland's place in Britain and Europe. The French authors actually provide more factual information, verging on the encyclopedic, which is a good old French tradition (but also a Scottish one, yet not so obvious in Brown et al), though it is also rather pedantic in the sense of 'facts for their own sake'. The Scottish authors, on the other hand, are only interested in facts when they relate to theory, of which they provide a great deal, mostly sociological. Here is the full panoply of modernity, post-modernity, feminism, Marxism, pluralism, corporatism, globalisation, identity formation, nation-state-society distinctions and interactions, and of course, nationalism and post-nationalism. Never mind that these concepts and theories have rarely been applied to Scotland before (and perhaps their originators would not do so in this way); they are considered to be the key to understanding Scotland today.

You might have thought that the French authors would be into this too, since most of these theories came from France in the first place, and there is a dominant sociological-philosophical-Marxist mode of thought in French academic life. Not so in Leruez and Morère. They belong to another French tradition, that of history, public law, administration and literary studies. None the worse for that, and I tend to that side myself. But if you want sociological

theory, grand social science analysis and 'vision', you will not find it in the French book.

Yet, as you would expect, there *is* an underlying analysis in Leruez-Morère which can be unpicked from the assemblage of information. First, these French authors have 'gone native' in that they reject the general view of their compatriots of Britain as *Angleterre*, and they assert that Scotland is indeed a nation without a state. This very un-French view of politics (the French, as Brown et al point out, do not distinguish between state, nation and society, and reject the Corsicans' and Bretons' claim to nationhood within the French state) is not really discussed or defended, and I wonder what French readers will make of it. Can they really envisage a 'multi-national state' with a separate Scottish 'civil society' apart from the English, especially since they have always assumed that *Angleterre* and *les Anglais* meant the same as Britain and the British?

Leruez-Morère give the facts for the Scottish nation, the Scottish political system, and Scottish 'civil society', and flirt with Lindsay Paterson's **Autonomy of Modern Scotland** at one point (p.93), but it is eventually clear that old French (and English) attitudes are not being replaced in essence. Unlike Brown-McCrone-Paterson, they see no vision of the future ('new political arrangements in the modern world') in which Scotland takes its place in the European Union as a player in a 'Europe of Nations and Regions', firmly underpinned by a separate Scottish national identity and civil society. The EU is hardly mentioned at all in the French book, and not as any fundamental aspect of the place of Scotland in Britain, Europe and the world. The French authors are also fairly static about Scottish politics, and somewhat cynical about the claims coming from devolutionists, nationalists, and the new generation of Scottish academics. They are still 'more British than Scottish', while the Scottish authors are definitely 'more Scottish than British'.

First, the old description of Britain as a 'unitary state' is accepted by the French (p.7), and the notion of an autonomous Scottish political system is rejected in favour of a 'sub-system integrated in the British system' (p.178), although there is a specific Scottish 'mode of government'. This is a top-down centralist view and gives Scotland little power to shape its future or achieve autonomy in the way it is governed and in its economy. What is left is an intense political life 'locally' (*localement*) (p.178) (a non-'national' and French term for anything outside Paris), fed by the debate on 'the national question' (a Scottish term) and also because Scotland differed from England

*Review: L'Ecosse Contemporaine*

on many of the grand national and international problems from around the Second World War. Examples of these are, curiously, the stronger pacifist movement in Scotland during the War, and the hostile response to Thatcher's sermon on Adam Smith and Protestant individualism. These were certainly divisions of a kind between Scotland and England, but was there not something more fundamental going on? Then, to show that the Scots are really fundamentally similar to the English after all, there is the 'notable and significant fact' (*fait notable et significatif*) that when Brigitte Bardot campaigned in France for several years against the export of young animals, her protests were met with great indifference in Scotland as well as in England and France. Similarly, with regard to compulsory identity cards and a centralised police force, the Scots react with hostility just as the English. Lastly, it seems that even the SNP accepts British parliamentary practice in its proposals (p.179). The lesson from all these examples seems to be that Scotland 'belongs to the world and to British civilisation', and has been progressively anglicised since the 19th century. Today there is no equilibrium between Scotland and England in politics, economics or culture, rather domination by the latter. However, there seems no way out of this situation (and it is not clear that it would be desirable anyway, for these French authors). Rather they are left with a sense of astonishment that there has not been more anglicization in Scotland after such a long common life in the British state (p.180). This is of course the opposite of Paterson, who is not surprised that Scotland withstood anglicisation after 1707, and thinks it can (and should) be resisted today.

The French approach is very understandable for citizens of the French 'nation-state', which is based on the assumption that building a nation with one civil society, language, education system, etc, in the framework of a unitary state, represents the highest goal of the Enlightenment and civilisation. For the French, sub-state nationalisms and civil societies different from that of France as a whole are anathema in this scheme of things. The French people in general (at least the Paris-led Establishment) have been astonished and annoyed by sub-state nationalism in Corsica, Brittany (now totally dismissed), the French Basque Country and Catalonia. No wonder that they are largely uninterested in Scotland, and sceptical about its claims to devolution and independence.

While Leruez-Morère have moved some way from this mode of thought in their treatment of Scotland, which will puzzle many French readers brought up on French Enlightenment ideology (including Marxism), I think that ultimately they probably belong in the tradition, as a comparison with

Brown-McCrone-Paterson shows clearly. The latter, who represent a strong strand in contemporary Scottish thought, reject the unitary state analysis, distinguish between state, nation, and society, emphasise the autonomy of Scottish civil society, and look forward well beyond the current (somewhat old-fashioned) devolution proposals to a Scotland freed from the political dominations of Britain and England and securely placed as a nation in the European Union and the 'world' generally.

Perhaps the French authors are too old-fashioned, and the Scots too idealistic. I confess that it is difficult to say which I prefer, as both have their strengths, and yet each is unbalanced to an extent. The French could have benefited from a more dynamic and theoretical approach, the Scots from a little more evidence that what they theorised about could be sustained from the facts, of which more could have been provided, and is not just wishful thinking.

But let us be grateful that in France there are scholars who take Scotland seriously, and are very well-equipped to write about it. In fact, if their book had been translated into English, it would have been considered as a textbook for university courses on Scotland.

*May 1996*