

## **REVIEW: ORANGEISM IN SCOTLAND**

*Joseph M. Bradley*

William Marshall (1996), '**The Billy Boys**' **A Concise History of Orangeism in Scotland**, Edinburgh: Mercat Press, pb, £12.99, ISBN 1873644523, 232pp.

In his introduction to '**The Billy Boys**', William Marshall implies that Orangeism, like religious identity, is a neglected subject in Scotland. His reasoning is that it apparently mars the image of Scotland which various people wish to project. Partly for the same reason, a number of academics and writers have encountered a degree of hostility when they have attempted to address ethno-religious questions in Scottish society.

It may be unfashionable, degrading or even plain dangerous to 'get in there' and experience or acquire insight into some of the lifestyles encountered by significant numbers of people in Scotland. However, some of our social scientists' backgrounds and lifestyles, legitimate and even desirable as they may be, do not predispose them to a wider view of society. Indeed, there might be a need to overhaul some of the time-trusted approaches and methodologies of socio-political research and to explore ethno-religious identities in a more radical fashion.

Although Marshall's book is somewhere between being academic and journalistic, overall it is a well balanced account of Orangeism in Scotland. Certainly it builds on Elaine McFarlands **Protestants First**, a history of Orangeism in Scotland in the last century. Although Marshall could on occasion have drawn on a wider context of anti-Catholicism, anti-Irish racism, or even working class cultures, his book should be read by those wishing to learn more about this aspect of recent Scottish history.

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Marshall covers the background and development of Orangeism in Scotland, from its roots in south Ayrshire to its growth throughout the industrial belt of the country. He rightly points to industrialisation in early to mid-19th century west-central Scotland as having a major impact upon both the ethno-religious make-up of the region and the survival and expansion of the Orange Order. Many Protestants came from Ulster (in the main of course ethnic Scots) and many more Catholics came from Ulster and the rest of Ireland to provide the labour required for industrialisation. The ethno-religious and political conflict experienced in Ireland was subsequently transferred to a Scottish setting. This combined with an already established anti-Catholicism in Scotland, as well as, of course, with the developing Scottish imperial mind-set. For Marshall,

Orangeism, per se, was not the root cause of prevalent sectarianism in Scotland, but as an ideology, it was well disposed strongly to reinforce the pre-existing prejudice held by a not insignificant section of the native proletariat towards the Catholic Irish.

Marshall reminds us that

Orangemen fully supported the concept of 'Empire', seeing in that enterprise a noble crusade to civilise the world in white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant attitudes and values.

It should also be remembered of course that political and cultural views which supported this type of patriotism were commonplace in Scotland at the time.

The imperial mind-set is partly indicated in the Orange view of the victory at the Boyne with its consequences for setting the tone for modern political civilisation. Marshall puts it as follows:

The Principles of representative government, of religious liberty, of popular control and of the right of every man to be responsible for his religion to his own conscience alone has spread throughout all civilisation in the wake of the Banners of William, who was the father of all constitutional progress.

For Scottish political society, this mind-set was important for the development of the Orange, indeed, the Protestant - Tory connection, one which continues to this day. The Empire brought economic benefits to industrial Scotland, and the predominantly Protestant workforce recognised

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this. Their employers - mainly Conservative by the early twentieth century - also believed that this factor should be stressed in attracting the Protestant as well as the Orange vote. When industrialists like the Bairds stood for Parliament there was a direct political advantage to be gained from the Orange vote in particular. In 1908, William McCormick, Grand Master of Scotland, addressed an Orange rally in Clydebank, urging

the return of a strong Unionist and Imperialist government to power, thus securing industrial prosperity and contentment throughout the Empire.

Such sentiments were particularly appealing to the skilled workers of industrialised west-central Scotland, and, as Marshall emphasises, 'almost all skilled workers in Scotland at this time were Protestants'.

Marshall's chapter on the Orange and Unionist Alliance, which developed in the late 19th century, is well illustrated. This was a time, the author states, when 'something of a "True Blue" frame of reference developed between party and voter'. Indeed, he notes, there was a good deal of Orange involvement in the setting up of a number of Conservative Associations at this time. The relationship was so strong that in 1893 the Order was allocated an official place on the recently formed Conservative policy making body set up in the west of Scotland.

Nonetheless, although this alliance favoured both Orangemen and Tories, the Order failed to make a significant impact upon the upper classes in Scotland. 'The Order would always be able to attract some men of social standing and political influence but not nearly enough of them to make any real impact on the levels of power in Scotland'. The Order would remain an essentially proletarian movement, a factor which would be both its great strength and its weakness.

In addition, politics is a different sort of game from that which dominates the Orange mind-set. The narrow focus of Orangeism could never alone sustain Orange-Conservative links. Other political issues which are not obviously infused with Protestant principles gradually became more important for most politicians, and indeed for most of the electorate, during the 20th century.

Although the Order is numerically one of the most significant bodies in Scottish society, geographical concentrations of Orangemen have never been so great that the Order has been able to seriously influence local or national politics. As Marshall stresses, the Order's political leverage has always been

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episodic or particular in character and has never been a universal phenomenon.

In addition, Scottish Orangeism's relationship with Labour has long been complicated by the real world of experience and material betterment, rather than that of a religious and political ideology which ignores such questions. The Orange proletariat often recognise their best economic interests lie in opposing the very forces in society that they often otherwise symbolically align themselves with.

This has meant that Orangemen can be labour-minded in economic and employment terms whilst retaining their identity with reference to the symbols of Orangeism, Protestantism and Britishness. For Marshall, since the days of the 'hungry thirties', this has been 'a purely common sense response to the political realities of their situation'. In addition, this has often occurred at odds with the thinking of the Grand Lodge itself. Marshall believes that

Orangeism with its accent on brotherhood, mutual aid and communal solidarity can be viewed as a perverse manifestation of some of the central tenets of Socialism. It mirrors traditional working class values at the same time as it does so much to negate them. That is the paradoxical situation in which the typical working class Orangeman finds himself.

It also might explain Orange social and political behaviour.

Despite the massive social, economic and political changes which have characterised British life in the post Second World War period, 'it is a testimony to the vitality of the Orange Order that it has managed to survive the de-industrialisation of the economy and the resultant social disruption to the communities concerned, particularly in the post war decades'. If the Order is almost impotent in the political and religious life of Scotland today, it members soldier on regardless.

As Marshall argues, identities like Orangeism give many people, particularly those of the working classes, 'a quite different perspective of their worth in a society from which many working class people are beginning to feel increasingly alienated and rejected'. Although I would remove the word 'mere' at the end of his sentence, again Marshall grasps a fundamental of Orange identity when he writes that 'however much religious bigotry can be said to underpin much of this behaviour, there is something more going on

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here than mere anti-Catholicism'. Marshall's book should be viewed as a stimulus to learning about those features of life in Scotland rarely addressed.

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