

REVIEW
IN AND OUT OF THE STATE:
SCOTTISH AND OTHER NATIONALISMS

David McCrone

Peter Lynch **Minority Nationalism and European Integration**, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996, ISBN 0708313779, hb, £39.91, 228pp.

James Mitchell **Strategies for Self-Government: the Campaigns for a Scottish Parliament**, Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996, ISBN 0748661131, pb, £14.99, 350pp.

Nowadays, many commentators south of the border bemoan the fact that books on the 'condition of England' have all but disappeared. True, Will Hutton's **The State We're In** has become a best-seller, but it is the exception which proves the rule. At a time when challenges to the British state both from within and without are probably greater than at any point in its history, it is difficult to think of much of a contemporary literature accessible to what used to be called the 'thinking public'. Some explain this decline by pointing out that much of it is to be found in newspapers and magazines these days, but, since the virtual demise of Penguin books, it does not appear in book form any more. In general a literary culture no longer has the domination it once had, and radio and television carry some of this material.

Scotland, like Ireland and to some extent Wales, is different in these respects; maybe it is not as different as we like to think, but there is a growing and accessible book culture which straddles (like this journal itself) academic and public debate. Much social and political science writing is still so esoteric

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and incestuous that no-one reads it except its rivals and reviewers. Our world is not perfect. The broadsheet newspapers in Scotland are going through a crisis of identity, and, certainly in terms of the east-coast publications, largely ignore scholarly output which writes about the 'condition of Scotland'. One can but hope that political change might usher in a fresh look, if only for reasons of self-interest.

The two books reviewed here are valuable additions to a growing oeuvre of academic work on Scotland's political future. The book by Lynch is based on his PhD thesis, and, unlike most of such tomes which struggle to find a niche between the demands of academic examiners and those of a wider readership, is a well-written and highly informative account. Its great strength lies in its comparative account of 'minority nationalisms' in the context of European integration. Its general theme is that the process of Europeanisation has altered fundamentally the context in which nationalist and regionalist parties operate, and that, by and large, Europe is a help rather than a hindrance to their political aspirations. The author focuses in detail on four such: the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, the Breton Movement in France, and Volksunie in Belgium.

Such parties are largely new, dating in their modern forms from the post-war period, and cannot easily be located on a straightforward Right-Left spectrum. For example, the Union Democratique Bretonne and Plaid Cymru are on the Left, the SNP is Centre-Left, and Volksunie is in the Centre with other parties such as Vlaams Blok further to the Right. Neither can the parties be labelled 'nationalist' parties in the same sense. Lynch acknowledges this by indicating the variety of terms for minority nationalism: regionalism, regional nationalism, sub-state nationalism, neo-nationalism, ethno-nationalism, stateless nationalism, and so on. Their goals vary from independence to federalism to home rule to devolution to demands for greater cultural, but not political, autonomy. These debates are echoed within the parties themselves as they seek to adjust to and take advantage of the variable political geometry of the new Europe. More generally, the author comments: 'European integration in tandem with global economic trends has had the effect of killing economic autarky stone dead as nationalist strategy - a fact which has been accepted by the nationalist parties' (p.197).

The other book by James Mitchell whose work is better known to those interested in Scottish affairs provides an account of the strategies which have been used in the quest for self-government in Scotland. Its strength lies in its middle chapters, in particular those dealing with the SNP's internal strategy,

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and those on the campaigns by pressure groups and supra-party conventions for Home Rule. The chapter on the SNP is itself well-worth the price of the book alone. Some of the earlier chapters suffer a bit from extraneous academic concept-mongering which don't add a great deal to our understanding of politics on the ground. Nevertheless, this book too is a very valuable account of where Scottish politics has got to at the end of the 20th century, and can be recommended.

Scotland has been well-served by its younger scholars and academics who have taken up the challenge in a fairly hostile climate, academic and political, of writing about its 'condition'. The promise of a new parliament should make that task easier.

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