

REVIEW: L'ÉCOSSE CONTEMPORAINE

Christopher Harvie

Christian Civardi, **L'Écosse Contemporaine**, Paris: Ellipses, 2002, 176 pp, pb, 12.50 euros, ISBN : 2729810374.

Scotland does not do badly in terms of publicity within Europe. There are up to twenty guidebooks in each of the main languages and, in Germany and France in particular, cultural groups and academics who take a close interest in us. The directions of these two streams are not the same. The PR operations and guidebooks are there to boost us, admittedly to a pretty discriminating, well-educated clientele, while the academics join enthusiastically in our national sport of self-lacerating critique: come on in, the blood's lovely!

Christian Civardi, pro-Rector of the University of Strasbourg II, is by training an historian of the Scottish labour movement, and one of the most convincing and lucid of our unofficial ambassadors, helpfully remote from the artifices of PR and that transatlantic/enterprise-culture mumbo-jumbo which has so far tended to disfigure our embryo foreign relations.

L'Écosse Contemporaine is a straightforward and persuasive account of the changes which have enabled and accompanied self-government and their institutional, economic and social background. It was published before the 2003 election but presents a wealth of statistical detail, and a sympathetic but not indulgent account of most of Holyrood's first parliament. As New Labour's artifices collapse at Westminster, this retrospect prompts the thought that Holyrood's achievement of running-in the new arrangements was, comparatively speaking, a modest success that can be built on.

Civardi's faith in an independent Scotland in a 'Europe of the Regions' maybe sounded a bit optimistic in 2004 or 2005, yet since then *stasis* within, or

Christopher Harvie is professor of British and Irish history at the University of Tübingen.

Review: The Union of 1707

discrediting of, the big-state governments of Europe, and the continuing accumulation both of power and policy success at the small-nation or regional level, seems to bear him out.

A copy of this book should be in the library of every secondary school, where it can help in healing our ‘Scottish patients’: kids growing up with little knowledge of politics and history, and less of European languages. ‘See ourselves as others see us’ – and the sooner the better.

April 2006