



CHICAGO JOURNALS

NACBS
North American
Conference on
British Studies

E. H. H. Green and D. M. Tanner, eds. *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values, and the Reception of Economic Debate*

Author(s): Guy Ortolano

Source: *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 808-810

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of [The North American Conference on British Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/604795>

Accessed: 11/05/2011 09:38

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press and The North American Conference on British Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The Journal of British Studies.

<http://www.jstor.org>

on a “dual intelligence approach” (343), combining clandestine operations and close cooperation with the Irish government on military and intelligence matters. The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and other intelligence agencies established new secret networks of agents. But more important, the new British political representative in Dublin and military and intelligence attachés worked with Irish authorities to provide the necessary operational intelligence and to dispel the myth of the Irish fifth column.

After the initial crisis passed, British intelligence work focused on winning the propaganda war in Ireland and on preventing any vital defense information from leaking out through Ireland. The colorful cast of intelligence-related characters makes McMahon’s story interesting, although his assessment that confiscating German Ambassador Hempel’s infrequently used wireless transmitter before D-day was “the most serious challenge faced by British intelligence agencies” (402) suggests the limited importance of this theater of operations.

McMahon’s examination of World War II intelligence seems to confirm an unspoken theme of the entire book: that secret intelligence—the cloak-and-dagger aspects of the business emphasized in popular histories—was essentially worthless, at least in Ireland. Only after 1941 did the SIS provide reliable intelligence, which tended to debunk rather than spread alarming rumors, but even then its agents were untrained locals, its information was seldom original or important, and its network was thoroughly penetrated by Irish intelligence forces. This modest achievement marked a huge improvement over the exaggerated and alarmist prewar secret intelligence, which tended to originate from embittered unionists dreaming of the whole of Ireland returned to British control or from mercenary agents angling for money or more permanent employment.

McMahon’s contention that intelligence had a “major impact on British decision makers” (3) is less convincing. The extent to which intelligence affected decisions is never clear. McMahon himself points out that “diehard unionist” (163) views were prevalent among the intelligence forces and Conservatives leaders. Arguably, then, intelligence served only to confirm or reinforce preconceptions and biases. For instance, I doubt Churchill’s prejudices were (or could be) overcome by the calming intelligence reports that cautioned against coercion in 1940. He was perfectly willing to cherry-pick the intelligence to find material to support his position.

Similarly, McMahon probably gives British intelligence too much credit for changing official attitudes toward Ireland by the end of World War II. The changed geopolitical circumstances more profoundly shaped Britain’s new relationship to its neighbor than did the levelheaded reports from the British representative in Dublin. Unionist diehards had to reconcile themselves to far greater threats to empire than an independent Ireland. Neither of these reservations detract from McMahon’s accomplishment. His book is an important contribution to the scholarship of intelligence, and a worthy first volume in the Boydell Press History of British Intelligence series.

Padraic Kennedy, York College of Pennsylvania

E. H. H. GREEN and D. M. TANNER, eds. *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values, and the Reception of Economic Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xiii+313. \$99.00 (cloth).

In 1935, George Dangerfield famously identified the “strange death of liberal England” in a series of crises preceding the Great War. Liberalism, Dangerfield argued, went to its grave not as another casualty of war but, rather, upon the exhaustion of a political temper that proved unable to accommodate claims that were at once contrary and absolute. This wide-ranging volume of essays—edited by Duncan Tanner and the late Ewen Green, and dedicated

to Peter Clarke—attends to the existence and persistence of the liberal temper before, during, and after the First World War, in the form of cultural values and moral sentiments that informed the behavior of a range of intellectual and political figures. Each of the essays begins by relating its subject to an aspect of Clarke's work, and the principle theme that emerges is the inadequacy of the "economic" as an isolated category of explanation.

The introduction, cowritten by Tanner and Green, situates the volume, and the work of Peter Clarke more generally, in the context of broader developments in intellectual and political history since the 1970s. These developments came to emphasize less the validity of ideas, as formulated by experts and transmitted to politicians, so much as their use, as adopted by situated actors for reasons of their own. "The contributors look at how ideas are refracted, tailored and utilised—consciously or unconsciously—by political writers or cultural figures," Tanner and Green explain, adding that, as a result, "the value of ideas is reasserted, not as 'expert' opinion influencing events, but as mechanisms through which pre-existing orientations are given credibility and meaning" (26–27). Economic ideas remain central to political life as depicted in this volume, but since ideas can serve multiple purposes, and individuals face competing pressures, material interests or economic commitments only partially explain the decisions of political actors. A second aim of the introduction is to assert the conceptual sophistication of this approach, despite a tendency among some of its most prominent practitioners to wear their theory lightly. The editors regret that "the impact of the less consciously theoretical is easily passed over (or misrepresented) because it does not wear its conceptual originality on its sleeves" (26), and their introduction partially remedies this oversight by relating this vein of work in intellectual and political history to more explicitly theoretical trends.

Part 1, "Economic Ideas and Political Leaders," considers the relationship between particular political figures and broader economic currents in four distinct cases. James Thompson examines debates regarding the minimum wage during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. He shows that these debates were not confined within national borders and that questions about wages were always invested—and understood to be invested—with political, ethical, and moral concerns. John A. Thompson exerts pressure upon economic interpretations of America's entry into the First World War. He seeks not to repudiate economic explanations exactly so much as to expand our conceptions so that they include the fact of America's economic implication in the international political system. Duncan Tanner draws upon a collection of Ramsay MacDonald's papers at the University of Manchester to reveal the role of personal qualities and individual decisions in the Labour government's efforts to manage the 1929–31 crisis—efforts, he shows, that cannot fully be understood through the familiar lens of adherence to "orthodoxy." And Boyd Hilton contributes a remarkable reinterpretation of Robert Lowe, chancellor under Gladstone from 1868 until the prime minister assumed that position himself in 1873. The twists and turns in Hilton's intricate essay cannot adequately be conveyed here, but generally speaking he poses the question of why Lowe was replaced in 1873, and he answers that question by recovering the contrary intellectual formations that molded Gladstone and Lowe despite their superficially similar commitments to liberal economic orthodoxy.

Part 2, "The Use and Abuse of Economic Ideas: Keynes and His Interpreters," consists of three essays that examine the interpretation and reinterpretation of John Maynard Keynes. Richard Toye and Ewen Green contribute nicely paired essays on the shifting relationships between Keynes and the Labour and Conservative parties (respectively). These relationships were often complicated during Keynes's lifetime, as Toye shows in his recovery of the wary embrace between Keynes and Labour during the interwar period, but they became considerably more straightforward after Keynes's death, as figures across the ideological spectrum jostled to claim Keynes's benediction for their own preferred policies. These two essays testify to the aptness of Clarke's distinction, developed in *The Keynesian Revolution and Its Economic Consequences* (Cheltenham, 1998) and discussed by Tanner and Green in the

introduction, between the histories of “Keynes” and of “Keynesianism.” Eugenio Biagini’s chapter demonstrates the existence of that dynamic in postwar Italy as well. Biagini’s essay also points to a welcome dimension of this volume as a whole: although the essays carefully examine particular figures making particular decisions in particular contexts (indeed, that is the emphasis of the empirical, contextual approach advocated in the introduction), their scope ranges to include examples from Europe, the United States, and Australia, in addition to Britain.

Part 3, “Economic Forces and Their Significance,” further interrogates the category of the “economic” in the intellectual and economic history of twentieth-century Britain. Rather than identifying the category’s inevitable implication with moral and ethical concerns, Stefan Collini instead recovers its emergence as a “synoptic” concept in interwar cultural criticism (274). His fascinating essay shows that T. S. Eliot, R. H. Tawney, F. R. Leavis, L. C. Knights, and others came to associate “modern” society with the emergence of particularly economic modes of behavior and thought during the seventeenth century—a move that shifted the target of the cultural criticism they inherited and transmitted from the fact of industrialization to the developments that enabled it. The volume closes with Barry Supple’s consideration of the moral dimensions of some of the century’s most significant economic developments, including structural changes (such as the shift from heavy industry), the abandonment of national autonomy (in favor of European integration), and debates over public expenditure (especially regarding pensions). Supple shows that these developments involved moral and political choices as much as economic adaptations, and he counsels “less heroic devices” than the ideal of egalitarianism in the course of future efforts to reconcile economic adjustments with moral commitments: “Such apparently banal strategies,” he concludes, “may do most good and least harm in the exercise of the moral choice which must—or at least should—underpin our reactions to economic change” (306). Dangerfield might have been surprised by its survival, but he would have recognized the sentiment, and Supple’s tempered conclusion serves as a fitting end to this splendid collection of essays on the survival of liberal England.

Guy Ortolano, University of Virginia

JOSEPH MELLING and ALAN BOOTH, eds. *Managing the Modern Workplace: Productivity, Politics and Workplace Culture in Postwar Britain*. Studies in Labour History. Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008. Pp. xiv+169. \$99.95 (cloth).

British politics from the late 1950s to the 1980s was dominated by a concern for Britain’s relative economic decline. In the early 1960s, Labour under Harold Wilson blamed the Tories’ old-boy network and failure to plan for “thirteen wasted years,” promising to harness the power of science and the state to restore the British economy. In the 1970s, the Conservatives, first under Ted Heath and then under Margaret Thatcher, blamed the bloated state created by Labour and the erosion of individual competitiveness it ostensibly created. Although the Conservatives and Labour proposed diametrically opposed remedies, they did agree that economic decline was a real problem. And both also blamed, albeit in very different ways, the trade union movement for contributing to the problem by excessive sectionalism, opposition to new technologies, and general bloody-mindedness. Historians and other analysts, both at the time and since, have often embraced one or the other of these contemporary political views of British decline.

Managing the Modern Workplace consists of a series of case studies that call into question simplistic notions of British economic failure and, in particular, the role of trade unions in causing it. In his chapter on the British and American automobile industries, Joseph Melling