

Torrance, D., (ed.), 2012, *Whatever Happened to Tory Scotland?*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, pp. VIII+190.

A potential reader of this volume might respond to the question in its title with another one: is there any reason to be interested in the Scottish Tories (the official name of the Scottish part of the British Conservative Party is the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)? Such a question might seem harsh, but one may use a few reasonably persuasive arguments to defend it. The major force in contemporary Scottish politics is of course the Scottish National Party (SNP). It is not only a party of government but also a *spiritus movens* of the pro-independence camp. The Scottish Labour Party (SLP) might still be recovering from the electoral shock of 2011 but it remains the SNP's biggest rival (this was confirmed by the result of the 2012 Scottish local elections) and it is capable of electoral gains in the future. The Scottish Liberal Democrats lost their status as the "third-power of Scottish politics" in 2012 but the party still has 11 MPs elected in Scotland, and it is a party of the United Kingdom government in coalition with the Conservatives. These two parties are also trying to propose visions of Scotland's constitutional future as an alternative to the independence path preached by the SNP. In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives only recently and somewhat half-heartedly have joined the constitutional debate; the party still seems to be internally divided on this issue and, although the Conservative Party is the bigger partner in the coalition government in London, it has only one MP from Scotland. If the above is not convincing, then one might have look at the index of a recently published second edition of the *Scottish Politics* by Paul Cairney and Neil McGarvey. The imbalance between the space devoted not only to the heavyweights of Scottish politics (the SNP and SLP) but also the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives is striking. So it bears repetition: is there any reason to study Scottish Conservatism? If anybody indeed has any doubts, the reviewed volume should help with putting them to rest. The authors not only present to the reader a set of well thought-out essays on Scottish conservatism. Some of them also contain insights which, if carefully paid attention to by the Party itself, could be treated as foundations of a rebuilding process (one may call it and *unintended advising*). There are also the authors, most notably David

Melding, who pin their cautious hopes for a change on the Scottish Conservatives' new leader, Ruth Davidson, who was elected almost a year before the release of this book. Maybe then not everything is yet lost for the Tories in Scotland? If the present author was a leader of the Scottish Conservatives he would certainly consider beginning with the contribution by James Mitchell and Alan Convery. It is an examination of the two distinct approaches to the political challenges which are ever present in the Conservative Party. Thus it offers a strategic scope of analysis. In their opinion, in Scotland the party should definitely be more *Disraelian* than *Peelite* in its approach. What does that mean? It should try to set an agenda in stead of just reacting to the initiatives proposed by the others. It should be flexible and not dogmatic. In the field of devolution the last conservative leader of the *Disraelian* trait was Edward Heath and one can safely assume that what followed was an era of unrepentant *Peelites*. How can one be a *Disraelian* in Scotland? In the authors' opinion the party should be arguing for a Scottish Parliament with broad fiscal powers (i.e. enhanced devolution), which in turn should create a natural milieu for the supposedly more fiscally responsible conservatives and thus broadening their representation.

No political party whatsoever is allowed the luxury of not taking into account the social context in which it operates and on which it depends for support. As John Curtice convincingly argues, Scottish Conservatism is not failing because of the presumably dominant social-democratic sympathies among the Scots. It is rather the party's own failure to rightly interpret the social attitudes and respond to them with changes in its electoral message. It is striking indeed that in spite of the popularity of devolution and the ever stronger Scottish national identity, the Scottish Conservatives for a long time remained generally sceptical about constitutional change. Consequently, they are being perceived as a party that did not sufficiently care for Scotland's interests. In Curtice's opinion, in order to succeed, the Conservatives need a decisive strategic shift. At the same time he is very sceptical if Ruth Davidson is capable of accomplishing this.

For David Melding the Scottish Tories should look at their Welsh counterparts for inspiration. In Wales, the Conservatives not only perform better in electoral contests but also show a more friendly attitude towards creative constitutional thinking. In sum, to emulate this, the Scottish Conservatives would need its versions of Nick Bourne and

Cymrification (as it might be termed, given that *albanisation* is being used in the field of linguistic and cultural studies and *caledonization* is being used by the geologists). Melding, a well-known supporter of the federalization of the United Kingdom, also argues here for the adoption of federalism by the Conservative Party. In his opinion, only a project of a well-balanced federal union is capable of saving the Union, and at the same time broadening the support of the Conservatives in Scotland.

Such an advisory mood is also noticeable in the contributions by Antje Bednarek and Alex Massie, though the tone of them is radically different. Bednarek's academic contribution analyses the role of women in the Scottish Conservative Party, and her conclusions are not very optimistic. She assesses the recent phenomenon of conservative female leaders (Ruth Davidson's predecessor was Annabel Goldie) as being rather misleading. The actual position of women in the party's structures did not change much, hence she qualifies its supposed modernization as a token one. To overcome such superficiality an influx of younger members is necessary. The tone of Massie's text is so different that one could justifiably describe it as a diatribe. For him, the Scottish Conservatives "remain a toxic brand in Scotland" as a result of their own shortsightedness. How a party, he pointedly asks, which prides itself as a guardian of the balanced budgets, for such a long time could not see that broad (or even full) fiscal autonomy of Scotland may be the right way to change its electoral fortunes there?

There are also two intriguing contributions which could be qualified as belonging to the field of intellectual history. In the first of them, Gerry Hassan calls for a reconsideration of the role that Thatcherism had played in Scotland. Such a reconsideration is needed for in Hassan's opinion Scottish politics operates behind a mask of anti-Thatcherism. As a result, a dominant anti-Thatcherist narrative has emerged that has created a myth which has not only made the Conservatives politically almost irrelevant. It has also stifled the debate on the scale of the internalization of Thatcherite ideas by the SNP and Labour Party. In such a context (could it be called "anti-Thatcherism without content?") an open and serious discussion of a radical political alternative for Scotland is almost impossible. Colin Kidd in turn somewhat provocatively shows that the Scots themselves might be at least in part responsible for the conceptualization of Thatcherist ideology, which makes it difficult to argue that it was

an English import, totally irreconcilable with the Scottish political traditions (it should be added that Antje Bednarek also notices this connection; look for note 22 on page 167).

This book definitely does not disappoint either when it comes the historical perspective(s) on Tory Scotland thanks to the contributions by Alvin Jackson, Richard J. Finlay, David Torrance and Margaret Arnott with Catriona M.M. Macdonald. Thanks to them an understanding of what really has happened to Tory Scotland is all the more comprehensive.

Observing the recent change of tone among the leaders of the Scottish Conservatives (especially during the party conference in March 2014) one gets the impression that the reviewed volume indeed could have been carefully read. Ruth Davidson's leadership should not be understood as a radical break with the past, but it seems to be a genuine attempt at renewal (there are also more cautious assessments of her record; for example in Alan Convery's recent article *The 2011 Scottish Conservative Party Leadership Election: Dilemmas for Statewide Parties in Regional Contexts* published in "Parliamentary Affairs" vol. 67, no. 2, April 2014). With her reformist approach she is trying to position the Tories as truly Scottish, reclaim patriotism from the grip of the SNP and calls for a further devolution. The internal divisions may remain but she has some influential backers among English (e. g. David Cameron) and Scottish Tories (e.g. Struan Stevenson). Of course a crucial puzzle remains: is it not too late? If indeed it is, then the Scottish Tories will have to respond to the challenges facing them in radically different constitutional circumstances. Circumstances, it might be added, which they should have been trying to prevent for a long time now. A surprising inability of critical auto-reflection made the Conservatives operate contrary to their long-term interests.

This book is without doubt a significant contribution to the field of studies devoted to Scottish political parties. It neatly complements the recently published new or updated studies of the SNP and SLP.

I will make one final remark. The role of the reviewed volume's editor certainly confirms Torrance's status as one of the leading historians (if not the leading historian) of Scottish unionism.

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