

rentals and census material at hand, there was no need to be so imprecise. When "black cattle fell in value by 100 per cent" in 1815 (p. 43), did the price actually drop to zero? Why not quote prices?

Social and economic history, particularly in a rural setting, requires a firm grasp of social custom. The announcement of a farm roup (auction) from the pulpit was not "the intrusion of secular affairs into the sacredness of the Sabbath" (p. 116), but, in the absence of local newspapers, an act of charity, as was one's attendance to buy unneeded objects for the sake of the widow.

One may also wonder at the absence of any reference to literature on economic rent, such as Chisholm's *Rural Settlement and Land Use* (1962), which would have introduced the author to Johann Heinrich von Thunen's work on the laws of distance governing farm costs and market prices in a similar economic environment (Pomerania): *The Isolated State* (1826). Much of the peripheral area within British commercial agriculture would have been explicable, and rents seen to be reasonable. The author's aspiration to find rents at Lothian or East Anglian levels in a London-oriented marketing system is unreasonable; the differences, due to distance, might then have led to different inferences about efficiency and enterprise (p. 41).

On matters of social structure and demographic trends and processes, there is no analysis, but uncritical reiteration of contemporary opinion. Perhaps work on the 1841 and 1851 census lists would have helped here. Some categorical statements might then have been made as to the social origins of the farm servants; were they really of a different class from the tenants who employed them? Why is it that the author mentions so many of the landlords, improving or otherwise, but not a single tenant by name? It was the substantial tenant who usually carried out the actual improvement of land, and who engaged in debate about methods and produced the ideas for local demonstration and adoption.

Finally, one can agree with the author that the region saw "radical reappraisal by the landlords of their approach to estate management" (p. 153), but was the resultant absentee landlordism beneficial to the region and its people? It sounds astonishingly weak to conclude that "the phenomenon of a group of essentially conservative landowners changing their estates in less than half a century from an almost medieval backwardness to some of the most improved agricultural properties in the country seems totally inexplicable and, even after careful study, there appears to have been no single powerful motivating force" (p. 154). One can only suggest that, perhaps, the right questions were not asked, that, perhaps, traditional methods of writing history are inappropriate for the object in view.

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H.-U. WEHLER, ed. — *Klassen in der europäischen Sozialgeschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979. Pp. 280.

This small volume contains the revised text of nine papers presented to the section "European Social History in Comparison: Social Inequality and Class Structures" at the 1979 congress of German historians. The section title, more than the book title, describes the contents. In subject matter the essays range from reflections on social inequality (Wehler) to case studies on England (middle and upper

classes by Pollard; working class by Hobsbawm), France (1630-1830 by Mager; since mid-nineteenth century by Haupt), Germany (late eighteenth century to early twentieth century by Kocka; Bundesrepublik by Lepsius), Italy (late eighteenth century to early twentieth century by Hunecke) and the USA (Puhle). Substantial notations at the end of each essay provide an overview of recent work, since the studies are rarely based upon original sources.

In his general overview of the change from a hierarchical, feudal system of estates to a more fluid system of classes, Wehler poses a number of questions about class structures, formations and functions. He leaves it to the case studies to answer the issues raised, especially how the emergence of capitalism transformed the system of inequality. Since he has announced that defining classes and class systems is complicated, Wehler does not provide his colleagues with very precise concepts or even hope of coming to terms with the subject. Some authors, such as Pollard, decided to begin with historical situations and at the end see if the concept of class has any utility for the analysis made. Pollard, for instance, tries to explain how English agriculturists maintained their political-power position longer than their economic base justified. In short, he proceeds as though the agriculturists were a class and attempts to analyse relations between this group and the middle class. Crucial to his explanation of the relatively peaceful changes of English class structure are the splits within the middle class, especially those transforming the lower middle class from an "enemy-critical class to a conservative element" (p. 44). By contrast, Hobsbawm defines the class groupings of England in the era of intense industrialization, 1840-80, before noting the "moderate and subaltern labourism" of the period. The rest of his essay rambles towards the postwar situation.

More serious and thorough are the essays on France and Germany. Mager sets up a series of criteria to judge inequality and account for social structures. Each section is substantiated by statistical summaries. He demonstrates the general continuity of structures and social groupings as French society changed from an estate-dominated to a notability-led society. Similarly, Haupt demonstrates modern French class structures by statistically recounting inherited property holding and occupational patterns. After the descriptive part he seeks to explain lasting social inequality with reference to recruitment and education. Lepsius's thorough account tries to describe the "life situation, interest representation and values" (p. 66) of a variety of social groupings. He also analyses intermarriage patterns among occupationally differentiated groups. Like the other authors he has difficulty accounting for the persistence of inequality given the disappearance of sharp class lines and ideologies emphasizing equality of opportunity.

The collection as a whole has an air of *déjà vu* about it. Perhaps that is because the essays contain so few sharp conclusions. Perhaps it is because nearly all the authors have expressed similar views better elsewhere.

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