

## Scottish Miners

*Alan Campbell: The Scottish Miners, Bd. 1: 1874–1939: Industry, Work and Community, Bd. 2: 1874–1939: Trade Unions and Politics, Aldershot: Ashgate 2000, 401 S. and 433 S., je 45,00 £*

Alan Campbell's two-volume work on the Scottish miners represents a *tour de force* of an often forgotten industrial region. The culmination of ten years painstaking research, the two books seek to reconstruct the social and labour history of the Scottish mining regions. While another section of the 'Celtic' fringe, South Wales, has received much attention from local historians, the Scottish miners have been strangely neglected. As such, Campbell's books provide an important balance in our ever-expanding knowledge of the British coalfields.

A doyen of the social history project that emerged in the 1960s, Campbell forcibly rejects the post-modernist concerns with language and seeks to 'retain the materialist focus of the Marxist tradition upon the dialectic between structure and agency' (p. 5, Bd. 1). The first volume is, therefore, concerned with examining the structural development of the Scottish industry and the miners' communities. Adopting a comparative approach, Campbell uses Philip Cooke's five-point characterisation of what constitutes a region (the productive base, the labour process, ownership of capital, specific social relations and institutional specifics). In this manner Campbell successfully teases out the differences between the four Scottish coalfields (Ayrshire, West Central, Fife and Clackmannanshire and Mid- and East Lothian) to present a subtle and variegated account of industrial and social development. Not content with distinguishing between the coalfields, he also selects ten localities within these regions to produce an even richer picture of the miners' communities. Campbell's examination is comprehensive, covering all aspects of the industry, ranging from the markets served, the degree of concentration and mechanisation to the ethnic composition of the towns and pit villages. Through this comparative approach the author is able to identify features common to all the coalfields, but also to illustrate their distinctiveness. West Central, therefore, emerges as the region most prone to industrial conflict, while Ayrshire and Mid- and East Lothian had a low degree of conflict. Furthermore, Campbell is able to chart how the characteristics of these four regions changed over time. For example, owners in Fife and Clackmannanshire initially adopted a co-operative attitude towards trade unions, but later became increasingly hostile. Growing levels of industrial conflict and social disorder paralleled this changing attitude.

The second volume examines the contours of trade union and political development in the four coalfields. Following a high point in the 1870s, Scottish miners' unionism remained a weak and fragmented affair until the 1900s. Thereafter, the unions were strengthened, but were shattered by the industrial disputes of 1921 and 1926. The fragmentary and divided nature of Scottish miners' unionism after 1926 is illustrated by the formation of a Communist union, the United Mineworkers of Scotland in 1929. The UMS was a unique in the British coalfields and vividly illustrated the militant attitude of the Scottish miners in the inter-war

period. However, although the formation of a Communist union, and the election of two Communist MPs, might be seen as evidence of the Scottish miners developed sense of class consciousness, Campbell points out that Conservative MPs also enjoyed success in the mining constituencies. The growth of the labour movement in the Scottish coalfields, therefore, emerges as a more complicated story than stereotyped accounts of miners' solidarity would suggest. Much like the Ruhr before the First World War, the labour movement in Scotland was fragmented along lines of ethnicity, religion and politics. For example, conflict between Irish Catholics and Orangemen (Irish Protestants) proved a formidable barrier for trade unions and Labour Party activists attempting to build class solidarity.

Campbell conceptualises the complex development of unionism by applying three 'ideal type' orientations. The Independent Collier represented a work culture based on the autonomy and skill of the worker. This type corresponded to lower levels of mechanisation and small pits. Restriction of output was seen as the best way to maintain wages. The author sees this orientation as being dominant from the eighteenth century to the 1880s. Between the 1880s and the 1930s the Bureaucratic Reformist superseded the Independent Collier. Pits now tended to be larger and production was a mixture of handwork and machine cutting. The Reformist aimed in the short-term for collective agreements, but the longer-term goal was nationalisation. Finally, from the 1930s the Militant Miner developed against the background of large monopolies and highly mechanised pits. Politically Communist, the Militant Miner saw socialisation as the ultimate goal. Campbell admits, however, that these 'ideal types' did not correspond to chronologically hermetic eras, but that each orientation overlapped and continued to exist even if in a subordinate position.

Campbell is also careful to link his analysis of trade unionism and politics to the structural factors outlined in the first volume. For example, he regards the Bureaucratic Reformist approach as largely a failure before 1918. The policies associated with the Independent Miner, on the other hand, survived into the 1900s due to the uneven degree of mechanisation and continued importance of handwork (p. 118, Bd. 2). However, Campbell is keen to avoid any reductionist relationship between labour processes and ideology. While early mechanisation led many to reaffirm some of the exclusive policies of the Independent Collier, Campbell also identifies affinities between the work practices of the Independent Collier and Militant Miner. These qualifying statements aside, Campbell does suggest that his framework allows 'tentative linkages between the mining labour process, trade unionism and mineworkers' political behaviour' (p. 6, Bd. 2).

The scope and methodological rigour of Campbell's books provide a compelling and highly readable account of the history of the Scottish miners in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Campbell's attempt to link the structural development, outlined in the first book, and agency, described in the second, is extremely convincing. However, his account of trade unionism and politics might have benefited from a more open-minded view towards some of the ideas of post-modernism. While some English historians have used the 'linguistic turn' as a platform to attack older social history, others have tried to adopt a more intermediate course. Historians such as John Belchem (*The Languages of Labour*) have sought to link both discourse and material structures. Arguably, the templates

Campbell uses in the second volume could also be construed as discursive constructs. As noted, he is at pains to show the continuities and affinities between his templates. These could have been more extensively explored by the examination of the discourse of the trade union activists. How did the Militant Miner, for example, draw upon the traditions of the Independent Collier and reformulate them to correspond to the very different environment of the 1930s?

A more sensitive use of discourse analysis could also have been applied to his examination of social structures. In the final chapter of the first volume Campbell discusses ethnic and religious identities in the coalfields. He vividly describes the tense relationship, and numerous clashes, between the Irish Catholics and Orangemen. Catholicism and Protestantism underpinned these identities, yet they also required constant reinforcement through speeches and parades. On the other hand, Campbell admits that these identities could be fluid. By accepting some of the tenets of discourse analysis Campbell could have charted these shifts, and the labour movements attempts to 'flatten' out differences between these groups in their efforts to organise the miners, more extensively. Admittedly, Campbell sets out his case against the 'linguistic turn' from the first. He sees the post-modernist school as rejecting 'realist' epistemology (under which he includes his own approach) through its focus on language and discourse (p. 4, Bd. 1) However, in light of this attitude, it is therefore surprising that he does seem to engage with the 'linguistic turn' obliquely. Campbell employs what could be considered post-modern buzzwords. 'Discourse' is used several times, but perhaps more surprising is the use of the 'other'. While discussing Orange identities in the early 1920s, he comments that the language used by the Benhar miners during the 1921 lockout revealed 'a complex discourse of militant trade unionism inflected with Orange antagonism towards Catholicism and in which Sinn Fein, "unmanliness" and strike breaking are fused into an opposing, non-union other' (p. 353, Bd. 2). Here Campbell seems to be acknowledging the importance of the mixture of identities and discourses within the miner's rhetoric. It seems then that even Campbell is not totally impervious to the 'linguistic turn'. By engaging with some of its ideas more openly Campbell could conceivably have deepened his examination of the implications of these identities for the formation of trade unions.

Overall, Campbell's two volumes represent a major work of social and labour history. The books provide a scholarly and readable account of a neglected group of workers. Furthermore, his methodology and the rigorous nature of his comparison provides a shining example to other comparative historians. Not only do the books demonstrate the continuing vitality of social and labour history, they also give a valuable boost to the practice of comparative history. Their only drawback is the refusal to adopt some of the insights emerging from the 'linguistic turn'. The use of such ideas need not mean the wholesale acceptance of post-modernism and could only enrich an already excellent work.

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