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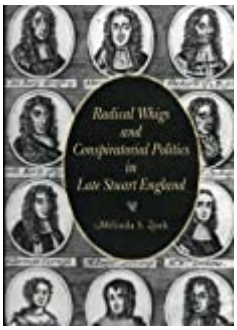

Melinda S. Zook. *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England.* State College, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. xxi + 234 pp. $37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01856-0.

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Except for brief excursions outside the parameters of the 1680s, this is a study of that decade and the activities of "Whig radicals," defined by Melinda Zook as those politicians, adventurers, and polemicists who were willing "to use and justify violence to obtain their ends" (xiii). For the most part, then, it is a book about the movement of radical politics and political thought from Exclusion through the Revolution. Rather than adopting the conventional view that Exclusion failed, giving way to a successful Tory backlash in the last four years of Charles II's reign and a conservative revolution three years later, Professor Zook argues that "the Whig exclusion movement became increasingly more exclusive, more determined, and more radical in the years that followed" (xii). Whereas Jonathan Scott, in *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677-1683*, dismissed the Exclusion Crisis as an "historiographical invention" (1992, p. 18), Zook sees it as the engine of radical politics through the 80s, culminating in success at the Revolution. "For radical Whigs," she writes, "the 1680s had been one long exclusion crisis"(xiii).

Zook has done a good job of identifying and describing what she refers to convincingly as a radical political culture. Particularly usable is an appendix of the careers of some ninety-four radical Whigs, those who qualify for inclusion in her taxonomy by virtue of their commitment generally to a right of active resistance and specifically to "a violent solution to the problem of the royal succession" (p. 3). A problem, however, is that she may have stretched her radical net too far. Not everyone will agree that signing one of the petitions for a parliament to be summoned in 1679 or 1680 or being a supporter of a bill of exclusion is sufficient to associate those signatories or supporters with an endorsement of active resistance. More problematical is that Zook may be making exaggerated claims for the radical culture that she has written about so comprehensively and so well. That it existed is beyond doubt; that it was more than a marginal subculture is still open to question. The testing ground was the Revolution and it was there that, according to Zook, "the ideology that permitted resistance, and the revolution culture that disseminated it, triumphed" (p. 147). But did it? That a subculture of resistance was in evidence in the 80s and a revolution of sorts occurred in 1688-89 does not mean that the one was the proximate cause of the other. A more compelling suggestion may be that the centerpieces of radical political thought, contract theory and the right of resistance, having been absent from the debates of the Convention and the Revolution Settlement, radicalism, at the end of the day, faltered rather than triumphed.

Zook's work stands in relief against the backdrop of

an earlier and more conservatively oriented scholarship. For a very long time historians of the Revolution of 1688-89, Whigs and revisionists alike, agreed that the episode was a rather tame affair. Such disagreements as there were centered less on causes than results. Some few argued that nothing much had been changed, while most contended either that the nation had moved backward to preserve its constitution or forward to change it. As to the event itself, just about everyone was persuaded by the contemporary assessment of ease with which it had been accomplished. In striking contrast to the thousands of lives spent in six years of civil war, this revolution had been achieved with negligible bloodshed in under two months. Arguably what made all this possible, a revolution seemingly without a rebellion, was the long shadow of civil war and the fear that 1641 might come again. As a result, the post-Interregnum restoration of both monarchy and church was the restoration as well of a national commitment to non-rebellion.

In this more traditional view of later Stuart political culture view it was the avoidance of radicalism that informed the conduct of English politics from the Restoration through the Revolution. Notwithstanding the aberration of Monmouth's ill conceived and irresponsible rising, any opposition to the joint threat of absolutism and Catholicism was understood to have been conditioned on the forswearing of violence. Seen through this filter the campaign for Exclusion was tolerable for having been confined to the battle-ground of parliament and the press; the Rye House Plot to do away with the king and duke of York was explicable for having been more wishful fantasy than active conspiracy; and the Revolution, both reluctant and respectable, was distinguished for having been guided by moderation. The victory to be celebrated in the historiography of Whig triumphalism was thus as much one of process as of outcome. The agenda of Protestantism and constitutionalism had been realized not by blood and violence, but by a sensible politics of balance and restraint. So much then for an earlier Whig history.

Much has since changed, due in large measure to data provided by Mark Goldie and Tim Harris and to the work of American scholars such as Lois Schwoerer, Richard Greaves, Gary De Krey, Janelle Greenberg, Richard Ashcraft, and now Melinda Zook, all of whom have sought to document the imprint of radicalism, particularly the right of resistance, on the politics of the Restoration and Revolution. These have been so successful in informing the historical debate that their arguments may have been carried further than any one or more them ever intended. Witness Linda Colley who, in a recent review of Norman Davies, The Isles (*TLS*, March 10, 2000, p. 6.), could remark without seeing the need for further comment or explanation, that "at a scholarly level, and even in school texts, it is now accepted . . . that 1688 was a violent, not a peaceful revolution."

Yet, despite Colley's confident aside on the Revolution not all scholars have been or will be convinced. Many, while certainly appreciating the importance of radical political thought and not denying the existence of radical politics, will remain to be persuaded that the subculture of radicalism had much of an effect on the Revolution, let alone that the Revolution was much of an exercise in political violence. To be fair, Zook, more cautious than Colley, does not make the same exaggerated claim for 1688, but neither does she lag far behind. "If," as she asserts in her Introduction, "we take the entire decade of the 1680s into account, the Glorious Revolution begins to look less glorious, less smooth and bloodless, and more like other modern revolutions" (xv). Not likely. In an otherwise good book on later Stuart radicalism the suggestion that 1688 looks anything like 1776, 1789, 1917, or 1949, is a conceit that extends too far.

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