

between revolution and reform', he argues, 'is much smaller and above all less fundamental' than has usually been argued (p. 16). Moreover, to emphasize the failure of revolution in Germany is to overlook the fact that successful revolutions are extremely uncommon; almost everywhere, reform, not revolution, is the norm. Finally – and most significantly – Rürup undermines the normative assumptions upon which laments for an absent revolution ultimately rest. Even successful revolutions, he wisely remarks, can be violent and destructive, leading, as in the case of the Russian revolution of 1917, to war, terror, and mass murder. There are many things about the German past that one might wish had been different, but surely the absence of a German version of the Bolshevik seizure of power is not one of them.

While most of the essays collected here rehearse arguments and analyses that appear elsewhere, *The Problem of Revolution* is a concise and convenient introduction to some important interpretations of German history. Students will find in this book useful accounts of significant historical episodes and good examples of contemporary German historiography's unsettled condition.

Stanford University, California

JAMES J. SHEEHAN

The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875. By BRUCE CURTIS (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 2001; pp. 385. £40).

THIS rich and suggestive book by one of Canada's leading historical sociologists should be of interest to scholars of state formation anywhere and ought to be required reading for all historical demographers for whom manuscript census material is grist for the methodological mill. *The Politics of Population* is situated in a small, provincial society in the middle of the nineteenth century. Its application and qualification of theory, its comparative framework, its cautionary lessons for researchers who use census data, and above all the surprising stories Curtis disinters from most unlikely sources, transcend its particularism. This work in Canadian history has much to say to social and political historians in Britain, Europe and the Americas.

In two previous books and a dozen or more articles, Bruce Curtis has explored aspects of the development of the sinews of the state in mid-nineteenth century Canada from a Foucaultian perspective. He has previously been concerned with the fertile disciplinary realm of education, particularly the evolution of a state-controlled school system and the development of hierarchical command and control bureaucracies within it. With this book Curtis widens his perspective on the process of state formation to encompass the inscription of the citizenry as a population with quantifiable social attributes. According to him this historical process produced both an image and an instrument: it was an episode in the development of a collective social self-consciousness and it equipped the state to govern, discipline and impose policies upon its imaginary people.

Given Curtis's theoretical point of departure, this might have turned into another grim and relentless account of the harnessing of individuals to distant authority, this time under the yoke of the census. But Curtis is critical of Foucault's ahistorical interpretation, and his encounter with the

voluminous documentary materials left over from various mid-century attempts at census-making underlined for him the contingent, cacophonous nature of the enterprise. His critical stance with respect to theory, his subtle application of it, and his careful reading of the historical record blurs the Foucaultian picture without entirely obscuring it. The invention of the state with all its attendant machinery becomes a much more messy, muddled, ironical, incomplete and curiously personalized process. To make a census required political will, administrative capability, conceptual sophistication, strategic direction, a regulated labour force, consistent application of abstract categories and a compliant citizenry. In the abstract Foucaultian schema these instrumentalities simply appear to pin people firmly to the grid of state. Each of these elements, however, has a history and much of Curtis's text is devoted to explaining change along these dimensions. Census-making in a linguistically, religiously and culturally divided Canada, where the changing numbers and social characteristics of the people had profound political implications, was a particularly contentious and contested act. It was not until 1871 that all these elements could be successfully combined, and then, ironically, in a scientific statist enterprise imbued with ultramontane, anti-industrial, ethnic bias. A nationalizing instrument was constructed that on its social dimension denied the existence of a Canadian nationality.

Curtis is sensitive as well to the personalities behind the various attempts at census-making, in part because he has found a series of touching human struggles buried in the documentary detritus of the census, but also because his theory sensitizes him to the historicism of science in the making, the political process whereby theory and categories harden into convention through discourse. Thus it is not just a matter of human interest that he introduces us to the schoolteacher and feckless Tory hack, Walter Crofton, who initiated the first census-like activities in 1852, the diligent journalist and agricultural booster, William Hutton, who toiled through ill health and a myriad of difficulties to produce the 1861 census, and finally and almost triumphantly, the surprising anti-hero, the literary, ultramontane, pronatalist, back-to-the land anti-urbanite French Canadian nationalist, whose neo-feudal ideology guided the production of the first 'scientific' census in 1871, Joseph-Charles Taché. Curtis wants to demonstrate that seemingly impersonal science gets 'made' out of personal convictions and that it carries hidden deep within its methodologies various ideological agendas. He is not, however, deterministic on this account. Things made for one reason can be, and often are, used for other purposes. A modern state can be socially constructed even with a neo-feudal census.

Population, as Curtis argues, has to be made up. It is not 'out there' to be captured or counted. A census cannot be taken, like a photograph, he insists. Rather it is a concept, an idea, that has to be constructed by getting many imaginations to think and act in the same way. It is essentially an imaginary construction, but in the modern sense one that requires intellectual sophistication, bureaucratic power and discipline. At root a census is an elaborate collective fiction, or rather a series of linked narratives. It is a set of stories men tell other men – women were not usually trusted to provide information – who inconsistently record these stories in pre-ordained categories for other men to 'correct' and tabulate. At each point interpretation clouds the impression. Curtis's account of the inconsistencies, systematic biases, and arbitrary re-arrangement of data associated with census-making will cause anyone who

has used manuscript census material to shudder with apprehension. The census is not the reliable voice from the bottom up that social historians have imagined it to be and have used, often uncritically, to reconstruct an image of mid-century society. Population has its politics.

This is a book about a seemingly dull subject that is brimming with critical intelligence and bemusing irony. It has its flaws – opaque prose, jargon and repetition among them – variants on the phrase ‘to configure social relations as population’ appear 29 times, ‘to invest social relations in statistical forms’ 12 times, and ‘social imaginary’ 17 times. But there is something important being said in these pages that offers a more nuanced way of understanding the history of state formation. Curtis complicates without completely negating theory with the crooked timber of human experience.

York University, Toronto

H. V. NELLES

The Modern British State: An Historical Introduction. By PHILIP HARLING
(Cambridge: Polity P., 2001; pp. 283. £55; pb. £15.99).

PHILIP Harling's *The Waning of 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779–1846* was reviewed in the *EHR* in February 1998 (cxiii. 450, 206–7). This new work is of a different kind, composed for a much wider readership. Harling starts at 1688. Five chapters bring him to 1979, and a sixth carries the story on from 1979 to ‘the Present’. This last section will not win many friends for contemporary history and might have been better omitted, but the first five are a *tour de force*, covering in fewer than two hundred pages what many series devote two or even three separate volumes to. The theme runs from war in the eighteenth century to welfare in the twentieth, or, to put it another way, from John Brewer to Jose Harris. The minimal state of the nineteenth century, with its peripheral military campaigns and its hesitant steps towards proto-welfare, makes a somewhat muted appearance between the two, though Harling offers a bow in the direction of Peter Mandler's high-minded patricians, and acknowledges that ‘if there was a Victorian “revolution in government” it took place at the local level’. The lead story runs, then, from the regressive tax-levying, empire-expanding state of the eighteenth century where welfare was left to charity and to the parishes, to the progressive tax-levying, empire-losing state of the twentieth century, where dismal revelations from the recruiting offices put the milk and beef into school meals and welfare was the price paid by the state for compulsory military service. Welfare was the great achievement of the twentieth century, but it was not the contentious issue, which was for how long after a war the state should plan and manage the economy.

Harling has written a creative summation of the historical writing of the past forty years. This is no bland Third Way history. There is no descent into précis, and the writing is selective, though it is left to the reader to measure the amount of space which has been allotted to rival authorities. The more extreme theorists of state power and state failings, E. P. Thompson and Correlli Barnett, are relegated to the back seats. Geoffrey Holmes and Patrick O'Brien, Pat Thane and Paul Addison are promoted to the fore. The result is a fine book, but inevitably there are criticisms. Harling appreciates the difficulties posed by the