

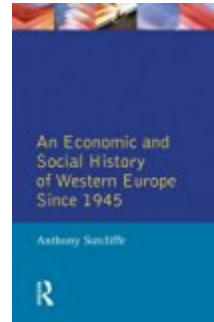
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Anthony Sutcliffe.** *An Economic and Social History of Western Europe Since 1945.* London and New York: Longman, 1996. xxiii + 376 pp. \$32.80 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-23645-5.

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## Toward a Modern Europe

In the aftermath of World War II, European nations were devastated. The war exacted a terrible toll on nations, and their futures were in doubt. Would they be able to rebound and rebuild? According to Anthony Sutcliffe in *An Economic and Social History of Western Europe Since 1945*, the western portion of Europe, after years of hardship, recovered and became strong once again. However, in the post-war years, this strength was dependent upon cooperation rather than competition.

Sutcliffe discusses in the preface that this book developed from his own teaching and that he envisioned it as a textbook on this specialized topic. To facilitate its use, the book is organized into subheadings which highlight various topics pertaining to Western Europe. Some explore specific countries, while others focus on such issues as socialization and immigration. Sutcliffe argues that the turning point, however, for Western Europe was the oil embargo of 1973 and the fall of Communism in 1989 which forced European nations to realize that they must work together.

Sutcliffe begins his book by explaining how Western Europe was rebuilt after World War II. Within this chapter, he illustrates the complexities of the process: trying to prevent the Soviet Union from interfering, making the Marshall Plan an effective program, and rebuilding after such extensive war damage. Among the most difficult goals, however, were stabilizing the currency and improving European manufacturing.

Once Western Europe began to recover, attempts were made by leaders to cooperate with each other. Sut-

cliffe illustrates that European leaders began to see the benefits of pooling their resources. This was a difficult process and one that still poses great difficulties. However, slowly, these nations moved toward the formation in 1957 of the European Economic Community. The EEC led to the reduction of trade barriers and attempted to foster a feeling of continentalism, rather than nationalism. Yet that process, which is ongoing, faces difficult times ahead, especially over the use of a European currency.

Sutcliffe uses the next two chapters to detail Western European society and the influx of immigrants. He analyzes social change from World War II to 1970 under various subheadings, such as "Women," "Holidays," and "Student Protest." Within those areas, Sutcliffe explores how various economic situations impacted society. In the chapter on immigrants, he explores how immigration affected the West, and its economic results. The major impacts on Western Europe, however, came in 1973 with the Arab oil embargo, and the 1989 "fall" of communism in the east. According to Sutcliffe, the oil embargo disrupted a growing European economy and contributed to rising unemployment and inflation rates. Yet Western Europe began to recover. The "fall" of communism increased immigration, which greatly affected the West. The last part of the book examines current conditions in Western European nations. Each nation is highlighted, and Sutcliffe explores such aspects of society as corruption, rural life, education, and the family.

While this book is designed as an economic and social

look into Western Europe, it would be more accurately described as an analysis of the economy and its effects on society. The book is filled with statistics which prove useful at times, and cumbersome at others. In general, the book is statistically driven. For those fascinated with mathematical computations, Sutcliffe provides a plethora of statistics on inflation, currency rates, and gross national product numbers.

The organization of the book, however, is most problematic. The various chapters preclude a smooth flow between topics. Although textbook authors face an enormous challenge when they attempt to present material in a clear manner, this book lacks justification for its chapter topics. Why Sutcliffe divides information where he does is not readily apparent.

In addition, the sections on society are underdeveloped. For example, his section on European women is very superficial. In a page and a half, it is difficult to explain the complexities of life for women today in the various nations. Students who peruse this book might think those small sections adequately explain women's lives.

That would be false. But, the same can be said for any of the sections discussed under the title "Society." In general, the book reads like a collection of "bullets": short, condensed packets of information on a specific topic area. Even as a textbook, it lacks the complexity needed for a clear explanation of Western European economics and society.

Perhaps the title should be amended, the discussions of society reduced, and the text promoted as an economic view of Western Europe. The social sections are not integrated sufficiently into the body of the work for it to be viewed as a source for students interested in social history. Clearly Sutcliffe is strongest when dealing with economic issues. That should be the sole focus for his work. Adding sections on society, as he does here, just muddles his presentation.

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