Martin Mitchell’s book is part of a veritable explosion in recent years of studies on the Irish abroad. While much of this scholarship examines the Irish in America, it has increasingly been supplemented by studies of the Irish in Canada, Australia, the Caribbean and beyond. The attention now given to the Irish overseas is perhaps best exemplified by the multi-volume series *The Irish Worldwide* (London, 1992-97) edited by Patrick O’Sullivan. This renewed interest has also resulted in the production of new studies of the Irish in England, Wales and indeed Scotland - perhaps most notably with Elaine McFarland’s volumes studying the development of the Orange Order, *Protestants First* (Edinburgh, 1990) and the impact of the United Irishmen, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution* (1994) respectively.

In *The Irish in the West of Scotland*, Mitchell focuses on the role of the Irish in the broad development of working-class and reform politics. In doing so, he takes direct aim at prevailing stereotypes, reproduced at least since the publication of James Handley’s 1947 ground-breaking examination of the Irish in Scotland. Specifically, Mitchell demolishes the notion that the Irish had little positive impact on working-class politics since they were largely employed as cheap labour and, more sinisterly, as blacklegs and strike breakers by the industrialists of the west of Scotland. While conceding that many Irish were employed in this manner, Mitchell provides an overwhelming number of examples of Irish involvement in early trade unionism and political radicalism. He demonstrates that the Irish were a
notable presence among the membership of early miner’s unions in the Lanarkshire coal fields and, by the 1830s, dominated both the volatile Cotton Spinner’s Union and handloom weaver’s organizations. Building on the work of McFarland, W. Hamish Fraser, Chris Whatley and others, Mitchell also provides details that link Irish working men to the development of political radicalism in Scotland in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, both in the foundation of the revolutionary United Scotsmen and the movement for parliamentary reform that followed the Napoleonic War.

While Mitchell focuses on the positive Irish contribution to broad Scottish working-class politics, he also pays attention to the particular concerns of the west of Scotland’s burgeoning Irish Catholic population. Indeed, a large portion of the book is devoted to examining the response to Daniel O’Connell’s Catholic Emancipation and Repeal Movements. Given Mitchell’s evidence, it is clear that both were enthusiastically supported by Irishmen in Scotland. His study is particularly helpful for understanding the connection between the Irish middle class agitation for Catholic Emancipation and the support for the 1831 Reform Bill. Intriguingly, Irish immigrant’s endorsement of O’Connell’s demand for the repeal of the 1801 union of the British and Irish parliaments resulted in tardy support for Chartism. According to Mitchell, the rivalry between O’Connell and the Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor accounts for this development, since the Irish in the west of Scotland tended to side with O’Connell. He points out that the Irish did support Complete Suffragism and eventually embraced the Six Points of the Charter, but only in 1848 when the movement began its precipitous decline.

Mitchell’s evidence and analysis are compelling. After reading his study, one can have little doubt that the Irish played a pivotal role in Scotland’s working-class and reform politics during the first half of the nineteenth century. Mitchell concedes, however, that this is far from the whole story and calls for more detailed study of Irish political involvement in the second half of the century. Such a study may indeed corroborate the findings of Stephen Fielding, who in Class and Ethnicity (Buckingham, 1993)
has argued that stereotypes similar to those found in Scotland have obscured Irish involvement in Labour politics in late nineteenth and early twentieth century England. There are, however, particular questions raised by Mitchell’s study as it stands. Did, for example, the development of strident Irish Nationalism undermine the basis for cooperation across the religious divide? Mitchell points out that Glasgow’s Chartists tried in vain to involve the Irish in the movement, succeeding only when it was too late. Given that Chartism was arguably the most intense popular political movement in nineteenth-century Scotland, this may well have caused deep lingering resentment. Mitchell acknowledges that in order to understand the significance of Irish political involvement during the first half of the century, we need to develop a fuller understanding of the relationships between Irish immigrants and Scottish society. This must entail a nuanced appreciation of the community itself, one that would include the role of women and children, both in the work force and as agents in agitation, as well as a more thorough understanding of the link between the growth of the Irish Catholic community and the rise of sectarianism and racism.

Studies of the Irish in the United States could prove to be useful models here, particularly Haisa Diner’s, *Erin’s Daughters in America* (Baltimore, 1983) and Noel Ignatiev’s recent study *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995).

Martin Mitchell has produced a valuable contribution to the study of the Irish abroad. His carefully argued well-supported book will encourage many of us to re-examine our received ideas about the Irish in Scotland. As the author concedes, the book raises as many questions as it attempts to answer, but nonetheless it provides the reader with an appreciation of the extent to which the Irish contributed to Scottish working-class consciousness before the sectarianism that scars Scotland’s industrial west became firmly entrenched.

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