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***Foundations of Political Economy: Some Early Tudor Views on State and Society* by Neal Wood. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. pp. x + 319, index.**

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Neal Wood's *Foundations of Political Economy* is an intellectual history of the germination of political economy in the writings of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English reformers. Professor Wood does for political economy what Janet Abu-Lughod (1989) did for the history of the "modern world-system": He pushes its origins back almost two centuries. By exploring the works of several writers -- John Fortescue, Edmund Dudley, Thomas More, Thomas Starkey, Henry Brinklow, Robert Crowley, Latimer, Thomas Becon, Thomas Lever, and Thomas Smith -- he shows how early forms of political economic methods, concepts, and analyses were first formed. This is more than the usual intellectual history.

Professor Emeritus Neal Wood roots his analysis of this intellectual discourse in the events of the day and in the lives of the writers. They were the first observers and commentators on nascent rural capitalism who grounded their analyses and proposals in their own experiences. They aimed their writings at the sovereign and other political elites in an attempt to persuade them that general economic prosperity was the way to avoid the twin evils of the tyranny of overly strong central control and the anarchy entailed in popular uprisings. Many of their arguments bear striking resemblances to current political debates. A sound-bite version of these Tudor texts would be, "It's the economy, Sire!" These writers were fundamentally conservative. They sought to preserve the old order by policies that promoted general prosperity.

As a reviewer I claim no expertise in intellectual history or the Tudor period. Rather, I review this work from the stand point of a sociologist-anthropologist with an avowedly world-systemic and ecological bent. As the reviews by intellectual historians are quite favorable, I will not try to summarize the exegetical arguments, but only summarize Wood's conclusions.

Wood introduces his argument with due caution, noting that these writers are neither philosophers or giants, but propagandists who shared dissatisfaction

with current conditions and who sought moderate reforms. They focused on what we have come to call political economy, were practical, and used empirical data to support their analyses. They wrote during the time that the modern state was emerging, as was capitalism, especially in its agricultural form. They were much concerned about homelessness, idleness, crime, and rebellion. They saw the roots of these social ills in enclosures, engrossments (consolidation of small holdings), and steeply rising rents ('rack-renting'). With the exception of Thomas Smith, they tended to argue from a moral position.

The chapter on sixteenth-century England is a succinct summary of the conditions under which most of these writers lived. It was an era of growing state power and centralization, increasing legal activity, and the birth of capitalist textile production in rural areas. The new drive for land for grazing sheep engendered massive displacement of rural peasants, who were often ready recruits for rebellions and uprising. Literacy was on the increase, leading to a mixing of new with ancient ideas. Education was increasingly seen as important for further protecting the interests of society's elites.

Next, Wood dissects the development of the economic conception of the state. A key feature of the new conception was attention to information on wealth and the groups who possessed it. These writers emphasized the economic as opposed to moral purpose of the state. Thus, their recommendations for reform focused on economic issues. They developed the distinction between useful and nonuseful labor for the first time (p. 38). Because many of these writers were farmers or their sons, they often blamed the greed of nobles, clergy, landlords, gentry, and great merchants for current conditions. They argued that improvement required government intervention. Subsequent chapters discuss specific writers or groups of writers.

John Fortescue, a forerunner of the reformers, opposed absolutism, feared popular unrest and excessive democracy, saw the law as supreme, favored a government consisting of a mixture of king and parliament, argued that natural law limited political action, and suggested that a reciprocal relation obtains between governed and government. He was "decidedly conservative with an unshakable faith in a hierarchical society" (p. 47). For him, the test of a good government was the prosperity of the people. He argued that poverty gave rise to idleness and susceptibility to rebellion. Thus, it was in the King's interest to promote political stability through economic prosperity. He was not, however, as vitally concerned with reform as his Tudor followers because he lived in a more prosperous age. Nonetheless, he laid much of the ground work for their ideas.

Sir Edmund Dudley (c. 1462-1510) was the first Tudor reformer. He was an activist public servant whose prosecution of merchants led to his eventual execution for treason. Although anticlerical, he, too, was conservative. He wrote of the "tree of commonwealth," developing this metaphor at great length. Still, he emphasized the need for the state for the "creation of wealth shared proportionately by all" (p. 77). His concept of commonwealth did not include the state or society or government, but was more akin to common

good. This common good depended on Christian faith, efficient administration, enlightened nobility, and fully employed commoners. He did favor the royal power to control the clergy, but made no contribution to the conception of the state as an institution. He did emphasize economic conditions, noting the identity of interests between ruler and commoners. He argued that prosperity would decrease likelihood of rebellion and lessen crime. He was very uneasy about "acquisitive individualism" (p. 89) among nobility and affluent commoners.

These ideas are the starting point for Sir Thomas More, the most famous of the writers Wood discusses. Wood argues, conventionally, that More's Utopia was neither democratic nor egalitarian. It allowed slavery and was patriarchal in the extreme. Wood notes that during More's chancellorship six heretics were burned at the stake. More was personally involved in all but one case. As the chapter title notes, More was "the enlightened conservative" who defended hierarchy and was fanatical in exterminating religious dissent.

His Utopia presented the state in its ideal form. More used it to explain the deterioration of European society and offer a model for improvement. It also showed that a stable state rested on a thriving economy, which, in turn, rested on universal socially useful work. The purpose of the state was to facilitate those conditions and those that promote individual well-being. Interestingly, More doubted the efficacy of severe punishment, because crime is rooted in poverty, not evil. He decried current enclosures and greed that cause poverty. His remedies, however, were reformist: Restore the commons, curtail steep price rises. He promoted intellectual activity, and saw education as a source of ideological conformity and support for the intellectual elite. This conception of education is a motivating factor in contemporary culture wars. More sought to forestall tyranny through a mixed constitution that diffused power. He differed from the other reformers in devising a government based on collectivism and meritocracy.

In the next chapter we learn that Thomas Starkey was the first to use the concept "state" in its relatively modern meaning. Starkey, too, worried about idleness and absolutism. He furthered the economic conception of the state, emphasizing the need for material comfort for a healthy union of body and soul. As a Christian, he worried about "fallen man," which he saw as the source of the need for education. He argued that poverty and extreme inequality were the roots of idleness, crime, and social disorder. For Starkey the legitimate interests of individuals, and the state, were health, wealth, and moral virtue. He recommended ending clerical celibacy, lessening the number of servants of the nobility (to free them for socially useful work), and military exemptions for heads of large families. He defended limited enclosures when the needs of the displaced were taken into account. He recommended that the new royal wealth obtained from confiscation of monasteries be used to subsidize nobles who had fallen on hard times, to build schools, and to give land to young men. He made several proposals for limiting royal power. Education should concentrate on training future rulers. The clergy

should concentrate on moral leadership and be barred from more than one or two benefices. In short, he wanted a state and society that worked for the common good through production of wealth.

In response to uprisings of the 1530s and 1540s, a number of Christian writers, the so-called commonwealth men, sharply criticized conditions and proposed many reforms. The first of these, Henry Brinklow, also saw economic roots to current disorders in greed. He recommended that the king employ his wealth in ways that increased the prosperity of his subjects. The others, Robert Crowley, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Becon and Thomas Lever promoted similar policies. All but Latimer were Lutherans, or were associated with Lutherans, so they experienced periods of exile. They all tended to see selfishness as root of many social problems. For them, the purpose of the state was to stimulate worship and promote conditions that made worship possible. They railed in sermons against high prices of food and clothing, high rents, lack of funds for education, and lease mongering. Although they saw the root of these evils in greed, they did not explain why greed should so suddenly increase. They were highly critical of nobles and lawyers. They advocated strenuous labor for everyone, high or low. They argued that those who ruled were appointed by God to "fashion and maintain a salubrious social environment" (p. 190).

The penultimate chapter is devoted to Thomas Smith's "moral philosophy." Smith's emphasis on secular and rational proposals, unlike the moralistic commonwealth men, was a new development. Wood claims that Smith was the first political economist (p. 193). He was the son of a farmer who became a member of parliament and later secretary of state. He identified ruling-class interests with justice, with the proviso that they also promoted the interest of the governed. He developed an incipient notion of sovereignty, and distinguished between government and the state. He saw important roles for "free men" in the state. Free men did not include bondmen or women. He developed a crude model of economic man who acted rationally in his own interests. He argued that exorbitant rents and the influx of treasure from the New World were the causes of inflation. He used the metaphor of a clock for the economy, which he conceptualized as a set of interacting parts. He also recognized that the economy of one country could not be understood in isolation from those of other countries. He conceived of the state as a household writ large.

Although Smith acknowledged individualistic drive for money and power as a fundamental cause of social problems, unlike the commonwealth men he did NOT recommend moral reform as a solution. Rather, he sought to manage greed for the well-being of the state. Based on his understanding of enclosures, he recommended protection for traditional dispersed land holdings by small land holders and that wool be subject to the same export restrictions as other goods. He also recommended that raw materials not be exported, but turned to manufactures at home. These reforms temper the deleterious effects of greed expressed in enclosures while allowing further increases in the production of wealth. He saw another root of disorder in the

contentions about religion. He recommended that the state pressure the church to put its house in order.

He was highly critical of the condition of higher education, which he saw as vital to the training of new leaders. In this discussion Wood delivers a veritable gem from Smith's *A Discourse on the Commonweal of this Real of England* (1581):

... he then lectured his audience on the degeneration of the universities. University students, he feared, were interested in little more than learning to read and write and acquiring a knowledge of Latin and other languages in order to get well-n paying jobs at graduation. If the attitude prevailed, he maintained, "This realm within a short space will be made as empty of wise and politic men and consequently barbarous, and, at last, thrall and subject to other nations whereof we were lords before." Learning, he insisted, was a vital auxiliary of practical experience in all fields of human endeavor (p. 230).

Probably every college teacher who reads this book--or this review--has heard, or made, similar comments.

In the final chapter, Wood acknowledges that these writers were not giants, but still demand attention because they are the founders of political economy, constructed a modern conception of the state, and were first-hand observers of "incipient rural capitalism and some of its harsh social and economic consequences" (p. 236). They were also the first to suggest remedial action via governmental intervention. In ignoring them, we miss links between medieval and modern ideas.

Their key contributions were in developing a new conception of the state, arguing for the role of social environment in shaping individual behavior, and their critique of rampant individualism. Wood argues that English writers developed these ideas because of England's insularity, which minimized the dangers of foreign invasion in tandem with the legacy of a centralized monarchy. English prosperity in the early 1500s and the appearance of rural capitalism, also contributed to a focus on the analysis of wealth. A tradition of data collection made doing so easier. Wood notes that today it is worth remembering that these men were not revolutionaries, but conservatives. They argued that to preserve order the state must support the interests of all its citizens. To do so it was necessary to examine actual conditions, which could be done by educated citizens. Thus, these relatively minor writers contributed much to our modern understanding of our world.

Whereas Wood argues that the new political economy was grounded in the experiences of men of affairs in Tudor England, there is more to this than he suggests. His intellectual history can be juxtaposed insightfully with Jack Goldstone's (1991) analysis of revolutions and rebellions. Two points of Goldstone's elaborate argument are salient here: first, that rebellions are rooted in demographic changes--a point both Wood and his Tudor writers

note, if considerably less clearly than Goldstone does; second, that rebellions begin as attempts to restore the status quo ante and only become revolutions when some members of an erstwhile disenfranchised portion of the elite succeed in directing popular support for changes that they think will enfranchise them. That this often does not occur is outside the scope of this review.

These Tudor writers were calling for a return to a previous order -- before the demographic disruptions -- but in doing so they had to invent new conceptions, a new vocabulary, and a new mode of analysis. In doing so they began an intellectual revolution even while trying to restore the past. The materialist roots of this revolution are more robust than Neal Wood argues. Although the revolutionary invention of political economy is nearly half a millennium old, Neal Wood's book left me with an overwhelming sense of how little the discourse on poverty, prosperity, and government has changed in that time.

For the reader interested in the roots of political economy, the chapters on specific writers might well be skipped or skimmed (chapters 4 through 9). The heart and force of Wood's argument, however, is in his textual exegesis in these chapters. Because he quotes text in original Tudor or Elizabethan English, the going can be difficult at times. But occasional gems, like the passage on students quoted earlier, reward the reader. Wood's text, on the other hand, is always clear and well argued. For anyone who enjoys a well-crafted book or is interested in intellectual history, reading this book is well worth the time.

### ***References Cited***

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