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Como, David. *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

As in other areas of his scholarly work, David Como has chosen a much-needed locus of study. The sheer complexity of the civil wars has resulted in both a glut of scholarly assessments and reassessments and an increasing number of unexplored threads and back alleys. Como's work is an examination of radical Puritan printings surrounding these events, primarily between 1640 and 1646. The work is divided into five chronological sections, beginning with the Personal Rule and ending with the English Revolution.

Como's research includes an array of underground stories and rumors to account for the shifting allegiances of the day, though these are convincingly presented alongside well-known texts. Particularly interesting is the path the story takes through secret presses and anonymous pamphlets, all building to a crescendo of revolution. Though dense in its presentation of so much material, all is woven together to build a readable story of the events. The depth of research and the scope of analysis is impressive, and anyone interested in the period will find the work compelling.

The richness of Como's work is punctuated with a host of manuscripts, newspapers, and diaries to demonstrate the various trends and ideas at play in the story. Alongside almost cultic visions of the worthiness of parliamentary deeds were those individuals who gave increasing voice to the rights of those groups that were cast out of the mainstream. The fluctuations of the freedom of the press, especially during the convening of Parliament, are also explored. Of notable interest is the tracing of the influence of the Marjory Mar-Prelate Press and the various disaffected groups that were churning out their published materials with hopes of turning both public and parliamentary alike. The ground swelling of favor toward the pamphleteers and the general disdain for prelacy is not lost on the reader as each of these trends is followed in Como's story. In fact, Como's foray into the production numbers and the wide distribution of a long list of pamphlets suggests their popularity is more than is often admitted by historians.

Helpful excursions take the reader on a tour of events, mostly behind the scenes through otherwise forgotten meetings and hidden drama. From the chaotic streets of London in the late 1641 riots, through smoke-filled pubs, and into the inner squabbles within the chambers of the Commons, Como somehow brings order and purpose to all the unrest in the city of London.

The underlying premise of the book is to demonstrate how the civil wars developed into a full-scale revolution. To accomplish this, Como is

careful to listen to all accounts as he contextualizes the various unorthodox groups in their relationship to radical Puritanism. Pluralism and toleration are central themes throughout the age, and both played into the revolution itself. As such, Como is able to focus more so on the “kaleidoscope” aspect of the age than others, as opposed to seeing only chaos and persecution as central themes. It is a refreshing and positive read, though requiring a lot from the reader to follow the various characters along the way.

Como deals with a significant list of different ideologies, with a focus on their evolution over time. A great deal of helpful research is provided, focusing on Independents, Presbyterians, and Levellers (or anti-formalists), a constantly shifting and diverse field of players that he covers so well. Particularly pivotal events are well noted: Parliament’s taxation without the king’s blessing to fund the war, key battles that altered the balance of power, the publication of obscure pamphlets, the midnight movements of secret presses, and the swaying back and forth of public opinion. Surprising elements include the revelation of just how dysfunctional the squabbling factions in Parliament were and how that related to the religious differences that were boiling over in London. Como reminds us that the war was not simply with the king, but it was among the members of Parliament itself, and inner concerns toward Lord Essex created further factions over time. Easily forgotten or overlooked petitions for peace and the awkward exchanges of money are further pieces of the puzzle. Como places Pym and other Presbyterians in the dock as pressing for conditions that Charles would never accept, like the total abolition of Episcopacy. As such, Como’s analysis recognizes that conditional elements for peace were intentionally a bar that would never be reached by both sides. Overall, the book is a helpful survey of the ups and downs of parliamentary power, leading to its sustained plateau in the late 1640s. The gradual rise of public disdain for the king’s activities is also well covered, in addition to the various views of public blame for the war itself.

The work also delves deeply into movements such as Antinomianism and Anabaptism. Of particular importance is the recognition that the vacuum of church discipline was partly to blame for the unrest of the day. Ironically the purging away of the problematic elements of prelacy created a means for the almost uncontrollable nurturing of unorthodoxy. Even the war effort itself, in the hands of godly elite to bring about stability, became a means to enflame apocalyptic radicalism. Como focuses his emphasis on print propaganda in the rise of these groups. Especially interesting is Como’s tracing of competing underground printing collectives, which laid

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the groundwork for the rise of the Levellers, and a fascinating early survey of their interactions with Cromwell. Along with these movements arose more and more pleas for toleration of various views. In the wake of concern over orthodoxy and freedom of the press, several important unions among these outcasts are discussed.

Como recognizes the shift from less press restriction to the instability caused by such openness by 1644. The remaining analysis covers more underground publishing efforts, chaotic night raids, letters back and forth among the Independents and Presbyterians, and the various reasons for the rise of Cromwell and the Independent party. Some helpful reference appendices are provided, with analysis of various press ornaments and types—not the kinds of things that will appeal to every reader, but they provide a significant resource for researchers. This volume is a needed addition to the field and should be welcomed by all with interest in the British civil wars, Puritans, or print culture.

—Mark Koller

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