

SWEDEN : NATION OF THE MODERN WORLD. By Irene Scobbie. Ernest Benn Ltd., London. 1972. 254 pp. Price £3.00. Maps, index, bibliography.

No other country has figured so consistently in British political and social debate and controversy as Sweden. Different sections of British opinion have found much to admire and much to deplore in the state of Sweden. The Gaitskellites during the Labour Party controversies over Clause Four were fond of pointing to the combination in Sweden of a low level of state ownership combined with a high level of social welfare, a redistributive system of taxation and a remarkably low level of industrial strife. The Left was attracted during the Cold War by the example of Swedish neutrality and more recently by the sight of a Minister in a Social Democratic Government marching side by side with a representative of North Vietnam in a protest to the American Embassy in Stockholm, at a time when a Labour Government in Britain was proving herself a loyal supporter of the United States. Radicals of a different sort were attracted by the sexual permissiveness apparent in Sweden. The Scandinavian country seemed to offer an American standard of living without the harshness of the American

Protestant ethic as it was applied to both economic and personal morality.

In the last few years, however, Sweden has attracted as many brickbats as bouquets. Poverty has survived the best efforts of the Swedish welfare state. Alcoholism and mental illness seemed to argue that many Swedes felt isolated in their affluent wonderland. Above all, Sweden was discovered to be fostering the seeds of totalitarianism in the corporate and centralised structure of state and interest group which had evolved since the Social Democrats had first come to power in the inter-war period.

Miss Scobbie's contribution to the excellent 'Nation of the Modern World' series eschews both the politically inspired polemics of an earlier generation of post-war writing about Sweden and the more recent moralising about the inadequacies of a materialistic concept of welfare. Priority is given in her volume, as in other volumes in the same series, to information and description. Miss Scobbie's forbearance provides welcome relief, for which the occasional blandness of her comment is a small price to pay.

The greater part of the book is devoted to political and economic issues. Miss Scobbie does well

to remind the general reader that Sweden's prosperity is of recent achievement. The fact that in 1900 one Swede in five was to be found in the United States is eloquent testimony to the extent to which Sweden's unsympathetic geography and climate and her political and social conservatism had combined to deprive thousands of her children of a means of livelihood in their own country. The pace at which Sweden adapted to the twentieth century from such a poor base perhaps requires more explanation than Miss Scobbie had space to offer. Sweden's performance had been matched by Denmark's in adapting from a primarily grain growing to a primarily dairy producing agriculture in the latter half of the nineteenth century and by Norway's swift economic development in the twentieth. The cultural and political factors appear to be important - in Denmark the Folk High School movement of Grundtvig, in Norway and Sweden the care taken by the respective governments to maintain national control over the natural resources on which the economies were developed. Writing from a Scottish vantage point one cannot help comparing Swedish and Norwegian policy in this respect with the present British policy on the development of Scotland's newly discovered natural resource in the North Sea.

Miss Scobbie gives due attention to the innovations in social policy of Moller, Hansson, the Myrdals and other pre-war Social Democrats. The achievement of Wigforss in pioneering the application of Keynesian economics is acknowledged. But again, one would have liked to have been provided with at least some hints about the cultural and intellectual sources of the social inventiveness demonstrated by that extraordinary generation of Swedes. After all, Miss Scobbie tells the reader that after the Napoleonic wars the Norwegians left the Swedes far behind as they moved towards greater social and political democracy. How were the Swedes able to catch the Norwegians up, and even to surpass them in some fields?

Miss Scobbie devotes nearly sixty pages to contemporary Sweden. It is in this section that she most effectively deploys a talent for relating developments in literature to the social and economic conditions, quoting a moving passage from Claesson's novel 'Who Loves Yngve Frej' to illustrate the problem of rural depopulation for example. The issues Miss Scobbie highlights in this section are the issues on which the Swedish response will be closely scrutinised abroad. The problem of regional development: the re-discovery of poverty: the

problem of reducing differentials of income in a highly developed and specialised economy - and the ultimate question of how to reconcile the popular demand for a high level of material prosperity and social welfare with an active, operating democracy and a social environment sympathetic to the psychological and emotional needs of the individual in a post-religious era. Miss Scobbie has provided a readable and notably sympathetic account of the issue.

Stephen Maxwell

THE VARIOUS NAMES OF SHETLAND. By Alexander Fenton.

One of the more difficult problems facing the place-name scholar is the interpretation of the names of large physical features like islands, major rivers and mountains. Mr. Fenton has tackled a very familiar name to us, but one that is nonetheless difficult, if only because of the variety of cultures, languages and dialects that have affected the general use of the name. It is obvious that Shetland occupied a key place in the Scandinavian migrations, so this booklet is of particular interest to students of the sagas.

The writer traces the development of the