

Rogers, Nicholas. *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Pp.xi, 440. \$100.00

Malcolm Greenshields

Volume 20, Number 1, June 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017573ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017573ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Greenshields, M. (1991). Review of [Rogers, Nicholas. *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Pp.xi, 440. \$100.00]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 20(1), 57–58.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1017573ar>

more pertinent in trying to correct the abuses in society, particularly during the Great Depression. In this regard they were in good company with such people as Dorothy Livesay and others. The brother became a known organizer while Joe used his skills in the court room to defend CPers in labour battles or against state oppression, as occurred in WWII when CP leaders were interned.

But it was not just as a defender of the CP that he made his mark. There was a wide range of interests that attracted him and these were of a class nature. He battled for educational development for younger children through kindergartens; he opposed the racial and religious intolerance in schools. His advocacy of civil liberties and free legal aid contributed to the inroads made in the latter and also in the contest for recognizing women's rights. Low cost housing rent controls and confronting developers also were on his agenda. The last were opposed because they made no commitments, and received taxpayers' money through outright gifts, grants and tax concessions that provided profit at the citizens' expense but did little for the people.

In this area he became the bane of representatives of the various right-wing "citizens" leagues or civic political coalitions. Some of the struggles are graphically illustrated, such as when he purposely challenged the anti-crosswalk legislation introduced to insure that people encountered the capitalist consumerism of the underground malls the developers constructed. Frequently he had to find supporters where he could in the CCF or NDP, or among maverick liberals or conservatives. Here one is made aware of another "House of Closed Shutters" that Hopkins Moorhouse and others wrote about in early Winnipeg as the City Council conducted business be-

hind closed doors to ensure confidentiality and public ignorance. Zuken denounced that type of democracy, yet it never seemed to bother others; neither did it stay their criticism of socialists or communists, who they thundered were responsible for doing the same thing. Somehow they missed their hypocrisy.

Zuken faced constant taunts of being a communist and adhering to the CP. The name calling and redbaiting were not veiled, and invariably demonstrated the accusers' ignorance of socialism as a philosophy and ideology in that they were consistent with their fellow Canadians.

Smith raises questions about Zuken's allegiance over the years to the CP in spite of the traumatic and overt contradictory positions it took. His was not a blind adherence, yet Smith forgets to point out that politicians are consistent; almost all endorse their political parties despite their blatant flip-flops; the few who do not, give proof to the rule. Zuken is thus not uncommon.

There is perhaps a question of proportion in the biography. A number of points on the early background of Winnipeg could have been omitted readily or cut without any loss; other aspects require clarification. In the later period, from the 1950s on, could more not have been devoted to the impact of the immigration or the ideologies that prevailed in Winnipeg? And Zuken undoubtedly was selfless in his work and influenced a number of people by his actions, and by all indications was poorly paid. Whatever wealth he accumulated indicates either he was a better manager than was believed or his wife Clara did an excellent job of managing the household since they made frequent trips. The Zuken story takes on some of the Horatio Alger

mythology: the boy from the poor family who made it, which is not quite the case. Even though he criticized the system, he worked within it; there is little to indicate that he was prepared to overthrow it. That does not diminish what he had to struggle against but it does suggest that perhaps he became an advanced social democratic reformer accepting the mixed economy. Regardless, the story needed to be told.

Foster Griezic
Department of History
Carleton University

Rogers, Nicholas. *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Pp. xi, 440. \$100.00.

A recent review by Julian Gwyn, in the *Canadian Journal of History* (XXV, December 1990), made short work of Nicholas Rogers' discussion of extra-Parliamentary reform politics in English cities during the early Hanoverian period. Gwyn informed the reader that "gross corruption" characterized English politics "until after 1885," and that "until electoral bribery ends and limits on electoral spending are imposed, political reform is of small moment to historians." Moreover, we are told that "English politics in 1714-1760 do not lead anywhere that any ordinary reader wishes to be taken." Well, while corruption may be deplorable, it has seldom been regarded as a veto on historical enquiry, and it was, after all, partly a growing perception of corruption that gave impetus to early reform politics.

Politicization has often been (perhaps as Gwyn would have it) interpreted too narrowly, on the one hand, to indicate initiation into the official sort of political activity. On the other hand, historians have also sought its signs with

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

anachronistic vigour in the animus, for example, of peasants toward their neighbours. One of the virtues of Rogers' work is that he manages to tread carefully between these two extremes, and in doing so constructs a detailed portrait of popular English political sensibilities and their relation to the world of official politics. In doing so, he not only challenges the Namierite view of the exclusivity of high politics during the period, but also casts doubt on the metropolitan assumptions that have often excluded cities outside London from any significant part in early Hanoverian politics. His analysis of a variety of sources, ranging from the local instructions to Members of Parliament to the contemporary press, marshals convincing evidence of an alert, vigorous broad-based electorate by turns intractable and deferential, local and national.

In a sense, this is a study of the failure to reform, and as a result it may lack some of the retroactive glamour historians often give to later reform movements. But Rogers is concerned to show the development of an urban political consciousness and his sensitive critical examination of institutions and popular political attitudes does just that. Moreover, he demonstrates clearly that there was real power outside the metropolis and the political elites. In an impressive array of examples, his most telling illustration of this "popular" power is the extra-Parliamentary support of William Pitt during the Seven Years War.

As much as it has to recommend it, this book will probably not, as has been suggested, reach the ordinary reader. The non-specialist will find frustrating the occasional failure to provide clear explana-

tions of various municipal bodies and their functions. While very well written, the rather involved analysis also needs, in several places, clearer recapitulation of where it is headed. Finally, the publishers have done the author the disservice of pricing his book out of reach of all but specialists, the wealthy and academic libraries. This is, however, a fine piece of work which certainly deserves the attention of all interested in the history of urban politics. It breaks new ground, particularly in its examination of cities outside London, and deserves to become a standard for research in the field.

Malcolm Greenshields
University of Lethbridge