GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Some years ago it was predicted that British imperial history would inevitably break down into a series of national histories. There were a number of reasons for this prophecy: political, diplomatic and constitutional history, the conventional over-arching themes of imperial studies, seemed to have reached a methodological and analytic impasse; the economic relations of empire had to a large extent become subsumed in global models, if not lost in an ideological labyrinth; and to a certain extent the abandonment of 'imperial history' seemed a politically correct parallel to the retreat from empire itself. On the other hand, national histories seemed to be a necessary concomitant of an era of decolonisation that involved not only the granting of independence to Asian and African states but also the progressive repatriation of constitutional and legal frameworks to the old 'dominions'.

It is now apparent that this prediction was unnecessarily pessimistic. A national historiography has played its part in the cultural self-confidence of state-building. Many more national histories will be written, but it has become apparent, in what some regard as a post-nationalist age, that the study of the complex relationships established by the British Empire has a new lease on life. Such studies no longer concentrate upon the centrifugal effects of metropole upon periphery, but deal in the interactive character of empire, particularly in its social, cultural, intellectual and military forms.

Kent Fedorowich's book well exemplifies this trend. Research on soldier settlement has to be set within the wider history of emigration and immigration. It needs to be understood in the context of the culture of 'ruralism', the anti-industrial agrarian myth which swept the English-speaking world in the early twentieth century. And it has to be interpreted through the repeated and fundamental contradictions of the imperial experience: benefits to the mother country in relieving social tensions; the social and economic development of the dominions; or the enhancement of imperial bonds.

Fedorowich's research spans not only British social history, but also that of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, as well as touching on settlement elsewhere in the Empire (for example in Kenya). Soldier settlement, which has sometimes been studied in its national setting, can only be fully understood in its widest dimensions. Only then can its combination of high hopes and failure, its adaptation and frustration through the different conditions of the four dominions, and the hazards it faced through the extreme swings of the economic cycle, be fully understood. This book is an excellent example of the 'new' imperial history.

John M. MacKenzie