

## REVIEWS

THE RISE OF THE ATLANTIC ECONOMIES. By Ralph Davis. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973. xiv-352 pp. Cased £5.00.)

ENGLISH OVERSEAS TRADE, 1500-1700. By Ralph Davis. (Macmillan, for the Economic History Society, 1973. 64pp. £0.50p.)

Professor Davis has written a fitting first volume for a new series on *World Economic History*, edited by Charles Wilson. It is sweeping in chronological coverage, beginning with the Portuguese explorations of Africa at the start of the fifteenth century and concluding with the mechanization of cotton textiles in the English Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. It has broad geographic coverage: the five major European members of the Atlantic economy (Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, England, and France) get about three-quarters of the volume, and their various American colonies the remaining pages. "Aimed at the university market", it provides an excellent synthesis of literature on the development of western Europe and the factors in the economic growth and decline of the several countries. Davis draws upon the most recent works of economic history written in several countries, weaving them into an interesting and thought-provoking series of essays, upon individual geographical areas as well as providing comparisons among them. The basic facts are well presented, but what makes the book of particular interest is the author's attempts to explain them. As befits the broad questions, the explanations draw upon economic and non-economic factors, and Davis is keenly interested in the effects of possible climatic changes, the economic outcome of political, social and demographic forces, and the role of different patterns of legal control in influencing the nature of economic change, as well as the impact of economic changes on these variables.

While the "big questions" are asked, the judicious tone, and focus upon national economic performance, mean that political polemics are somewhat minimized. Factors in the "rise of

capitalism" are described, but without the specific concerns which authors such as Dobb have generated for this period. Similarly, while the external relations of the European economies are described, overseas expansion is not made the centre story, as in the books of Parry, nor is there made any claim that European expansion and growth was at the cost of bankrupting the areas of settlement and trade. As Davis describes one of his major hypotheses, the book "is not specifically about the relationship between Europe and colonies; indeed I have tried to show that the main influences on European economic development arose within the countries of Europe themselves, though Europe was powerfully affected both by Spanish America in the sixteenth century and English America in the eighteenth". The Atlantic economy did exist, according to Davis, but "it was subsidiary to, a modification and enhancement of, the economies of the individual countries of the Atlantic seaboard that took part in it". By design, therefore, the book concentrates on the internal economic history of the various nations and regions discussed.

As in any volume of this scope, there is much to disagree with, no doubt an indication of the large number of issues on which Davis passes judgment. Yet, for the most part, Davis presents his conclusions clearly, and the steps along the way, coherently. In accounting for the rise of some nations, and the fall of others, particular emphasis is placed upon war as a drain upon economic resources and on the relationship between the form of land tenure and agricultural efficiency, but a host of other variables are introduced. At a few points the interpretation of economic events seems awkward - as in the artificial contrast between real and monetary factors in describing the inflation of

the sixteenth century, and in the analysing of the effects of good harvests on agricultural income – but these are exceptions to the general high level. After “much consideration”, Davies included only six tables, although many time series are introduced verbally in the text, and the interested student can trace them down through the bibliography. The absence of footnotes enhances readability, although the omission will occasionally frustrate the curious scholar.

Professor Davis's book will be very useful reading to the student, as well as to the professional historian. In drawing upon a large body of material, and very ably synthesizing and using it to ask and answer interesting questions, he has provided an excellent, and a well-written, introduction to the early modern economic history of the countries of western Europe and their colonies in North and South America.

Professor Davis's other contribution is considerably narrower in scope. In a brief 43 pages of text, and with the help of two maps and five tables, the changing pattern of British trade between 1500 and 1700 is sketched in. The increased trade with southern Europe, and the rise of trade with Asia and the Americas, are noted. In brief compass, it provides a guide to three decades of work on “how and why the volume, commodity structure and geographic spread of trade changed over two centuries.” There is a short section dealing with trade organizations and institutions, but brevity apparently precluded discussion of ships and shipping. The book fits well into the aims of the *Studies in Economic History* series, Professor Davis's command of the subject making the guide particularly useful, and it contains a five-page annotated bibliography.

STANLEY L. ENGERMAN

PORT LOUIS, A TROPICAL CITY. By Auguste Toussaint (trans. W. E. F. Ward). (Allen & Unwin, 1973. 143 pp. 4 maps, 4 photographs. £2.45.)

This small volume, written by a French authority on maritime history, is a revised and abridged version of a work prepared to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the capital of Mauritius. As in many sugar islands, the history is filled with hurricanes, epidemics, droughts, fires, competition for overseas markets.

At times the author's story seems overwhelmed by such details, interesting though they may be to the citizens of Mauritius.

The fortunes of Port Louis reflect changes in world politics, in Mauritian business, and in its relation to Indian Ocean routes. Initially the port was a French outpost on the route to India; as such it played a significant part in the British-French struggle for the Indian Peninsula. After its conquest by the British in 1810, it became the commercial centre for a sugar island (and sugar still accounts for nine-tenths of Mauritian exports). After slave emancipation, the planters brought in Indian coolies whose descendants make up two-thirds of the island's population. The other large group consists of French-African creoles. Port Louis continued to serve as a way station for shipping from round the Cape destined to India or Australia; this trade was sharply cut with the opening of the Suez Canal. When Egypt closed the Suez in 1956 and after 1967, Port Louis benefited. In recent decades planes across the South Indian Ocean generally break their long overwater journey at Mauritius. In the 1960s Japanese, Korean, and Chinese fishing vessels came in increasing numbers to fish in the surrounding ocean. Most recently improved harbour installations have speeded up the handling of cargo and led to plans to create a free port industrial zone on a landfill area next to the port.

Toussaint ends his study in 1970 on an optimistic note. It is perhaps too soon to evaluate the effects of Mauritian independence (1968) and of United Kingdom entry into the Common Market. Both Port Louis and its island hinterland depend on the sugar export to pay for imported food and manufactures and the sugar has been marketed under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. The 140,000 population of Port Louis depends mostly on serving the 856,000 Mauritians. As these average out to over 1,000 per square mile, the economic base for both the island and its port seems precarious. Toussaint mentions the growing influence of Asiatic companies in Port Louis business. Could the city become another Singapore or is it too isolated to take on broader functions?

Toussaint's slim volume has many virtues as well as a few limitations. The historical sections are clear and give an effective picture of the port.

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.