

Reviews of two books on constitutional law

Colin R. Munro, *Studies in Constitutional Law* (2nd edn, 1999), Butterworths. Pp. 365 + xxi.

Colin Turpin, *British Government and the Constitution: Texts, Cases and Materials* (4th edn, 1999), Butterworths. Pp. 630 + xlv.

Constitutions develop as a means of regulating state coercion. These two books give erudite accounts of where Britain stands now in this regard. It is not a straightforward picture, having grown substantially more complex during the past half century. The main reason for this may be expressed in one word: Europe.

Professor Munro's excellent treatment has deservedly gone into a second edition. He expresses a Scottish view of the British constitution, though except in rare instances (for example use without explanation of the Scottish technical term homologation) this does not cause any difficulty for Sassenach readers. The treatment is selective rather than comprehensive for, says Munro, comprehensiveness in constitutional law texts is becoming impossible. This allows us to enjoy (and I do mean enjoy) treatment of vital topics in depth without the book having to be of excessive length. The topics include devolution, constitutional conventions, electoral law, parliamentary sovereignty, the European Union and the European Convention, parliamentary standards and privileges, the Crown and its prerogative, and the separation of powers.

Mr Turpin, Reader Emeritus in Public Law in the University of Cambridge, also competently handles the variegated texture of our government and constitution. Both these learned authors write as if there indeed continued to be "a British constitution". But what we now have is a rather wider setting for the governance of British people, comprising our common law and parliamentary enactments together with European treaties having direct effect and other engagements backed by international law, such as those with the UN and NATO.

It seems that in the third millennium we should no longer refer to the British constitution but to the British multiconstitution. Mr Turpin says in his preface that, while preparing the new edition of his admirable work, he has had "a bracing if disquieting sense of the ground shifting under my feet".

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