

REGIONAL POLICY IN BRITAIN: THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE by P.N. Balchin.  
London: Paul Chapman, 1990.

This book is one of many to have appeared over the last two years concerned with the character and extent of regional inequality in Britain, the extent to which such inequalities may or may not have widened in the past decade, and the policies which have been or could be implemented to deal with such problems. The main title is somewhat surprising given the contents of the book; some 60 pages (about one-third of the total) deal with the past, present and possible future of regional policy, while the remainder constitutes an examination of regional inequality. A more appropriate title might therefore have been "regional inequality" in Britain.

The book begins with a brief introductory chapter on regional imbalance. This provides some useful contextual material on the historical background to regional problems, a subject often given only cursory mention by texts such as this. However, there is no real discussion of theories of uneven development, which would have been useful both as a guide to policy alternatives and as a way of evaluating the present government's fixation with the ability of market forces to promote regional convergence.

Chapters 2 and 3 then review, respectively, the available evidence for a "north-south" divide at the regional scale, and the measures taken to deal with such a divide in the past. Chapter 2 encompasses a considerable range of evidence on a variety of topics and this will be a valuable source of up-to-date statistics. However, while this chapter is strong on pattern it is less so on process, for which the reader might need to consult the more detailed studies of particular issues in, for instance, Lewis and Townsend (1989). Chapter 3 then succinctly reviews the successes and failures of "traditional" spatial policies and of measures implemented by the Conservative governments since 1979.

Chapters 4 and 5 can likewise be considered together, because the first (the "myth" of the north-south divide) rightly cautions against over-reliance on broad-brush regional contrasts, presenting much subregional evidence on a range of social and economic topics, while the second evaluates a range of options which might become part of the spatial policy agenda. In this latter context, the emphasis on the need to take account of a whole range of public expenditure and taxation policies, and the regional implications thereof, is particularly welcome. The penalties of the present ill-considered and contradictory set of policies are spelled out forcefully: "to compete effectively with other member states of the European community after 1991, it is essential that economic efficiency is increased *throughout the whole of the UK*" (p. 83; my emphasis).

Balchin's book thus succeeds in dispelling some myths about regional inequality and in making a strong case for the continuation of regional policy in the interests of economic efficiency. Two minor criticisms are worth noting: the quality of many of the maps leaves much to be desired, and there are occasional lapses into excessive reliance on journalists' observations: evidence of record spending on foreign holiday bookings at one Northern travel agent can hardly be taken as irrefutable evidence of the "north's" prosperity (p. 126). Despite this and several similar occurrences, the book

will be valuable in teaching as a summary of most major dimensions of regional inequality and as a guide to policy options.

Reference:

Lewis, J.R. and Townsend, A.R. (eds.) (1989). *The North-South Divide: Regional Change in Britain in the 1980s*. London: Paul Chapman.

John Mohan

Queen Mary and Westfield College

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA: EXPLORATIONS IN ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND GEOGRAPHY by D.J. Walmsley and A.D. Sorensen. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1990.

Images of Australia are characterized by myths. For example: many of the country's cultural symbols are linked to its harsh rural outback, while the vast majority of its population resides in comfortable urban areas; the economy of the "western" urbanized nation, in turn, resembles that of a Third World country, with its reliance on mining and primary production.

The book sets to clarify some of these myths by providing a comprehensive and systematic account of the geography, economy and society of today's Australia. This challenging goal is made even more ambitious by the book's attempts to trace the country's history and project its future development. In short, as testified by the authors: "the book is a journey from the past to the future" (p. xvi).

This massive task, however, is undertaken with considerable aptitude. The book begins with documenting the "peopling" of the continent and analyzing the changing social structure of its population—from a British outpost into a multiethnic society. The following three chapters provide detailed accounts of the evolution of the main characteristics of Australian society: the second chapter deals with the economy, the third examines its (mainly social) quality of life, while the fourth describes its political system. The fifth chapter examines Australia's role in an increasingly unified global economy, while the sixth draws several likely scenarios for the nation's future and analyzes their relative merits.

The approach taken is generally descriptive, which is appropriate given the book's self-proclaimed purpose to provide a text for early university studies. The approach is also genuinely multidisciplinary, not only due to the all-encompassing purpose of the book, but also because the authors believe that: "political, economic and social events are interdependent... and are influenced by geographical circumstances" (p. 307). A wealth of empirical data supplement the text, providing an abundance of useful tables, maps, diagrams, and figures. Theories, methods and techniques are clearly (albeit briefly) explained in the relevant places. Another useful feature of the book as a teaching