



NATIONALISM AND CULTURE

By F. McEachran

THE structure of modern industrialism, including the superstructure of feeling and thought which it throws up, has varied in intensity and direction. In its earlier days during the Protestant Reformation, when the great national communities of the West first became aware in some respects of their separate existence, it was interwoven with religious feeling and could not be disentangled from theology. It was, in fact, difficult to distinguish between German "nationalism" in the days of Luther and the Protestant "theological" outlook, and in the end both are the product of a common original source.

Yet behind this common development, both in Germany and in Britain, stood the power and influence of a body of people who had attained a greater (relative) monopoly position than that of any similar class. They were, in the first place, classes consolidated within the boundaries of definite countries, England or Germany, with no common interests across these boundaries, and even with conflicting interests. They did not, in the second place, represent any international point of view like that exercised, for example, by a feudal king with estates in France and England, or in Germany and Italy, nor did they even throw up any international line of communication like the Roman Church. On the other hand, they stood for a concentrated local interest whose power extended over a convenient political area, whether this area was Britain, the German Empire or France.

The ideological superstructure was, as we have seen, religious and nationalistic, but on the whole (in the seventeenth century), more religious than nationalistic. One reason for this was the still prevailing international feeling inherited from the Middle Ages, which was the outcome of feudal economy. Another reason is that when living close to the "nature" of the fields and woods — and man lived much closer to nature in this sense before the industrial revolution than today — the human psyche reacts much more deeply to the urge of the spirit and feels more intensely the unity behind the universe. Nationalism, in fact, was still a secondary influence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and remained so until the nineteenth and twentieth, when for the first — and let us hope for the last — time it became a substitute religion.

The differences which had arisen within the human comity of nations, the decay of Latin as a spoken tongue, the rise of the vernaculars as literary vehicles of expression, and, above all, the rise to supremacy of one sort

of vernacular in each national group (Françien in the Ile de France; and Middle English in England) to the position of national languages, meant the creation of real differences, and in some respects most unfortunate ones. It did not mean, as people often think, that something was coming into its own that had hitherto been neglected, but that where equal rights had once existed in national culture, one "monopoly" dialect was beginning to suppress the others.

The immediate outcome of the industrial revolution in the cultural line was the canalisation of national feeling into the narrow bed of language and literature rather than of religion, with results that were, on the surface at least, of a highly beneficial kind. Italy and Germany became united, and the languages called Tuscan and High German, representing the economic group in power, clamped themselves on each of these new nations. Meanwhile, through the greater division of labour brought about by modern commercial development, trade between different parts of the world was rapidly increasing, not only between the various national countries, but also within each national unit itself, and the effect, not only on the economic life but also the cultural, was remarkable. The various tolls and customs on the provincial boundaries had been, and still were, a valuable source of unearned income for many people, but the new possibilities arising in the form of profits from exchange — and in most cases profits for the same people — were so much greater that free exchange came almost of itself. Thus the provinces of Italy gradually shook off their commercial barriers and were united into one country, reflecting in the political sphere the unification which the Tuscan language had stood for culturally for some time. In Germany, the *Zollverein* of 1833 actually preceded the union by a generation, but in both countries the process was really the same.

A landowner in, say, Lombardy and Naples, like a feudal king of France or England, has estates and interests in more than one province, and may quite easily find enormous gain in encouraging inter-provincial trade. In a period of quickly expanding trade like the nineteenth century it was much more to the landowners' interest in any given European country to abolish internal tariffs than to preserve them, and this being his main line of profit, any suitable weapon such as war or education could be used to advance it. In one case indeed, that of Britain, whose Empire was spreading over the whole world and whose oceanic trade was greater than that of any

other nation, it was even obviously to her advantage to go further and to abolish all customs whatsoever. But she was, relatively speaking, in a position which was unique. In other countries (and we have lately seen the same process at work in England) the abolition of tariffs on trade stopped short at the frontier and stopped short for good. Italy and Germany became nations with a unified commercial code and a unified language, but the process did not go, as the English free traders had hoped it would, beyond the national frontiers.

The reason is that when the anti-monopolist and free trade movement got to the boundary of the country⁽¹⁾ it came against something very hard, very concrete, very powerful and concentrated, and this was the internal, nationalistic land monopoly. The abolition of inter-provincial tariffs was done, as we have seen, in the service of the land monopoly, and the state, with its "national" language, is really the apparatus by which it keeps the fundamental monopoly going. When, therefore, the free trade principle as applied by a monopoly state reaches the national boundaries of the same state the whole problem of trade and commerce takes on an entirely new aspect. The various monopoly groups in the national interior are well organised and well entrenched. They may want raw materials and markets overseas but they do not want to compete with imported manufactured goods, and so it comes about that the various countries, having completely broken down their own internal barriers, from the year of the French Revolution, 1789, onwards, have proceeded to pile them up in successive waves on their national frontiers.

Simultaneously, while making barriers stronger against the aggression of any foreign monopoly the need for a spiritual smoke-screen grows greater, and as we should expect, nationalism grows in intensity. Moreover, once the barrier is strongly demarcated by high customs duties and by the necessity for passports, etc., it becomes more important, in the total absence of any real difference, to find some camouflage for the real aims intended. Hence the zeal, almost amounting to frenzy, with which populations passing into the control of another government are subjected to the pressure of educational propaganda aimed at removing their linguistic, literary, and racial habits. Louis XIV, in the comparative peace of the pre-machine age, when monopoly was still largely dynastic, did not need to treat the Alsatian population in this manner, and would indeed never have thought of it. Dynastic monopoly was too firmly seated to need to indulge in more than religious persecution.

The warping of the mind which has been described so far is mainly of the cultural kind, and we do not need to add that there are many other forms of unnatural thinking. The fact that men, owing to economic dis-

location, have to live lives of a stunted kind is another important element, including the development of slum mentality with its curious one-sided intellectual alertness. Not only the poverty-stricken, however, suffer psychologically from the dislocated backgrounds; the rich also suffer, and they suffer to an equal extent in another direction. They have to adopt a whole series of clichés, such as "buy British," "imperial preference," "safeguarding of industries," "export or die," "our way of life," which in their own way warp their life and their mentality to almost the same extent. They are conditioned as members of the monopoly holding classes as surely as the working classes are conditioned in their life, and their minds are just as unfree. The background of economic unfreedom produces an unfree psyche.

If we agree that the basic structure of society is perverted fundamentally and along with it the super-structure of ideas, we shall have to confess again that the future is not a bright one. But it is also true that the human psyche, which has been evolving, concentrating, deepening and hardening for thousands, even a million years, is very tough, and may yet survive the maladaptation of the present world. Although greatly perverted, the human race is sound at heart, and there are still here and there oases in the deserts of unreason. Certain things are now known by a few people in a few countries which were never known before and which can be counted to the general progress of the race. Those who know them are as a rule insulated against any warping from outside, either by environment or by psychology; and what they know they pass on.

It is true, as the Marxists say, that men as a whole can believe only what the environment allows them to believe, but it is also true that men have now experienced many environments. The race, fortunately, has a memory, and while they cannot always be immediately implemented, memories can be stored up for use later. Some environments in the past have shown themselves to be better than others, and the human mind, by investigation, has discovered why. And although it is obvious that the world today, and the European world in particular, is bound to go through a period of intense collectivism, this does not mean the end of all things, nor even the beginning of anything new. In any event, it will not be equal in all parts, nor will it be found absolutely everywhere. There will always be interstices, and into these interstices those who know will creep. A time will come, when the false winds of doctrines are over-blown, for the world to listen anew and in the end, by dint of sheer biological integrity, the truth will prevail.

We can say this much about the immediate future and we can say it with a warning. We know now that certain things are permanently right and permanently wrong and nothing can shake this knowledge. Land monopoly is wrong, socialism is wrong, chattel slavery is wrong, and above all, the state is wrong, and this last, which obscures all other evils behind its pseudo-glorious name, is the most wrong of all.

(1) A boundary may be almost anywhere. Supposedly "natural" characteristics which are presumed to be the explanation of national boundaries will be forced, by education, and in our own day, by compulsory emigration, to conform to the line at which two Powers meet in equilibrium, neither being able to force the other back any further.