

8

Oikophobia

But can national loyalties really endure in the modern climate of opinion? This is a vexed question that must be answered case by case, and with due regard to all the stresses and strains of local history. Consider our own case: that of England. Nobody brought up in post-war England can fail to be aware of the educated derision that has been directed at our national loyalty by those whose freedom to criticise would have been extinguished years ago, had the English not been prepared to die for their country. To many of the post-war writers, the English ideals of freedom and service, for which the war in Europe had ostensibly been fought, were mere ideological constructs—‘ruling illusions’ which, by disguising exploitation as paternal guidance, made it possible to ship home the spoils of empire with an easy conscience. All those features of the English character that had been praised in war-time books and films—gentleness, firmness, honesty, tolerance, ‘grit’, the stiff upper lip and the spirit of fair play—were either denied or derided. England was not the free, harmonious, law-abiding community celebrated in boy’s magazines, but a place of class-divisions, jingoism and racial intolerance. Look beneath every institution and every ideal, the critics said, and you will find the same sordid reality: a self-perpetuating upper class, and a people hoodwinked by imperial illusions into accepting their dominion.¹

To refute this vision of my country is not something that I can undertake in this pamphlet: though I have attempted the task elsewhere.² It is important to note, however, that this torrent of criticism has been almost entirely devoid of comparative judgements. Indeed it amounts to little more, in retrospect, than a catalogue of failings that are natural to

the human condition, which may have been endowed by the English with a peculiarly English flavour, but which will be encountered everywhen and everywhere—even in Scotland.

At the same time, precisely because it is in the nature of a protest against the human condition, this kind of criticism is infectious. What began as a *jeu d'esprit* among intellectuals very soon translated itself into political orthodoxy, facilitated by the Celtic bias of the Labour Party, and by a European élite intent on extinguishing the memory of the Second World War. Consciously or unconsciously, recent political decisions have had the undoing of England as their real or apparent objective, and the result has been a confusion of identity among the English that might lead one to conclude that, in our case, at least, national loyalty is on the verge of extinction. The official map of Europe makes no mention of England, but only of 'regions' marked on the map with the same bureaucratic arbitrariness that carved up the Ottoman Empire. The Labour Party is determined to endorse these regions with elected assemblies, so depriving the English of all hope of a parliament of their own. At the same time the Scots and the Welsh have been granted their own national assemblies, and the Northern Irish have been placed in a situation that renders the 'unionist' position (i.e. the position that reaffirms the crown of England as the source of political authority) all but untenable. The English, by contrast, are ruled from Westminster by a government composed largely of Scots, and by parliamentarians who do not hesitate to vote on English issues even when they represent Welsh or Scottish constituencies. Constitutional reforms of a far-reaching kind have removed or will remove those institutions that created the English way of doing things—not least being the hereditary House of Lords, and the Lord Chancellor (whose office is not merely the oldest in the land after that of the monarch, but also responsible for that aspect of the English law—the doctrine of equity—which did more than any other to create the 'little platoons' of the English people³). And English common law has now been made subject to a régime of 'human rights' whose final court of appeal is outside the kingdom, in a court dominated

by judges brought up on the civilian and Napoleonic systems. Crucial matters concerning national sovereignty are debated outside our parliament, and the government itself seems determined to deprive the English people of the means to protect their national identity. It has even been proposed that in any referendum on the future of our national currency EU citizens resident in Britain should be allowed to vote—a *de facto* recognition that sovereignty and national identity have already been sundered, in the interests of a transnational jurisdiction that refuses to recognise national boundaries.

All those facts are familiar. My response to them is to point out that the seeming loss of national loyalty is a feature of our political élites, but it is not shared by the English people. The 'we' feeling is still there in our national culture, and is responsible for such support as our politicians receive for their increasingly random gestures. Mr Blair may or may not have been right to take us into war in Iraq; but his ability to do so was contingent on the fact that, in a crisis, the British generally, and the English in particular, re-group around the old first-person plural. Even if we go to war reluctantly, we still go to war as *we*, obeying *our* government, and not as subjects ruled by some alien *them*. (Contrast the attitude of the Czechs to war fought on behalf of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—brilliantly conveyed by Jaroslav Hasek in *The Good Soldier Schweik*.) In its attempt to persuade us to accept the current levels of immigration, our government appeals to *our* traditions of hospitality, asks us to accept the newcomers not as competitors for our territory but as refugees, to whom *we* owe charitable protection. In every major crisis, the government falls back on our historic identity and unaltered loyalty, in order to persuade us to accept even the changes that threaten those precious possessions.

It will not have escaped the reader's notice that this historic identity, both in its English and in its British manifestation, has entered a state of crisis. This crisis has come about because the loyalty that people need in their daily lives, and which they affirm in their unconsidered and

spontaneous social actions, is constantly ridiculed or even demonised by the dominant media and the education system. National history is taught (if it is taught at all) as a tale of shame and degradation. The art, literature and music of our nation have been more or less excised from the curriculum, and folkways, local traditions and national ceremonies are routinely rubbished. We see the effect of this when the British take their holidays in foreign parts. Needing to affirm their national identity, and deprived of the culture that would enable them to feel proud of it, they have recourse to loutish belligerence, slouching from village to village with drunken howls, swinging bottles and beer cans in their prehensile arms.

Those disinherited savages owe their condition to the fact that their mentors and guardians have repudiated the national idea. This repudiation is the result of a peculiar frame of mind that has arisen throughout the Western world since the second world war, and which is particularly prevalent among the intellectual and political élites. No adequate word exists for this attitude, though its symptoms are instantly recognised: namely, the disposition, in any conflict, to side with 'them' against 'us', and the felt need to denigrate the customs, culture and institutions that are identifiably 'ours'. Being the opposite of xenophobia I propose to call this state of mind oikophobia, by which I mean (stretching the Greek a little) the repudiation of inheritance and home. Oikophobia is a stage through which the adolescent mind normally passes. But it is a stage in which some people—intellectuals especially—tend to become arrested. As George Orwell pointed out, intellectuals on the Left are especially prone to it, and this has often made them willing agents of foreign powers.⁴ The Cambridge spies offer a telling illustration of what oikophobia has meant for our country. And it is interesting to note that a recent BBC 'docudrama' constructed around that deplorable episode neither examined the realities of their treason nor addressed the suffering of the millions of their East European victims, but merely endorsed the oikophobia that had caused the spies to act as they did. The resulting

portrait of English society, culture, nationhood and loyalty as both morally reprehensible and politically laughable is standard BBC fare—prolefeed, as Orwell described it in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Nor is oikophobia a specifically English, still less specifically British tendency (although Scots seem relatively immune to it). When Sartre and Foucault draw their picture of the 'bourgeois' mentality, the mentality of the Other in his Otherness, they are describing the ordinary decent Frenchman, and expressing their contempt for his national culture. A chronic form of oikophobia has spread through the American universities, in the guise of political correctness, and loudly surfaced in the aftermath of September 11th, to pour scorn on the culture that allegedly provoked the attacks, and to side by implication with the terrorists.

This frame of mind finds a natural home in state institutions, since these offer the power base from which to attack the simple loyalties of ordinary people. Hence European parliaments and bureaucracies contain large numbers of oikophobes whose principal concern in exercising power is to pour scorn on national values and to open the way to their subversion. The domination of our own national parliament by oiks, as we might call them, is partly responsible for the assaults on our constitution, for the acceptance of subsidised immigration, and for the attacks on customs and institutions associated with traditional and native forms of life. The oik repudiates national loyalties and defines his goals and ideals *against* the nation, promoting transnational institutions over national governments, accepting and endorsing laws that are imposed on us from on high by the EU or the UN, though without troubling to consider Terence's question, and defining his political vision in terms of universal values that have been purified of all reference to the particular attachments of a real historical community. The oik is, in his own eyes, a defender of enlightened universalism against local chauvinism. And it is the rise of the oik that has led to the growing crisis of legitimacy in the nation states of Europe. For we are seeing a massive expansion of the legislative burden on the people

of Europe, and a relentless assault on the only loyalties that would enable them voluntarily to bear it. The explosive effect of this has already been felt in Holland and France. It will be felt soon everywhere, and the result may not be what the oiks expect.