

## **REVIEW: RECOVERING NATIONALISM**

*David McCrone*

Malcolm Anderson (2000), **States and Nationalism in Europe since 1945**,  
London: Routledge, ISBN 0415195586, pb, £9.99, 109pp.

Students of nationalism still struggle against the conventional wisdom that there is something ethnic, hence evil and dangerous, about its manifestations in the 21st century. Ernest Gellner wrote tellingly of the dark gods theory of nationalism which he saw as dominating discourse for over half a century after the Second World War. It was as if, he commented, that there was an evil genie in the bottle, just biding its time so that it could escape to infect an a-nationalist and innocent world. Much better, then, to adopt the view that we should all be on our guard against the virus which would inevitably lead to hatred and killing. Nonsense, said Gellner. All modern states are premised on national citizenship, and hence on nationalism. They simply pretend they aren't. Ah, say the critics, look around you at the events of the last fifty years. For forty of those years, the politics of the Cold War ruled, and they were struggles between capitalism and communism, between liberalism and authoritarianism. In western Europe in particular, the politics of nationalism were absent, apart from the few odd cases like Scotland, and they were the result of inadequate state-building at key political junctures. Wasn't the European project the very antithesis of nationalism?

Not at all, says Malcolm Anderson, in this excellent short book on nationalism in Europe since 1945. Nationalism was not only at the root of state competition in the West, but the very stuff of the Cold War itself. While it is true that it was ostensibly non-nationalist - a struggle of the big ideologies of the 20th century, no less - both the USA and USSR were actually employing the pursuit of national interests in the guise of global struggle. The USA, for example, was built on the twin pillars of isolationism

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*David McCrone is co-director of the Institute of Governance, Edinburgh University.*

### *Scottish Affairs*

and globalism - my country right or wrong, and the export of the American way of life. Even globalisation can be thought of as the latest form of American hegemony. Not nationalistic? Only if one buys into the view that patriotism is somehow a purer form of belonging, and Anderson is not at all convinced. Similarly, the USSR might have used (and abused) the rhetoric of cosmopolitan socialism, but, like capitalist, republican France, adeptly turned universalism into national particularism. Russia's great patriotic war against Nazi Germany was perhaps its most successful manifestation and mobilisation. The demise of the USSR was in large part the result of struggles between the core and peripheries within state socialism, and, he argues, nationalism was not the unanticipated consequence of bolshevik marxism, but central to it. The re-emergence of nationalist Russia is simply a not-so-old wolf in fresh nationalist clothing.

Lest we think that the super-powers were the odd ones out, Anderson observes that similar processes occurred among the global powers in the high tide of nationalism, 1880-1914. Germany, France and Great Britain all assumed the superiority of national values in their pursuit of geo-political interests. Imperial rule was a device for consolidating nationalism, notably in Britain and France; hence, the major challenge to their hegemony came from struggles of national liberation. In the period after 1945, the interests of the states and the European Community did not conflict, and nationalism was even revived but made secure by European integration. The pursuit of national interest was cloaked in the language of being *communautaire*. By the 1980s, however, corresponding with the translation of Community into Union, there developed a sovereignist-nationalist revolt against greater incorporation. Europe was seen as a threat to national identities by many political forces, and not only on the Right. Anderson argues that there is now a genuine struggle between nationalist and integrationist forces in Europe.

Europe itself cannot escape the consequences of nationalism. As early as the 1960s, the liberal elite could not hold the line against cultural pluralism, notably in France. The new challenges borne of immigration politics across the Union call into question the national accounts and histories of citizenship in Britain, France and Germany. The Europeanisation of population movements undermines these significantly. It is even possible, Anderson thinks, that anti-immigrant feeling will be channelled into a challenge to the European Union itself, at a time, and not only in the UK, where the European project is undergoing its most significant challenge in its fifty-year history.

*Review: Recovering Nationalism*

One of the major challenges to existing state structures in Europe in the 21st century emanates from irredentist and separatist movements. Anderson counsels: the creation of new territorial identities is possible which will disturb the tranquillity of nation-states whose members complacently think that their frontiers are permanent and unchallengeable realities (p.85). Some of these will come from the likes of Scotland and Catalonia, where nationalism has developed in a progressive and adaptive way to the new circumstances. He points out that there is nothing new about the link between civic democracy and nationalism; indeed, the liberal West was built precisely upon such foundations, despite the kind of liberal internationalism which gained ground among elites in the second half of the 20th century who sought to escape from, or disguise, the fact that nationalism was the basis of liberal democracy.

Malcolm Anderson has written a book of eminent good sense, drawing upon a lifetime of scholarship on the politics of Western Europe. That he wears such scholarship lightly makes this book accessible and readable, but no-one should doubt the force and implications of his argument. Nationalism is not some aberrant philosophy responsible for the evils of the modern world. It is the keystone of liberal democracy.

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