

## Does Nationalism look more towards the Future or the Past?

In any discussion involving nationalism it is difficult to emerge with a single opinion or line of thought. This is because the nature of nationalism is that it is split into many different categories ranging from benign liberal nationalism to the more aggressive expansionist nationalism. Some forms of nationalism therefore look to the past, while others look to the future.

Liberal nationalism is a form of nationalism which equates the rights and liberties of nations with the rights and liberties they would enjoy if they were individuals. The nation state is therefore seen as a sovereign body which does not have to yield to external influences. Liberal nationalism is perhaps best typified by Wilson's fourteen points created after the First World War to re-shape Europe. Liberal nationalism, with its emphasis on the liberal values of toleration, a plurality of views and freedom occurs most in nation states which are not based on ethnicity. i.e.: countries which have survived the transition between being a nation, where ethnicity and culture decide a person's 'membership' of that nation, and being a nation state, where it is the common bonds of citizenship which shape the nation. Once a nation becomes a nation state then ethnic and cultural differences become less important and the state can begin to be proud of its multi-cultural heritage and build towards that in the future. Nationalism in a multicultural society therefore tends to be forward looking because in the past the country was not multicultural and so it is impossible for a nationalist to be proud of something that didn't exist, nationalists therefore need to look to the future to be proud of what the country will become. Liberal nationalism can therefore be regarded as generally being forward looking.

The support of liberal nationalism for self-determining states means that a desire for expansion and war is not a 'side effect' of this form of nationalism. Many wars are justified by the aggressors with the argument that the country they were attacking is in some way 'less' than them, that its inhabitants are less civilised or less developed. Liberal nationalism, with its 21<sup>st</sup> century emphasis on multiculturalism, will therefore tend to shy away from aggressive wars as it not only violates the principles laid down by Mazzini of self-determination, but also undermines the nation they are trying to aspire to in the future.

Other forms of nationalism, however, have no such doubts about the ethics of war. Expansionist nationalism, as its name suggests, is the aggressive side of the ideology. It is the common image of nationalism in the minds of many people. A strong, dominating country forcing weaker countries to do as it wishes them to do or face the threat of war. It is the type of nationalism best exemplified by the European power's empire building in the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as the 'scramble for Africa'. In the twentieth century it manifested itself even more violently, this time not on the turf of Africa or Asia, but in the heart of Europe itself with the development of both the First and the Second World Wars. It is the chauvinism, a country's belief in its own superiority over others, which marks the main distinction between liberal and expansionist nationalism. Where liberal nationalists believe all states have an equal right to exist, expansionist nationalists believe their country's superiority gives them the right to exploit other countries. They believed that white Europeans were intellectually and morally superior to other races and so not only did this give Europeans the *right* to make other countries into part of their empire, but that they have a moral *duty* to do so in order to 'civilise' these other nations. With the very separated distinctions within expansionist nationalism between 'them' and 'us', it is difficult to see how this form of nationalism has any place in a 21<sup>st</sup> century multi-cultural society. Expansionist nationalists are forced to look back into a country's past to its empire 'glory days' and are unable to equate what seems likely to be the future with their chauvinistic beliefs.

The effect of the rise of expansionist nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the rise of anti-colonial nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The decline of the empires of the European powers meant the rise in pride of the countries that had formally been part of their empires. By 1955 it was clear that the days when Europeans were masters of the world was long past when at the Bandung Conference, 29 former colonies in Asia and Africa condemned colonialism. Anti-colonial nationalism is often associated with Marxist or socialist nationalism because of the nature of the economies adopted by the former colonies once they gained independence. Before independence, the poor state of the economies of their former colonies was not fully appreciated, but after independence it became clear and African and Asian leaders began to discard the free-market capitalism which they saw as one of the sources of their poverty and instead many began to adopt a socialist method of organising the economy and political system. Examples of countries which have adopted Marxist-Leninist ways of organisation are China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia. Other countries have been less extreme and instead have adopted a mixed economy, for example (before the recent purges), Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. These forms of nationalism, in rejecting their past, tend to be more forward looking hoping for a day when they can compete on the same ground as their former colonial masters.

One final form of nationalism to be considered is Conservative nationalism. Where liberal nationalism has its roots in liberalism, conservative nationalism has its roots in conservatism. Pride in one's country is an intrinsic part of conservatism, but it is pride in what the country was. By its nature conservatism is backward looking, looking to preserve the best parts of the past. In Britain, conservative nationalism is heavily entwined with symbols which have their basis in the past; the monarchy, D-Day and so-called 'Victorian values' all play a part in a conservative's eye of what it means to be British. It is the shared culture which provides social cohesion and so many conservatives doubt the effectiveness of multiculturalism. Conservative nationalism utilises the concept of the Fatherland so beloved by expansionists and as a consequence it is often intolerant of other cultures and bigoted.

The lack of unity between the different forms of nationalism means that it is possible to argue that nationalism looks to both past and present in equal doses. Aggressive forms of nationalism, tend to have an agenda which looks to the past, to the 'glory days' of strength and empire hoping to utilise the national feeling this produces to re-creating these days. More benign forms of nationalism however, tend to focus more on what a country can achieve in the future, praising concepts such as multiculturalism.