



# BULLETIN

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## English National Identity

by Bernard Rorke

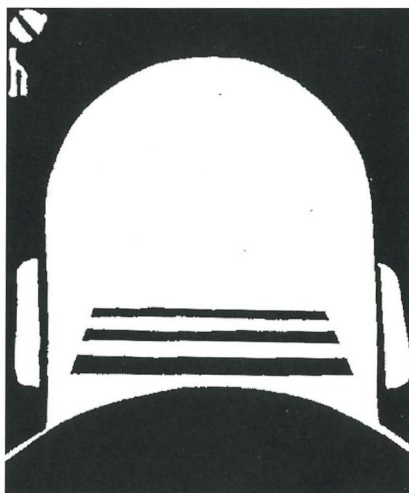
Last July, the hitherto little-known *Wisden Cricket Monthly* achieved nation-wide notoriety by adding the phrase 'unequivocal Englishmen' to the racist lexicon. The author of the piece, Robert Henderson, complained about the effect 'interlopers' have on the 'unequivocally English' cricket players and consequently on team spirit. He went on to ask if the desire to succeed for England might not be 'instinctive, a matter of biology'.

This racialized construction of 'Englishness' has to be understood in the context of Britain's post-colonial decline and crisis. The extent of this decline soon became evident in the post-war years. Far from heralding a new Elizabethan age, the coronation in 1952 of the present monarch marked the beginning of a reign that would oversee England's accelerated slide into impotence. David Cannadine put it succinctly: 'The state funeral of Winston Churchill in 1965, poised exactly half-way between Elizabeth's coronation and the Silver Jubilee, was not only the last rites of 'the great man himself', but was also self-consciously recognised at the time as being the requiem for Britain as a great power.'

This crisis has induced Britons to clarify their national identity by asking themselves a question first posed by Enoch Powell: what kind of people are we? This self-scrutiny has prompted what Paul Gilroy describes as an 'increasingly decadent

preoccupation with the metaphysics of national belonging'. Race has become an important component of this morbid political culture.

The form of racism that has emerged, a 'racism without races', has as its dominant theme the insurmountability of cultural differences. It is a racism which at



first sight does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions - what Etienne Balibar calls 'a differentialist racism'. The specifically cultural rather than biological inflection, the defining of race as a matter of difference rather than a question of hierarchy marks, to use Frantz Fanon's terms, a progression from vulgar to cultural racism.

In nationalist discourse the notion of 'we' which constructs 'the nation' need not necessarily cue racial identity. However, Powell's interventions in the 1960s were the first stage in a dramatic transition

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from the pragmatic conservative treatment of the nation as a working unit of disparate groups to its radical re-imagining as a homogeneous whole, endowed with some sense of pseudo-biological *ethnie*. What Martin Barker has called 'new racism' represents a hegemonic project, a veritable *gramscisme de droite*: more than an appeal to common sense, it is a struggle to create a *new* commonsense. From the Powellite interventions to Thatcher's infamous 1978 'swamping' speech, the ideologues of the 'new racism' insisted on the 'common sense' of respecting the 'tolerance thresholds' and maintaining 'cultural distances'.

Though this new racism does not require an explicit hypothesis of innate superiority, it is not difficult to see that the suppression of hierarchy is more apparent than real. Behind the differentialist emphasis of the new racism, Balibar sees barely reworked variants of the idea that the historical cultures of humanity can be divided into two main groups, the one assumed to be universalistic and progressive, the

other irremediably particularistic and primitive. This new articulation explicitly links race and nation and insinuates itself into the 'common sense' of national identity and citizenship. This was made abundantly clear by the Conservative Sir Alfred Sherman in 1979, when he stated that the 'relationship between indigenous Britons and this country is inherently different from that of Asians. . . . The law's job is to fit the facts. This obliges it to discriminate between marriages made in heaven and those arranged in Islamabad'.

In the 1990s the rhetoric is less shrill. John Major was moved to declare that Britain would survive in fifty years time in 'its unamendable essentials', that Britain would continue as 'the country of long shadows on cricket grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pool fillers'. As Michael Billig remarks in *Banal Nationalism*, this 'burst of metonymic stereotyping' entails exclusion. He maintains that this low-key, prosaic, understated flagging of nationhood deserves our attention because of, not despite, its rhetorical dullness and banality. For, as Arendt famously reminded us, banal is not always synonymous with benign. As clearly as Major's 'unamendable essentials' tell 'us' who 'we' are, they indicate who 'we' are not.

Sections of the centre-left have taken to playing the patriot game. In Tony Blair's 1994 Labour Conference speech, replete with phrases such as 'We will rebuild our country . . . if you share this commitment to rebuilding Britain . . . we have a great history and culture . . .', community and nation were elided rhetorically. This agenda is not racist, but Blair should be mindful of the risks posed by populist patriotism. Building a 'national-popular collective will' might make some sense in the short term. In the longer term, if Blair's much-vaunted radicalism is to deepen the democratic revolution, a British derivative of Amitai Etzioni's vulgar, home-spun communitarianism forged with a renewed sense of national identity will not suffice.

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## Paths to Paradise?

by Jeremy Tatman

The importance of André Gorz's side has been acknowledged by a variety of commentators throughout his career. The French daily, *Le Monde*, recently described him as 'one of the most important political thinkers of our time', while the American Marxist political economist, Herbert Gintis, has referred to Gorz as 'the greatest of Modern French thinkers'.

Gorz's work finds support particularly among those who admire his attempts to link existential and ecological concerns in the late twentieth century with the political, economic and technological processes that constitute the period's defining characteristics. Distinguished academics and members of various political organisations and movements alike have been impressed by his analyses of, and his endeavours to lend meaning and direction to, the crisis of industrial civilisation. It is in these endeavours that we discover one of the outstanding features of Gorz's work: the incisiveness and originality with which he critically interprets social developments and the possibilities they contain for qualitative social change.

Nevertheless, given the innovative and controversial character of Gorz's writings, it is not surprising that his work is not universally appreciated. From the late 1950s, a consistent concern of his writing has been to shake the Left out of its theoretical sclerosis and to furnish its institutional representatives with political initiatives of contemporary relevance. Gorz has sought to identify the conflicts, contradictions, needs and aspirations produced by capitalism - but which exist in contradiction to its logic - and to use them to formulate political strategies which will create the conditions for their transcendence. Though he has maintained that there is a fundamental need to overcome the exploitation and alienation inherent in capitalist societies, Gorz's approach has brought him into

conflict with more traditional sections of the Left, who have not always welcomed his challenges to established political convictions.

This trend has become more pronounced in recent years as Gorz's changing analysis of advanced industrial societies has coincided both with the Left's further distancing of itself from Marxist philosophy and with its renewed attempt to redefine the socialist project in a manner appropriate to the complexity of these societies. In particular, Gorz's proposals for the development of a society based on the distinct, but interrelated, spheres of heteronomy and autonomy have simultaneously been welcomed as an imaginative response to the social and political ramifications of the 'micro-electronic revolution' and derided as impractical and utopian.

Yet despite the wide range of the responses to Gorz's writings, a rich vein of his thought has not been fully explored. As in the work of Sartre, Gorz's fundamental belief in freedom as a defining characteristic of the human condition has remained constant since the 1940s. Gorz's intellectual project can be defined in terms of the negation of all limitations to human freedom. But the development and evolution of his concept of freedom and its applications in his thought have yet to be analysed comprehensively. Rather than examining the *concept* of freedom upon which this project is based, attention has often focused on the formulation of *strategies* designed to enable its greater realisation.

The German social theorists Jander and Maischen have argued that Gorz's early works of existential philosophy, which develop the interrelated themes of freedom and alienation, have informed his later, celebrated, texts. This view fits with Gorz's recent attempt to make operational the ontological approach developed in *Fondements pour une morale*: this approach informs both his critique of contemporary societies and his radical proposals for a politics struggling for more time for all.

Jeremy Tatman is a research student at CSD and editor of a forthcoming anthology of political writings by André Gorz.



## Fear After Fear

by Juan E. Corradi

Fear has received scant systematic attention in the social sciences, although it was once - with Hobbes and Montesquieu - at the very centre of theoretical reflection. I was drawn to the subject by developments in South America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In those days, military regimes used systematic terror to dissolve the civil institutions capable of protecting citizens from the arbitrary actions of the state. I co-ordinated a multi-disciplinary group to study the process of state terror in four countries of the Southern Cone: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

The results of this research, published as *Fear at the Edge* (1992), showed that, under terror, a sociological inversion takes place: the state, which in normal circumstances sustains rationality and predictability, becomes itself a source of radical insecurity and unpredictability. The dictatorships which promised to 'end fear' produced instead a deeper fear, to the point where daily life became unpredictable and hitherto familiar environments strange and hostile places. Like terrorism, state terror installs uncertainty at the core of the social system.

Under terror, the state is restructured along the lines of organised crime. It becomes a violent racket, or Mafia-like organisation. The legal definition of punishable actions becomes vague. Information is distorted. Communication is disrupted. Physical violence against citizens is exercised openly, in combination with other, covert forms of violence (torture, extra-judicial executions, disappearances). These acts of public intimidation help install an extraordinary sense of insecurity in ordinary life. Under such conditions, the capacity of actors to behave rationally is impaired.

The most dramatic effect of fear-mongering regimes is the fragmentation of groups and the destruction of networks of solidarity. Individuals retreat to primary

groups. The result is a sort of 'amoral familism'. The withdrawal from larger groups of solidarity entails public inaction and sometimes even hostility towards the few individuals who resist the state. Inaction is justified in a number of ways. A social exchange of excuses develops among terrified citizens. Cynicism and fatalism form a system of defence against calls to action. In some instances, despair leads to a form of social autism, to a retreat into silence. In the end, it becomes very difficult for isolated individuals to engage in



a proper inter-subjective validation of their sense of reality. Fantastic explanations and rumours circulate wildly.

Fear produces a vicious circle of collective inaction. However, the logic of collective inaction is not exclusive to terroristic settings. It operates also in more ordinary settings, in non-terroristic societies, such as total institutions (prisons, mental hospitals), even in such benign environments as academic institutions, where the diffuse fear of uncertain sanctions is sufficient to provoke countless little acts of cowardice, which in turn sustain abuses of power.

Is it possible to break the circle of fear? In *Fear at the Edge* we addressed this question through a comparative analysis of exit

situations in South American countries. We found that a major condition of exit from the circle of fear is the existence of organisations capable both of breaking the monopoly of communication by the repressive state, and of providing material and juridical assistance to victims. Those institutions support resistance and little by little impose upon the public the perception that there are alternatives. Ordinary people gradually come to the realisation that heroic action is not the only path to resistance. In short, we found that a crucial element in the exit from fear is the existence of protective barriers (supplied by institutions and personalities) behind which ordinary citizens may reconstitute the broken networks of solidarity and engage - in the form of low-risk activities with high symbolic value - in collective resistance.

Ten years have passed since the fear-mongering regimes of the Southern Cone were replaced by democratic regimes. Fear of arbitrary action by a terroristic state has abated. But other fears persist, which have an important impact on politics. In *Fear at the Edge*, we only began to address this issue, namely, by speculating on the roles of collective memory and justice in healing the social trauma of terror. On the topic of justice, we came to the tentative conclusion that some form of political justice by successor regimes was both necessary to overcome the past - and, in practical and juridical terms, nearly impossible. The different paths chosen by Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, suggest that there is no cost-free solution to the problem. Nor do other examples, drawn from the international community, provide a best solution to the settlement of large collective traumas after periods of terror. I believe that the comparative study of justice and collective memory will be one of the great topics of social science in years to come.

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