'Losing the Peace: Euroscepticism and the foundations of contemporary English Nationalism.'
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Political resistance to European integration in the United Kingdom laid important ideological foundations for contemporary English nationalism. The politics surrounding accession to the EEC was such that it signaled that accession was both a matter of supreme national importance and via the device of a referendum it led to the fusing of Parliamentary and popular sovereignty. The unfolding of the Thatcherite project in Britain added an individualistic - and eventually an anti-European - dimension to this nascent English nationalism. Resistance to the deepening political and monetary integration of Europe, coupled with the effects of devolution in the United Kingdom, led to the emergence of a populist *English* nationalism, by now fundamentally shaped by opposition to European integration, although a nationalism which merged the defence of British and English sovereignty. Underpinning these three developments was a popular version of the past which saw "Europe" as the ultimate institutional expression of British decline. Thus Euroscpeticism generated the ideology of contemporary English nationalism by legitimising the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty through the invocation of popular sovereignty underpinned by reference to the past.

Keywords: England, Euroscepticism, sovereignty, populism, nationalism

Introduction

They key to understanding English nationalism is not to search for anything which expresses itself as distinctively English in the realm of politics. This is because a central element of English nationalism is the defence of sovereignty – that is, the defence of the United Kingdom's sovereignty. Certainly there are some minor campaigns which seek to redress the asymmetric devolution of the United Kingdom, but the ideology of English nationalism is not generated in the main by this sort of resentment. Although devolution played an important part in creating the structural conditions necessary to imagine England as a distinct political community, the ideological content of contemporary English nationalism is generated by opposition to European integration. By

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defending the United Kingdom's sovereignty against the encroaching powers of the European Union, English nationalists often obscure English nationalism by defending Britain. This is not to say that English nationalism is necessarily 'quiescent' or even 'non-existent', but rather that Euroscpeticism informs and illuminates nationalism in England, providing the ideological content of contemporary English nationalism.

The argument that follows consists of three pillars, resting on a fourth foundation:

1. The politics surrounding accession to the Common Market was such that it signaled that accession was both a matter of supreme national importance and – via the device of a referendum – led to the fusing of Parliamentary and popular sovereignty;

2. The unfolding of the Thatcherite project in Britain added an individualistic and eventually an anti-European dimension to a nascent English nationalism;

3. Resistance to the deepening political and monetary integration of Europe, coupled with the effects of devolution in the United Kingdom, led to the emergence of a populist *English* nationalism, by now fundamentally shaped by opposition to European integration.

4. Underpinning the development and articulation of this anti-European ideology was a popular version of the past which saw "Europe" as the ultimate institutional expression of British and English decline.

The overall conclusion derived from the above is that political resistance to European integration laid important ideological foundations for contemporary English nationalism. It did this by legitimising the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty through the invocation of popular sovereignty, popularly understood by reference to England's past.

This emphasis on the ideological origins and construction of English nationalism differs from many recent approaches to Englishness. Political attention to English nationalism has been driven by the so-called "English" or "West Lothian Question": what sort of political powers should be accorded to England in an asymmetrically devolved United Kingdom? At a popular level, this question seems to have been met with equanimity (see Susan Condor in this volume for an analysis of English reactions to devolution). Explanations for this seeming quiescence are varied. They range from research demonstrating that there is an active hostility to English identity amongst the young (Fenton, 2007); to the notion that England is imagined as a void or absence (Abell *et al*, 2007); or that English nationalism exists but dare not speak its name (McCrone, 2006); or that it exists but it is politically weak (Bryant, 2008) and even to the notion that England is actually dead (Scruton, 2001). Each of these explanations has merit – some more than others - yet many of these studies focus on what we might call English identity as opposed to English nationalism. Kumar alone seeks to address the *content* of English nationalism, only to conclude that there never was anything resembling English nationalism until recently thereby inhibiting the development of a English national consciousness (Kumar, 2003). Anthony Smith has called for a longer-term historical analysis of English nationalism in the context of European unity (Smith, 2006) and this is an area which certainly needs to be further explored. Only Gifford has examined the relationship between Euroscepticism and populism, but with an emphasis on Britain and its political economy (Gifford, 2008). As I will argue below, resistance to European integration has laid the ideological foundations of a contemporary English nationalism by legitimising the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty through the invocation of popular sovereignty.

However, with one or two minor exceptions such as the Campaign for an English Parliament (CEP), the ideology of contemporary English nationalism is not explicitly borne by an understanding of politics, but is instead carried implicitly in an understanding of the past. An analysis of the role that arguments about the past – and lessons to be learned from them – played in resistance to European integration highlight the links between contemporary English nationalism and Euroscepticism. But the dominant understanding of the past in England is a vision of history where the notion of "Greatness" has been torpedoed by perceptions of "Decline" in the post-War era – and "Europe" can be all too easily seen as the institutional expression of this fall from great power status

I

Debates about accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1960s and1970s (see for example Her Majesty's Government 1971; Dewey, 2009) laid the foundations for the contemporary resurgence in English nationalism in two important ways. Firstly, they rehearsed arguments about the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty whose continuity and importance could not truly be understood by Continentals. Secondly, they fused the notion of Parliamentary sovereignty with that of popular sovereignty through the device of a referendum.

This is not to say that other considerations did not contribute to a sceptical attitude towards European integration prior to the 1970s. Some of these objections were based on nothing more than prejudice and hearsay. In a draft pamphlet, entitled *Into the EEC?* businessman A G Elliot argued against joining the EEC on the following grounds:

> I visited France on a 2,000 mile business trip and everywhere (except among the peasants) I found half the companies and people I dealt with tried to cheat me. As

a recent television programme proved this sort of thing does not happen to foreign visitors to England… and while I have spoken about the French, people tell me Italians are worse' (Letter/pamphlet from A G Elliot to Shore, SHORE/9/44 [Miscellaneous, 1971.]).

Such attitudes cannot be dismissed lightly since we know that "othering" plays an important part in the generation of collective identities (Cohen, 1991: 197). However, this mechanism is not specific to the English and was far less conspicuous at the level of Parliamentary and political organization around the issue of the United Kingdom's accession to the EEC where other issues were more important.

Britain's enduring ties to the Empire and Commonwealth were an obvious countervailing pull away from closer economic and political integration with countries of the European mainland. This was particularly true of Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who after Labour's general election victories of 1974 found himself at the head of a government reluctantly committed to a referendum on the re-negotiated terms of Britain's involvement in the EEC. Indeed Europe was something of a mystery to Wilson. Bernard Donnoghue, one of Wilson's policy advisors, felt that Wilson was 'basically a north of England, non-conformist, puritan… The continental Europeans, especially from France and southern Europe were to him alien. He disliked their rich food, genuinely preferring meat and two veg with HP sauce' (cited in Hennessy, 2001: 365). Speaking to the London Labour Mayors' Association in 1974, Wilson argued that Britain's ties to the Commonwealth were not merely a matter of sugar and butter:

There are deep personal and family relationships for many of our people with countries in the Commonwealth. I have 43 close relatives in Australia, descendents of my four grandparents, more than four times as many as I have in Britain. I am not unique in this. And in addition to family ties there are very

many who recall the response of the Commonwealth when Europe's freedom was in danger, many who developed close personal friendships in the Commonwealth. I trust that our friends in the Community will not underrate this powerful feeling in Britain, or the importance of the Commonwealth relationship which we can bring into the Community with us (Wilson, 1974).

For Wilson, Europe was equated with danger and threat, whilst the Commonwealth was a source of succor, and one made real through ties of family and friendship. And the anxieties about loss flowed in both directions, particularly from New Zealand which was set to be the biggest Commonwealth loser if and when the UK joined the EEC. A pamphlet written in 1971 by Tom Weal of the New Zealand Common Market Safeguards Campaign bore the famous picture of St Paul's during the Blitz superimposed on a Union flag on its front cover. The tone of the pamphlet was apocalyptic:

Together we stand at the crossroads of history. The SECOND BATTLE OF BRITAIN is immanent. In the mystical sense, am I to be that stranger from New Zealand standing on a broken arch of London Bridge to gaze upon the ruins of St Paul's?' (Weal, 1971)

But whilst these Commonwealth ties were important in the 1960s and '70s, they were not crucial in the emergence of a specifically English nationalism. Of more lasting importance was the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty and its fusion with popular sovereignty through the referendum of June 1975. Its was the prospect of the United Kingdom's entry into the EEC which forced members of the public and political class alike to think about the ways in which they were governed. The last time people were forced to do this was during the Second World War – and now there was the real prospect of close economic integration with some of the very powers that had fought against Britain. The greatest political resistance to European integration came from the

Labour Party, since at this stage, the Conservatives and the Liberals were pro-Europe. Debate about accession to the EEC was initially focused around the passing of the European Communities Act in October 1971. Writing in that year, Ron Leighton, director of the Labour Party's Committee for Safeguards on the Common Market, spelt out the fears of the left about the EEC. Whilst some of the objections related to left-wing suspicion of the EEC as being pro-big business, the twin themes of sovereignty and history emerged too. 'Sovereignty,' argued Leighton, 'is not a reactionary concept. It is our most precious possession, as those countries in the world without it today would testify' (Leighton, 1971: 13). But sovereignty could not be understood in isolation from history. Leighton continued:

> Our present liberties and freedoms in Britain were fought for and achieved by our forefathers in a long struggle which included such milestones as Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Chartist movement, the various reform bills, women's suffrage, and so on. Our present MPs have inherited these rights and liberties, and now they are custodians responsible for handing them on to future generations. They certainly have no mandate to surrender or abandon our right to self-government and self-determination to the apparatus in Brussels and would never be forgiven for doing so (Leighton, 1971: 13).

When Prime Minster Ted Heath duly signed the Treaty of Rome in 1972 and the UK acceded to the EEC the following year, the novel issue of a popular referendum was placed on the political agenda by the so-called "Anti-Marketeers" in the Labour Party. It was this device that began the fusion Parliamentary and popular sovereignty on the issue of Europe. The Anti-Marketeers were drawn predominantly, but not exclusively, from the left-wing of the Labour Party. Having lost the battle over accession on the floor of the Commons, this group, led by the likes of Peter Shore, Tony Benn and Barbara Castle, campaigned to make a referendum on the EEC Labour policy. This policy was broadly

supported by party members and MPs, but would prove difficult for the leadership when Labour came to power in 1974. But as Anthony Forster has pointed out, the notion of popular sovereignty inherent in a referendum sits strangely with the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty which was the ostensible goal of the Anti-marketeers (Forster, 2002: 92). Nevertheless, a referendum on continued UK involvement under renegotiated terms of accession was part of the Labour manifesto in both elections of 1974 and after their second victory of that year a date for a referendum was duly set for 6 June 1975.

However, it was the outspoken ex-Conservative MP Enoch Powell who made some of the most explicit links between national identity and sovereignty during the referendum campaign. Speaking on Radio Three in the run-up to the referendum, Powell – already habituated to defending the English people's sovereignty against New Commonwealth immigrants – argued that 'parliamentary sovereignty is the form in which we are accustomed to asserting our national independence,' adding that Parliamentary sovereignty was also 'the fact for which men have fought and died, that the laws in their country are made only by the institutions of their country and in Britain that they are made only by the parliamentary institutions of our country' (Powell, 1975). And even though many of the arguments on the left stemmed from a sceptical attitude towards the EEC's capitalist and Christian Democratic credentials, even figures such as Tony Benn could comprehend the EEC's lack of appeal in Britain through an understanding of the inviolability of Britain's borders since 1066 and portray it as a re-creation of the Holy Roman Empire (Benn, 1971).

What emerged stronger out of these debates during the first half of the 1970s was an understanding of Englishness founded upon and articulated around a sense of the uniqueness of Parliament, as well as its

historical formation, longevity and continuity throughout the travails of the twentieth century. This continuity could not be understood by Continental Europeans who, in the words of the anti-Market National Referendum Campaign, were 'more used to giving up their institutions than we are' (National Referendum Campaign, 1975: 5). These understanding of England's past were turned into a populist issue by the referendum of 1975. This unusual innovation in British politics was ostensibly to allow the people to decide this issue of supreme national importance. However, it was also designed to preserve the Labour Party from splitting over the issue of Europe (Hennessy, 2001: 365). In short, Prime Minister Wilson was far more concerned with Labour unity than European unity. Thus to keep the government together the electorate found itself confronted with arguments that were presented as being of such national significance that only "the people" could decide. To be sure the Anti-Marketeers failed in their objective of securing Britain's withdrawal from the EEC, losing the referendum in June 1975 by a margin of almost 2:1 (Blair, 2005: 47). Ultimately, the Anti-Marketeers' key argument that the referendum was about 'whether or not we remain free to rule ourselves in our own way' (National Referendum Campaign, 1975: 2) did not carry as much force as the government-backed campaign for a Yes vote which downplayed the threat to sovereignty and emphasized material concerns:

> Today we are even more dependent on what happens outside. Our trade, our jobs, our food, our defence cannot wholly be within our own control. That is why so much of the argument about *sovereignty* is a false one... If we came out the Community would go on taking decisions which affect us vitally – but we should have no say in them. *We would be clinging to the shadow of British sovereignty while its substance flies out of the window* [emphases in original] (Britain in Europe, 1975: 4).

And in a Britain where memories of wartime want still lingered, arguments about basic material prosperity – 'Britain, as a country which cannot feed itself, will be safer in the Community which is almost self-sufficient in food' – were persuasive (Britain in Europe, 1975: 6).

Nevertheless, these debates of the early 1970s gave political salience to a popular version of national identity linked to Parliamentary sovereignty. But there was a caveat; Parliament's sovereignty extended beyond the borders of England, a legacy of the United Kingdom's political development which helped conflate and confuse England and Britain. With England being what Arthur Aughey has termed 'an absorptive patria' (Aughey, 2007) Englishness and Britishness were still commonly merged. It would take a further intensification of anti-European attitudes, plus the strengthening of nationalisms in other parts of Britain, to begin to disentangle English nationalism from the defence of British sovereignty.

II

The Conservative Party's weakening commitment to European integration is well documented. As Andrew Geddes points out, Conservative support for Europe was predicated on a 'rather narrow trade-based idea of European integration that was unlikely to be adaptable to the ambitious programmes for political and economic integration which were launched in the 1980s' (Geddes, 2004: 192). Margaret Thatcher campaigned for a Yes vote in 1975 and although European affairs in the initial five years of her time as Prime Minister were dominated by the budget rebate, this was a difference of detail (admittedly one worth millions of pounds) rather than principle. Indeed, with the Single European Act (SEA) of 1987, it looked as if the Conservative Party was doing much to remake the European Community in Britain's new-found neo-liberal image. But the origins of what was now being dubbed "Euroscepticism" can be found

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in Thatcher's attempts to change the Conservative Party and Britain from 1975 onwards. As with Labour's referendum in 1975, domestic concerns ultimately generated important attitudes towards European integration and again a concern with British sovereignty arose in the face of the process of European integration. In asserting and defending British sovereignty, Thatcher not only hardened and deepened a split within the Conservative Party, but also deepened national divisions within the United Kingdom itself.

In her attempt to radicalize and modernize both the Conservative Party and Britain, the EEC initially seemed to be on the right side of history for Thatcher. The past – especially the Victorian era – was never a foreign country for Margaret Thatcher; in fact the past *was* Britain. But it was a past that served as an inspiration for contemporary renewal. 'The time is ripe for a new radicalism' argued Thatcher to her Party in 1977, but cautioned that her version of the past was not nostalgic, nor an attempt to turn back the clock to Britain's imperial heyday:

> On the contrary, we are trying to start the clock up again, to move forward with Europe. This is not going back to the nineteenth century, but trying to restore the economic and social momentum we had in the nineteenth century and adapt it to present needs (Thatcher, 1977a).

Negative attitudes towards European integration ultimately developed out of the "battle of ideas" over the relationship between the state and individual in Britain, which were only latterly applied to the development of the European Community. Thatcher outlined some of her early ideas – with the help of Sir Keith Joseph and the Centre for Policy Studies – in opposition during 1977. The idea that 'government should step in and replace organic and spontaneous relationships by regimentation from above' argued Thatcher, 'was alien to the Anglo-Saxon tradition'. She

continued with her historical analysis of the role of the state in European history:

> The absolute monarchs which emerged in some European countries out of the feudal order considered it their duty to regulate and initiate. If they did not encourage commerce and manufacture – they believed there would be none. They never stopped to ask themselves whether their heavy hand did not in fact inhibit spontaneous growth (Thatcher, 1977b).

All of this was designed to win over the Party and electorate to the neo-liberal ideas and, like Wilson's attitude towards Europe, was essentially driven by domestic concerns. Importantly, the notion of individual sovereignty was from this point on added to the popular defence of Parliamentary sovereignty begun in the 1970s. From May 1979 the Conservative Party sought to turn Thatcherite ideals into political and social reality. With such an emphasis on the individual, it might have seemed as if the link between a putative nationalism and the institutions of state would weaken, but this was not the case. As far back as 1977, *The Times* noted that 'Mrs Thatcher's assumptions are individualist and her individualism belongs to the English protestant Christian tradition (*The Times*, 5 July 1977). But the rhetoric of "putting the Great back in *Britain*" for a long time obscured the *Englishness* of Thatcherism – at least in England. But the distinction between Britain and the "historic nations" of the United Kingdom was always easier to make outside of its English core. In Scotland in particular, the distinction became more acute as the 1980s wore on. Andrew Marr noted that:

> What became known as Thatcherism was viscerally and intellectually opposed to the post-War Scottish consensus, characterised by the domination of the public sector and quasi-socialist tone in public life generally. With its mass public housing, high union membership and struggling heavy industries, Scotland was a lot like England, only more so. But its subtly different intellectual and political climate

made it much more resistant to the politics, if not the policies, of Thatcherism (Marr, 1995: 168).

From 1987, Scots opinion formers and the electorate began to move away from the Conservative Party. Responding to this growing disaffection, the Scottish Constitutional Convention issued a *Claim of Right,* arguing that 'we have a government which openly boasts its contempt for consensus and a constitution which allows it to demonstrate that contempt in practice' (Constitutional Steering Group, 1988: 23). So the problem was not just Thatcherism and the Conservative Party alone, but Britain too. The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly endorsed the idea that 'the United Kingdom is a political artifact put together at English insistence. If it is to continue, it must work for its living and justify its existence' (Constitutional Steering Group, 1988: 6). The Poll Tax, initiated in Scotland one year ahead of the rest of the UK, only fuelled anti-Conservatism and anti-Englishness (the two concepts being treated as almost synonymous).

Whilst the Scots were chiseling Englishness out of the Conservative rhetoric of Britishness, changes to the European Community pushed the issue of sovereignty – Parliamentary and popular – back to the centre of political debate. The logic of Thatcherism's individualistic anti-bureaucratism finally played out in the Bruges Speech of September 1988 (Thatcher, 1988). In this speech Thatcher was concerned to halt the erosion of national and individual liberty by what she saw as an encroaching, alien power. Her subsequent views on the development of the European Community (EC) reveal not only the manifest superiority of the British system of government – 'if I were an Italian, I might prefer rule from Brussels too' (Thatcher, 1995: 742) – but also the linking of the British way of life and national character with those very institutions of government, worrying the Prime Minister that 'British democracy,

parliamentary sovereignty, the common law, our traditional sense of fairness, our ability to run our own affairs in our own way' might be 'subordinated to a remote European bureaucracy, resting on very different traditions' (Thatcher, 1995: 743).

Further developments within the member states of the EC during the late 1980s, notably German re-unification, also revealed and contributed to a conflation of xenophobia and Eurosceptic ideas. Margaret Thatcher's meeting to discuss the German national character at Chequers in March 1990 and Nicholas Ridley's description of the EC as 'German racket' illustrated suspicions still resting on the experience of fighting Germany during the twentieth century (Ramsden, 2006: 405). According to Thatcher, since 1871 Germany had been veering 'unpredictably between aggression and self-doubt' and containing post-War Germany within the framework of European unity was not a way to solve "the German problem" but was only bound to exacerbate it (Thatcher, 1995: 791). The worst case scenario for Thatcher was a re-unified Germany in a strengthened EC (Volkery, 2009). But even if Thatcher was somewhat isolated in her attitudes, as the decade closed, the tendency within the Conservative Party to view the EC as a threatening alignment of former foes grew stronger. The European threat to Parliament's sovereignty appeared to threaten the very warp and weft of popular life, as the regulation and harmonization required to create the Single Market impacted on the United Kingdom and was reported in the press in greater measure.

When Thatcher was ousted as leader of the Conservatives in November 1990, the leadership challenge was precipitated by divisions over the issue of Europe. But despite the efforts of the pro-European wing of the Conservative Party to ameliorate the anti-European sentiments now commonplace in the Party, those ideas had set down firm roots. This left

the new Prime Minister, John Major, to deal with a large and vociferous Eurosceptic bloc in the Party, just at the moment when the political project of European union was being negotiated at Maastricht. And the issue of Europe continued to tear the Conservative Party apart during Major's full term as Prime Minister between 1992-7. Again the past was never very far beneath the surface of the debate on Europe, and the language was set in terms which recalled the wartime threat to Britain from Nazi Germany and its quisling allies. Paul Johnson wrote in *The Spectator* that 'what the row over the Maastricht Treaty has brought to the surface is the salient fact that Britain's real enemy is not Germany but France' where amongst the small number of politicians and *fonctionnaires* 'hatred of Britain and the individual freedom it stands for is a religion' (Johnson, 1992). In language ironically resembling those in favour of a devolved Scottish parliament, Conservative Eurosceptics spoke out against the erosion of democracy entailed by being an under-represented and poorly understood part of a centralizing political union. Thus the process of European integration heightened a sense of distinctiveness around the issue of sovereignty. Writing in *The European Journal*, the publication of the Eurosceptic European Foundation, Stephen Hill elaborated a divide between Britons and Germans in relation to sovereignty, the law and rights, attitudes which had become habits of mind:

> ...our constitution (which has evolved continuously for 781 years) is in an unwritten form and depends on duties. Our monarch is surrounded by an aura of mystery that reflects the ineffable relationship between the metaphysical Form of Sovereignty and the manifest sovereign. In Britain, we believe our liberty is protected in the belief of the Idea of Liberty itself... Germans believe the exact opposite. They accept that law is made by the president of the people and is worked out in advance and is written down. Similarly, the constitution (they are on their fifth in 125 years) must be written down. Their liberty, as they see it, is protected by their "Basic Rights" enshrined in a legal code (Hill, 1996:13).

Worse still, Eurosceptics believed that this un-English conception of political rights and freedoms was about to be imposed on England via the European Union. Ahead of the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference, leading Eurosceptics Bill Cash and Iain Duncan Smith accused Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl of advocating 'a system of authoritarian and bureaucratic European government which would extinguish the opportunity to disagree' (Cash and Duncan Smith, 1996: 39), precisely the curtailment of liberty that had been averted between 1939-45. This fear of German hegemony remained based on a view of European history: 'German fear of its past and other nations' fear of Germany is not a secure base for a balanced operation in Europe' claimed Cash and Duncan Smith, who argued that the "German Problem" had the potential to 'destabilize Europe and the world well into the next millennium' (Cash and Duncan Smith, 1996: 39).

By 1996, this attitude of seeing Anglo-European relations in terms of a particular view of the past had become so ingrained that most significant Anglo-European interactions were characterized as conflicts. This was particularly true in terms of the 1996 "Beef War" and the tabloid coverage of Euro96. The debates about European integration of the late 1980s and the 1990s had deepened the association made between the nation, the past and the defence of sovereignty. It also added a dose of English individualism to the mix, allowing for the development of criticisms of the EU as a constraint on liberty, not as in the European understanding of the past, its guarantor. Again, given the emphasis on defending *Parliament's* sovereignty from the seemingly federalist direction of European integration, it was still too easy to equate England and Britain and treat these two entities as synonymous. But although the content and contours of this nascent nationalism were emerging, the specific *Englishness* of this Euroscepticism was not yet evident to all

south of the Tweed and east of the Severn. Nevertheless, by the time of the fall of Major's Conservative government in 1997 the intellectual framework for an English nationalism based around Euroscpeticism was in place.

III

When New Labour came to power in 1997 one of their first and most significant actions was to devolve power to Scotland, Wales, London and – eventually – Northern Ireland. The only attempt to create a devolved regional assembly in England – in the North East in 2004 - was a resounding failure. But in the late 1990s, the asymmetrically devolved structure of the United Kingdom began to produce a sort of English *resentiment* nationalism of the type outlined by Liah Greenfeld (1992). Philip Resnick has referred to this type of nationalism as one characterised by "hubris" – 'an overweening pride in one's own national community' usually found in the national majorities of formerly imperial states; an attitude which he contrasts with the 'melancholy' of national minorities (Resnick, 2008: 789-90). In England the ideological content of a putative English nationalism had already formed around Euroscepticism, or at least Euroscepticism was broad enough to accommodate the opinions of those who resented bureaucratic regulation, open borders and foreign erosion of the United Kingdom's sovereignty – all understood as "national decline". The expression of that ideology might best be summed up by combining Resnick's two descriptors and concluding that English nationalism in the early twenty-first century could be described as "hubristically melancholic", where a nostalgia for the past combined with an increasingly organised and popular anti-European politics.

In January 1998, four months after the successful referenda establishing devolution in Scotland and Wales, a Private Member's Bill on the creation

of an English parliament was tabled by Teresa Gorman MP. Gorman was a prominent Eurosceptic, one of the so-called "Euro Rebels" who had lost the whip in 1995 over the issue of the UK's financial contribution to EU. Gorman might be described at this time as "reluctantly English": she had no particular desire to see the United Kingdom divided up into its national constituents, fearing that this might make the UK easier to govern from Brussels' point of view, but she felt that devolution had changed things. Gorman stated that despite calling for an English parliament, she was in fact a Unionist. But New Labour's policies had forced her hand and she demanded that the English receive 'fair and equal treatment', noting in passing that nine out of the twenty ministers in Blair's Cabinet were Scottish or Welsh or represented Scottish and Welsh constituencies (*Hansards*, 16 January 1998: col. 596). In those years immediately prior to the establishment of a parliament in Scotland and an Assembly in Wales, GK Chesterton's lines about the people of England who have not spoken yet were given a good dusting off. Indeed scholarly and popular interest in England and the English increased (see for example Jeremy Paxman's 1998 bestseller, *The English*). But whilst the Conservative and Unionist Party of Great Britain grappled with the pros and cons of establishing an English parliament after 1997, New Labour, with significant constituencies of support in Scotland, Wales and the urban centres of England, became the new Unionists, and developed notions of "inclusive" Britishness as a counterpoint to what they portrayed as "exclusive" Englishness of the Conservatives (see for example Gordon Brown in *Prospect*, April 2005). There was one sense in which the Conservatives were exclusively English since their parliamentary representation at Westminster was confined exclusively to England between 1997 and 2001. The election of 1997 initially pushed the two major parties further apart on the issue of Europe too. The Conservatives deepened their Eurosceptic stance and in their party

leaders William Hague and Iain Duncan Smith, they had two Eurosceptic champions.

At first, the contrast between the Conservatives and New Labour could not have been starker. After the long years of Conservative Euroscepticism, New Labour seemed like a breath of fresh air blowing in from the Channel. During its period of "modernization" in the 1980s and 1990s, the Labour Party dropped its 1983 manifesto pledge to withdraw from the EEC. Additionally, as the European Community under Commission President Jacques Delors began to regulate and harmonise its way towards the Single Market, its aims and objectives began to chime with a Labour Party itself reforming towards a "middle" or "third" way. Blair himself was the most "European" of all the Prime Ministers since Heath, and early on in his first term of office he addressed the *Assemblée Nationale* in French (it would be hard to image Wilson, Callaghan, Thatcher or Major being able to pronounce *rosbif* let alone conduct a whole speech in another language). During New Labour's term in office, there were attempts to contain narratives of Britain's past in a European framework, but ultimately the search for greatness emphasized the fact that past grandeur seemed unobtainable either within the context of European integration or as America's junior partner (Gamble, 2003).

Relations with European partners seemed utterly convivial at first. Speaking to Dutch dignitaries early on in his premiership, Tony Blair emphasized the long-term strength of Anglo-Dutch relations, stating that there had been amity between the nations for centuries despite a few 'naval misunderstandings' (Blair, 1998). Even though this was evidently a joke at the outset of his speech, the logic of subsuming European war and conflict to the safety of fraternal conflict also operated on large projects of commemoration – akin to Anderson's notion of the

'reassurance of fratricide' (Anderson, 1991: 197). The year 2005 marked the bicentenary of Britain's victory over two unnamed EU partners at the Misunderstanding of Trafalgar. Accordingly, Her Majesty the Queen and other dignitaries assembled at Portsmouth Harbour to see a re-enactment of the famous naval disagreement between the Reds and the Blues. In 1805, victory at Trafalgar secured the dominance of British sea power for over a century and was marked by the construction in London of a huge square commemorating the victory in the 1840s. However the 2005 commemorations at Portsmouth were one example of the dilution of Anglo-British greatness, reinforcing the notion that Britain may have won several wars, but it always seemed to be losing the peace.

Beneath the initial *bonhomie* there appeared to be a serious commitment to British cooperation within the framework of European multilateralism, as evidenced by the constructive attitude displayed by the new British government during the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 and the St Mâlo Agreement concluded between Britain and France in 1998. However, Blair was also conscious of the United Kingdom's "special relationship" with the United States and after September 2001 demonstrated the type of Atlanticist tendencies that appeared to vindicate all of General De Gaulle's fears about the United Kingdom's involvement in Europe. This pro-American attitude, combined with the United Kingdom government's refusal to commit to the euro (a significant dimension of European integration stymied by the threat of a popular referendum on the matter) appeared to signal that the United Kingdom was still unwilling – or unable – to choose between America and Europe.

It was the differing responses of the foreign ministries of Europe to the US-led invasion of Iraq which damaged Blair's European credentials the most and put Britain back into the "awkward" camp when it came to matters European. The initial invasion of 2003 pitted US, British and

Australian troops against the Iraqis: and US, British and Australian governments against those of France, Germany and Belgium. The Anglophones had support from other European countries such as Spain, Italy, Denmark and some applicant states such as Poland. It was this diplomatic dispute which led US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld, to divide Europe into "old" and "new", with Britain being in the latter camp. But there was another way of looking at this, and that was through the prism of a "core" and "non-core" Europe, with Britain definitely "non-core". This idea was given its greatest popular expression by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and his co-writers and signatories. On 31 May 2003, Habermas and his colleagues published a series of articles in various European newspapers (plus one in the US) denouncing the invasion of Iraq and thereby attempting to invoke a genuinely European public sphere, at least within "core Europe" (Habermas and Derrida, 2005). Habermas (and somewhat passively Derrida's) contention was that 'core Europe' could be defined through what he called 'the historical roots of a political profile': in other words, what was distinctive about contemporary Europe – especially in contrast to the United States – was the product of Europe's bellicose history and subsequent attempts to ensure that such calamities never took place again (Habermas and Derrida, 2005: 12). By this reading of history, the US could never understand the pacific concerns that drove European integration; by extension, Britons could not really grasp this *weltanshauung* either.

For Habermas, the anti-war demonstrations of 15 February 2003 were akin to a declaration of European independence and powerfully – if somewhat simplistically – linked the notion of "Europe" with the idea of "peace" (Habermas and Derrida, 2005: 10). This conception was strikingly similar to the ideals of the European Movement of the late 1940s. One of the European Movements' most ardent supporters was Winston Churchill. Although pro-Europeans in England tried to remind

their compatriots of Churchill's pro-European sentiments, Churchill was more commonly associated with Britain's wartime "finest hour". Indeed, by the turn of the Millennium, "the War" had become symbolic of Britain's enduring sovereignty in the face of threats – both militaristic and pacific – from continental Europe, albeit operating in the context of considerable ignorance to the actualities of the past (BBC News, 10 September 2000). This version of the past which privileged Britain's conflict with its continental neighbours was increasingly popularised through film, television, books, genealogy, commemoration and tourism (Ramsden, 2006: 363-92).

At a political level, it was still hard to discern a mass nationalism that was explicitly English (the Campaign for an English parliament and the English Constitutional Convention had limited support: Bryant, 2008: 670). At a cultural level this was less true. It was the display of the Cross of St George at international football tournaments which was the most obvious sign of this growing Englishness. This widening of support for England was not necessarily accompanied by a deepening of English national identity (see Fenton, 2007; Abell *et al*, 2007). But what the development of support for the England team did from the mid-1990s was to allow for a mass, popular expression of an identity which was exclusively and explicitly English rather than British; even if this identity was "non-political" in the sense that it was not linked to a programme of constitutional change. However there were signs that, when it came to the issue of Europe, an English nationalism that combined post-imperial melancholia with anti-European sentiment was emerging.

As noted by opinion pollsters back in 1975, most people did not vote for the UK's continuing involvement in the EEC out of any strong sense of conviction, but because they felt there was no other option available to them (Boase Massimi Pollitt Partnership. 1975). This loss of what Tom

Nairn has termed "greatness" – a fundamental aspect of Anglo-British identity which required the British state to project its power throughout the world (Nairn, 2002: 33) – informed much Euroscepticism. Raising concerns about Britain's power and freedom of action within an enlarged European Union, Quinten Davies asked 'is the whole Union to be vetoed by Latvia or Malta?' (Davies, 1996: 23). The latter idea was especially galling: Malta had been part of the British Empire and it was one thing to give them all the George Cross for wartime bravery, but another thing to let them tell Britons what to do via the institutions of the European Union.

In this sense, the European Union was itself a symbol of decline and could therefore be blamed for anything wrong with Britain, from bureaucratic waste to unregulated immigration. It was on just such a platform that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) was formed, with the party articulating its "Five Freedoms", the principle one being freedom from the European Union (UKIP, 2004). Formed in 1993 as essentially a single issue party, UKIP's main aim was to secure the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union – the ultimate defence of British sovereignty and therefore the British way of life. Two points in the creation of a political party committed to withdrawal from the EU are worth noting. The first is that UKIP's vision of the future was grounded in the past: leaving the EU would allow Britain to become 'a normal, self-governing democracy… once again' (UKIP, 1997) and that the EU would oblige Britain 'to abandon the centuries old democratic and legal systems that have been embraced by countries throughout the world' (UKIP, 2004).

Although from its name and its anti-devolutionary policies one could conclude that this was a British party, its electoral strategies and successes – particularly in the 2004 European elections – lead to a

different conclusion. UKIP concentrated its efforts in England and this is where all of its twelve seats were won. Similarly, twenty-four of the Conservative's twenty-seven seats won in that election were concentrated in England. Although it would be incorrect to argue that Eurosceptic attitudes are only found in England, the 2004 elections do suggest that Euroscepticism is a bigger vote winner in England than in other parts of the United Kingdom. It is also interesting to contrast the anti-European stance of this *de facto* English nationalist party with that of the Scottish National Party, for which European integration has become (officially at least) an opportunity rather than a threat: (Ichijo, 2004: 43-58). In this sense, European integration guaranteed and augmented Scottish sovereignty in contrast to Westminster which was seen by nationalists as a threat. Conversely, political Englishness still remained obscured in the language of the defence of British sovereignty. By being 'for British democracy, not Brussels bureaucracy' (UKIP, 1997), UKIP continued the conflation of England and Britain through the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty, its history and traditions. It could do no other. For all the ways in which the defence of Parliamentary sovereignty had been augmented by popular sovereignty, Eurosceptics in England still had to defend the UK's sovereignty against Europe whilst mounting a rear guard campaign against Scottish and Welsh secessionists; which ultimately meant a defence of Parliamentary sovereignty. But defending sovereignty could be understood in different ways. In the European elections of 2009, the British National Party (BNP) also won two seats in England. BNP leader Nick Griffin articulated a defensive English nationalism when he claimed that his party was not racist, adding that

> There's a huge amount of racism in this country; overwhelmingly it is
> directed towards the indigenous British majority, which is one reason
> we've done so well in these elections... The Labour Party, the Lib Dems
> and the Tories, by leaving the door to Britain open, have forced people to

turn to a party which speaks openly about the problem of immigration (BBC, 2009).

In Powellite ways, the BNP merged anti-Europeanism and anti-immigration in defence of sovereignty. The structural nature of the United Kingdom's integration into the European Union forced English populists within the UKIP and the BNP to speak the language of Britishness. It is thus the politics of sovereignty surrounding debates about European integration which help explain the continuing conflation of "England" and "Britain" amongst groups which we might otherwise expect to articulate contemporary English nationalism.

How this might play out in British politics remains to be seen. The Conservative Party has advocated referenda on two Europeans issues in the last decade: the euro and the Lisbon Treaty. This invocation of popular sovereignty is unusual for a party so committed to defending Parliamentary sovereignty. But in campaigning for a No vote the Conservative Party will be able to draw on a significant stream of English popular nationalism and one where the nostalgic sentiment of September 2009 which saw Vera Lynn top the charts might become an important political force with the ability to impact on the process of European integration in very significant ways.

Conclusion

The links between Euroscepticism and English nationalism are especially significant for several reasons. The first is that debates about the United Kingdom's accession to the EEC and its continuing level of involvement in the process of European integration focus attention on the role of sovereignty – particularly Parliamentary sovereignty – as a central element in English nationalism. Furthermore, the somewhat esoteric doctrines, ideas and conventions surrounding Parliamentary sovereignty

have been given a popular dimension through the Eurosceptic promotion of referenda on this issue, thus beginning the process whereby Parliamentary sovereignty was merged with – and to some extent even superseded by – popular sovereignty. Added to this during the 1980s was the notion of the sovereignty of individual as an economic being seeking freedom in the face of state bureaucracy. And although Euroscepticism can demonstrate support throughout the United Kingdom, the differing strategies and polices of nationalist parties towards Europe mean that Euroscepticism finds its most comfortable home in England. Additionally understandings of the past and the popular defence of Parliament's sovereignty feed into each other and reinforce each other. The result is that Euroscpeticism is in all but name English nationalism, but it is an English nationalism which still characteristically speaks the language of Britishness.

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