



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

John Bull Turns Johnny Reb

by Thomas Fleming

Since the 1940's, Americans have been slowly introduced to the idea that national sovereignty is a dangerously outmoded concept that must give place to a broader and more generous understanding of our place in the world: national defense became bound up with the principle of collective security; national welfare tied to foreign markets (and foreign aid); and the narrow and selfish principle embodied in the slogan "Don't Tread on Me" was replaced with a series of ever more vague appeals to our common European identity (Lend Lease, the Marshall Plan), our commitment to democratic progress (Korea, Vietnam), our faith in the brotherhood of man. We are the children, we are the world.

But as we extend our identity around the world, our sense of self inevitably thins out. The proliferation of acronyms is a dead giveaway. Like a cheap Hollywood cap job, everyday reality is being rotted out at the core and coated on the surface with a hard and lifeless abstraction. Once upon a time we were Virginians or Iowans, Americans living in a union known as the United States; now the best we can do is to boast of being "born in the USA" (no periods), a set of letters that suggests nothing more concrete than the IRS or MTV, and there may be little else to our common Americanness than can be found on a tax return or a Michael Jackson video.

Increasingly our eponymous acronyms are international, rather than national, and whatever the particular merits of the activities and policies spelled out by GATT, NAFTA, NATO, UN, no honest man can doubt that they represent a transfer, not merely of authority but of identity, from the nation to something supranational. This is no merely American phenomenon. All the nations of the West are being drained of their nationhood, but in some of them, at least, there are significant reactions, which may presage a wider counterrevolu-

tion against the international order that has seemed, for so long, the inevitable destination of every political road—the conclusion of every war, the object of every peace.

America has always been a province of Europe, and like most provincials we usually are a generation or so behind the capitals in the way we live and think and work. This has its good side; in the early 19th century, while the rest of the world was kicking over the traces and yelling for the rights of man, the United States was stuck in its Whig republican rut; and in the 20th century, Franklin Roosevelt was only a pale imitation of the dictators he aped and admired, Mussolini and Stalin. Being conservative is a good idea so long as there is something worth conserving, but once the forest has been burnt down, conservation in its literal sense is counterproductive. At some point it is time to clean up and replant.

So-called conservatives today are like the crazy old ladies who refuse to leave a condemned building, even as the wrecking ball is crashing into their apartments. Still fighting the Cold War, they call for defense buildups and an aggressive foreign policy; they think that ours is an imperial nation simply because we have nuclear weapons and a population of 250 million consumers, and the readers of the *Wall Street Journal* cannot disabuse themselves of the idea that in every international *chicane*, it will be Americans calling the shots. The French, who have actually been an imperial people, seem to be, by fits and starts, withdrawing into nationalism; the Germans are internationalists, of course, because they are—for the third time this century—rebuilding their empire; but it is in the United Kingdom where the contest between nationalism and supranationalism seems to have the greatest relevance for the United States.

I say the United Kingdom, rather than England or Britain,

because the UK is the remnant of the old empire. It is, as one Conservative journalist suggested to me, "the empire of the English over the Celts," by which he meant the Scots, the Welsh, and the Irish. This fact—so rarely mentioned in England—turns British politics upside down: it explains, for example, why Scots nationalists are warmly attached to European Union, and why English Tory nationalists oppose both European Union and any plan that would give the Scots some control over their own affairs.

Some Tory nationalists see Eurofederalism as a kind of plot to subvert the loyalties of England's Celtic subjects. Their fears were exacerbated when the German Christian Democrats put out a paper in 1994, arguing that no single nation should be able to block further European integration and describing sovereignty as now an "empty shell." More ominously, the Germans called for a "quasi-constitutional document" to "set out the division of powers between the union, the nation states and the regions." Norman Tebbit, at a Bournemouth rally (on October 11, 1994), described the German proposal as a plan to break the British nation into German-style *Länder*: "Now your breath may be taken away by that touch of arrogance of Germans seeking to define the relationship between Westminster and Edinburgh or Belfast and Cardiff—perhaps even Newcastle or Birmingham." In a telephone interview, Ferdinand Mount (the editor of the TLS) pleasantly observed that "the Norman Tebbits are the last reactionaries, and history will wash quietly over them."

American conservatives of nearly every stripe are used to thinking of "federalism" as, at least in principle, a good thing, and it seems paradoxical that in the Tory nationalist lexicon, federalism and devolution are synonyms for treason, while devolution has become the rallying cry for the revived Labour Party under Tony Blair. Short of a miracle—it is not every day that the English get an invitation to go headhunting for Argentines—it will be Mr. Blair and not Mr. Major who will decide the question of Britain's future in the European Community, and it is this sense of impending disaster that has egged on John Major's nationalist critics within his own party.

The case against Europe is complex. For some it is little more than John Bull's sentimental reaction against the loss of his identity, and hardly distinguishable from Middle American paranoia over the United Nations. More typically, the arguments are pragmatic and economic. The European Union has proved to be a costly bureaucracy, whose commercial and agricultural regulations seem to favor every state but England. Mr. Mount, who is decidedly pro-Europe, concedes that the fear of the new bureaucracy is justified up to a point, especially if the extreme Eurofederalists were to have their way. But, he adds, "What would unite three-fourths of the Conservatives—and everyone—is if European Union stopped here, where it is. There is, however, fear of going on to create a full-scale federation of the American type."

The opposition does not entirely agree on the relative benignity of the Union as it is today. Christopher Booker and Richard North had been writing a series of articles in the London *Telegraph*, revealing the criminal follies of the Brussels bureaucrats, until the paper's editors balked on a column about cattle disease. Historically, stringent British controls have guaranteed a disease-free cattle population in Britain. However, the Common Market resulted in the abandonment of some controls, since movement of animals between EC countries is now unrestricted, so long as they have a veterinarian's certificate say-

ing they are healthy. One prize-winning breeder took delivery of supposedly German but probably East European cows that not only came down with cattle AIDS but also infected other cows. Unable to sell his milk, the farmer now collects £5,500 a month. To some, the case illustrates the stupidity of European regulations; to others it is the greedy farmer who is at fault; but what strikes me as really ominous is the evil synergism between supranational regulation and the national government's responsibility for welfare. Between Brussels and London, bureaucrats succeeded in introducing a disease and gouging the taxpayers.

Immigration has been not emphasized by Euroskeptics, but it represents a more serious threat than cattle diseases. Charles Wardle, the immigration minister, resigned over the government's failure to maintain controls. According to official figures, in the five years up to 1993, 264,500 immigrants settled in the UK; but Peter Tompkins, head of immigration service for ten years, says the figure is more like 625,000.

The immigration crisis is complicated by European Union, which aims at a Europe without frontiers. Once a North African arrives illegally in Italy or Spain, it is fairly easy for him to go to France or Britain. There is already a problem of immigrants using false EC identity cards—particularly Algerian gangs involved in massive welfare fraud. If, as has been threatened, Brussels forces the United Kingdom to give up passport checks, Britain—as Wardle says—"would be powerless to stop a flood of immigrants entering the country."

Uncontrolled borders always make the work of the police more difficult, and in Britain (as in the United States) the knee-jerk response is not to stop the criminal immigrants but to threaten the liberty of the citizens. The frontierless zone introduced under the Single European Act (1986) and developed under Maastricht makes it easier for criminals to enter the UK. The police, who are now responsible for apprehending fugitives identified at ports and airports, will have to trace them and their money throughout the country. Not coincidentally, it was announced in 1994 that London police would carry Smith & Wesson .38's, while in the city bankers and other financial agents are now required to disclose their clients' financial dealings over £11,600. British police are increasingly required to collaborate with other countries of the EU where, as Charlotte Horsfield writes in *The European Journal* (September/October 1994), the police are not so tender in their treatment of civil liberties. Inevitably, she suggests, "the state authorities will depend more and more upon the police forces and other local agencies to monitor and control the activities of the ordinary citizen of its expanding empire."

The leading "Euroskeptics" are the whipless members, that is, Conservatives from whom the whip was withdrawn when they refused to vote as they were told. If there can be a leader in a group of mavericks, that title belongs to Bill Cash, whipless MP and founder of the European Foundation, which publishes *The European Journal*, an invaluable source of information and opinion on both European Union and the British response (61 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HZ). His speeches are hard-edged and to the point: "Let us say the unspoken word: 'We will not be subjected to a German Europe.'"

Before meeting Mr. Cash in April, I had imagined the sort of two-dimensional speech-reader who occupies all positions of power in both American political parties, but he turned out to be disappointingly likable: determined in his opinions but

more than willing to listen to other points of view—a good listener and an even better questioner. There is something almost North American in his frankness, and I was not surprised to learn that he admired Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich. Like so many American conservatives, Mr. Cash is interested in questions of money, and his opposition to a single currency stems as much from practical concerns as it does from the symbolic humiliation implied by a surrender of national currency. “No nation Tories”—as he calls conservative MPs committed to single currency—do not appear to be disturbed by his allegation that monetary union would mean an irrevocable transfer of £36 billion from the Bank of England to the European Central Bank, any more than our own Republicans were disturbed by the Mexican bailout. Cash says he is in favor of Britain remaining in the EC, but not if it proves “incompatible with our national interests.”

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For some Englishmen, at least, the choice is not between British sovereignty and European Union so much as it is a conflict between their dislike of Frogs and Dagoes and their fear of Yankees. John Gray, who has now explicitly aligned himself with Labour, apparently thinks that if European monetary union were subject to a referendum, it would pass, not so much on its own merits as that it could be made a referendum on England's continued participation in the EC. Some people are afraid of being isolated from the great events taking place on the continent, while others object to the Conservative Party's Atlanticism as a continuing invitation to increased domination by the United States.

Bill Cash suggests (in the May 1995 *European Journal*) that Britain is slowly being squeezed out of the transatlantic equation during a period when the relationship with the United States has become ever more important and as Europe moves in the direction of federal union, but if the choice is whether Britain is to be part of Europe or a province of the United States, there are many good reasons for picking Europe. This apparently simple dichotomy, however, is complicated by the enthusiasm for European Union expressed by so many American economic and political leaders. Last year in Bonn, President Clinton declared: “The United States does strongly support the movement towards a more united Europe, and un-

derstands that Germany's leadership towards a truly united Europe is critical.” Some in Britain think Clinton has fallen under the evil spell of Helmut Kohl, but like all transnational elites the American ruling class is strongly committed to an international economic and political order of which the European Union represents a small but nonetheless significant part. Is it an accident that Jean Monnet, the godfather of European Union, was a French businessman with very close ties with American tycoons? I am not suggesting that the advocates of European Union are mere shills of American business—although many of them may be just that—but, what is worse, that national borders and nation-states themselves are seen as an obstacle to the achievement of the goal for which all the Western elites are striving: a world of peaceful consumers run by transnational business leaders. Britain has faced this problem before. For centuries her royal family and leading aristocratic houses were closely allied to their counterparts on the continent. While these connections might occasionally be useful in preventing or concluding hostilities, the interests of the British nation and their international rulers did not always coincide. The divergence of interest was dramatically obvious in the reign of William and Mary, when the Dutch king used his British subjects as cannon fodder in his wars against Louis XIV, and his Hanoverian successors repeatedly showed more concern for their German principality than their island kingdom. Once the members of the royal family began marrying within the realm, it was clear that their power had become negligible, but Britain's rulers today have more in common with their partners and rivals abroad than with their fellow subjects.

Is there still a British “nation” in any sense that is richer than our own Disney-America? If food is a test of nationality, the island might just as well be attached to the continent—or rather to the subcontinent, since Indian food predominates. Only tourist restaurants advertise English cooking—or rather genuine English *fayre*—the rest are Italian or Indian or Lebanese. One Sunday, I go off to the National Gallery—the Bronzinos are good, but the Bellinis and Giorgiones seem over-restored. In Piccadilly Circus, I am held up by a Kurdish demonstration. No one seems to contest the right of Kurds to stage their protests in London, rather than Ankara or Baghdad (and no one recalls the Kurds' role in the Armenian genocide).

Kurdish demonstrations, Lebanese restaurants, Italian art—I might as well be in New York or Chicago. I think that it is this fear, that there really will not be an England some day, that lies behind the largely pragmatic criticisms of European union. Even the most pro-American of John Major's critics are aware of it; even his mentor, Lady Thatcher, belatedly began to drag her high heels on the question, and the Bruges Group takes its name from an anti-European speech she delivered in that city. John Major's response to the Euroskeptics' offensive was to resign as Conservative Party leader and stand for reelection. His opponent, John Redwood, was never taken very seriously, although Margaret Thatcher—preserving a rather vengeful neutrality—described the former Welsh Secretary as a “heavyweight person.” While Mr. Redwood based his challenge on the charge that the Prime Minister had “jeopardized the whole position [i.e., of the Tories] by resigning the leadership,” his candidacy was supported by Norman Lamont and other Euroskeptics whose opposition to European Union had driven Mr. Major to this desperate gambit. In the event Mr. Major survived the threat without substantially enhancing his stature or

unifying the party.

"A conservative government is an organized hypocrisy." Disraeli's definition was directed originally against Sir Robert Peel's repeal of the Corn Laws. A few weeks earlier he had remarked that Peel had "caught the Whigs bathing, and walked away with their clothes," meaning that Sir Robert was determined to hold power at the expense of his party's principles, just as Disraeli was to do later, when he reformed the franchise; as Churchill and Macmillan and Heath were to do, when they allowed Britain to turn socialist; and as Ronald Reagan and George Bush were to do in abandoning the white middle class.

Peel's "accomplishment" was a self-inflicted wound on a party whose great principles were its defense of the Crown, the church, and the land. One by one the Tories, in becoming "conservative," abandoned their principles (although I discover with pleasure that Charles Moore, a Catholic convert, opposes disestablishment on good Tory grounds). Over the years the Conservatives stole the clothes of the Whigs, the imperialists, the Liberals, and the socialists. In returning the party to its liberal phase, Mrs. Thatcher did her party and her country a great service, but classical liberalism, perhaps even more than socialism, is an internationalist ideology, and the Tories—if they are to be anything—must be the national party, the party that stands for the real England, the historic England, the England

for its own sake. Even if European Union were the best thing for everyone in the world, it should not be the achievement of a Tory government.

Unwilling as I am to admit it, Mr. Major has many fine points. He has a shrewd mind, and he is willing to stick to his guns, but—speaking with the recklessness of an outsider who does not have a right to an opinion—I really hope that his government falls and leaves it to Mr. Blair to tie the knot with Europe. The Conservatives have grown too fat in their years of plenty, and it will be a good thing for them to go out into the wilderness of opposition. (American conservatives, too, need to be disciplined by at least four more years of Democratic misrule until they can learn not to get in bed with the gentiles.) If the Conservative Party is to belong to Mr. Major and Mr. Heseltine, then it is of no more use to Britain than the Republican Party is to the United States.

Whether any of my English friends will agree with me, I do not know, but the conservative embrace of Europe has done nothing to endear the party to the voters. While I was there in the spring, the Tories lost control of all the local councils in Scotland. Hearing that I am on my way to Scotland, Bill Cash jokes over dinner: "Tell me if you see any conservatives in Scotland." I did, and he told me he was voting for the Scottish National Party, but that is another story. c

Lie Down and Die

by Peter Russell

I never visited my Father's grave,
I never visited my Mother's.
I thought it better (time's to save)—
And left it to the others.

Well, you may say that I was right—
What's in a dusty grave
But clay-stopped ears, eyes without sight
Back to the soil they gave?

The putrid flesh, the dried out bone,
Features once loved, but not enough;
Loveless, unloved and housed alone
The soul grows taciturn and gruff.

Larval appearances, forgotten voice,
Stage entrances, oneiric scenes—
Life goes on, a buzzing noise,
A crass idolatry of means

World without end, *in saeculorum*
Saecula,—life without ends,
Ask of the sacred quorum,—
What ends? And what amends?

Amens, Amens, Amens!