The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Solidarity Federation
NationStates
Summer 1998

Retrieved on April 8, 2005 from web.archive.org
Published in *Direct Action* #7 — Summer 1998.

**theanarchistlibrary.org**

# NationStates

Solidarity Federation

Summer 1998

***Nationalism, in any form, is totally incompatible with anarcho-syndicalism.***

***As is often stated, national boundaries are flukes of history and geography.***

***More specifically, they are the results of political machinations by robber barons throughout the last millennium or so, who use and abuse ordinary people in their search for glory, power and wealth.***

The nation can be seen as the gangster's turf, an area marked by bloody skirmishes, in which the real beneficiaries rarely take part. There are some obvious exceptions to this, notably in those areas of the world where the European rulers deemed it their right of conquest to divvy up the land as they saw fit. How many boundaries between two areas? Exactly the same as the number of people you ask to draw them. An appeal to the nation is an appeal to an abstract idea that is used to cover up the fact that we are expected to support one (our) ruling oppressor over another.

The call to nationalism is a call to create an 'other' that is not 'one of us' based on the dictates of history and political expediency of the leaders. Nationalism is not about a cultural identity, it is not

about a sense of place, or of a nostalgia for home — though these will all be used in attempts to develop these 'others' (outsiders, foreigners, inferiors..).

If being an anarcho-syndicalist is about anything, it is about recognising the humanity of everyone. You cannot create a libertarian communist society in one country surrounded by other systems and accept that as a stable situation. To have borders, to have foreigners that are defined by their situation in another geopolitical unit is to define ourselves by what we are not and to define them by what they are not. They are not 'us'; they are 'other' — this denies people the right to define themselves. Nationalism is the wholesale degradation of people by the defining of them as 'other'; as inferior.

On what basis is this definition of 'foreign' drawn up? I will seek to address this through the use of an example close to home, that of Welsh Nationalism. For many people, Welsh Nationalism is an almost benign form of opposition to the Westminster Government and, as such, it has proved attractive to socialists and libertarians. Now, it would be wrong to claim that many of those who are skirting around the rim of Welsh Nationalism are actively hostile to non-Welsh, I would just maintain that they are mistaken in what they are doing. What does it mean to be Welsh? How do they define what it is to be Welsh? Is someone who moves from England to Wales, who lives there, works there and makes their life there not as affected by decisions of the Westminster Parliament which affect the 'Welsh'? If not, what is the position of the immigrant from the West Indies, from the Indian sub-continent? I know the answer of the BNP. Here, I am not talking about state decisions which seek to suppress the culture of colonised regions/states/continents. Such ethnic cleansing, whoever advocates it and on whatever grounds or level, is wrong.

So it follows, obviously, any attempts to suppress the speaking of the Welsh language should be opposed, but I am not here concerned about the long term survival of the Welsh culture and lan-

guage other than its part in an evolving and developing society. If languages and cultures develop, it is up to those who are interested in them and who practise them to keep them relevant and alive. As a libertarian, it would be wrong to tell someone that in order to live in England they must speak English, as it would for an anarcho-syndicalist in Wales to insist that someone living in Wales speaks Welsh. Again, it is self-evident that if you move to an area where the language is different, it makes sense to learn the one spoken there if possible; it does greatly aid communication.

Many of the social issues which are addressed by these groups which seek a friendly nationalism, are not issues of nationalism at all. The issues of holiday homes is a problem in the Lake District, in Cornwall, in areas of the Yorkshire Dales, and I am sure elsewhere as well. It is not the imposition of the English *per se*, but of a certain class of wealthy middle-class, seeking an improvement in their already privileged life-style at the expense of the housing possibilities of those who live in the area. The problems of the imposition of rule from an unaccountable Government based in Westminster is true throughout the UK. To make it a view of English Government *vs.* Welsh people is to play with very dangerous ideas. The unscrupulous politician can stir up hatred based on semi-fabled stories from hundreds of years ago in an attempt to grasp power — all they need is the right environment. It serves those who would call themselves socialist and libertarians badly to contribute to this environment.

At a slight tangent, I would like to address the issue of xenophobia. The excuse often given for xenophobes is that evolutionary biology is part of our basic make up. The idea is that it is common in higher apes to be actively and pro-actively hostile to other troops of apes. It has been shown that chimpanzees form raiding parties to attack individuals from neighbouring groups. Similar things are known in other primates, including baboons, and other species throughout nature. The comparison has been drawn to with earlier human societies, where inter-group rivalry was characterised

by ongoing low level warfare, with occasional intensifications of the fighting.

Those who have something to gain use this as an excuse for the necessity of the nation state. This denies one important fact; that we have the capacity to learn, to consider and to make decisions based on our understanding, not only of our experience, but of the experience of others; both those we know and those throughout history. We have the ability to understand that we are no longer living in small groups, primarily of extended families, with a large amount of common genetic material. We have moved beyond the need for base genetic propagation. We have developed other things which we may wish to propagate; ideas, such as solidarity, mutual aid and compassion.

Fear of the unknown may well be part of the human make up; it would seem sensible in this dangerous world. I have no problem with accepting this, in fact I see it as a further reason for the importance of the ideas. The fact that we may once have been xenophobic apes means we have to work all the harder to develop our ideas in overcoming any lingering tendencies in this direction.

Indeed, these xenophobic apes and early humans also practised a great deal more in terms of co-operation. If you want to live in a society where you are not the one on the receiving end of xenophobic aggression, work with the part of human nature that seeks solidarity and co-operation, the part that is still relevant today — not with the part that seeks to form fights over patches of earth.

**If nothing else, getting all heated over a patch of mud usually means some cozy fat bastards are about to send you and your children to work or to war for their profit.**

On a final point, we do live in a world where states exist, and where differing governments interpret their job of control in different ways. It is sensible to take these states into account when seeking to defend people and promote the ideas of libertarian communism. But it seems to me not only dangerous, but patently absurd, to pretend that nationalistic rhetoric, 'however camouflaged',



can ever be beneficial or progressive. When you use the Nationalistic argument, you choose to set out to identify and to denigrate the 'foreign', the 'other'. And when that happens, it is usually the powerful who get the last say over who the 'others' really are.