

## JULY FLY

### The double face of nationalism

(From: European Review, 1932)

It is a fact that the (First) World War not only exhausted the process of developing nationalisms inside and outside of Europe, but actually brought it to its acute phase. Therefore, the desire to grasp the meaning of this event has its full justification.

What is the significance of today's nationalism in the context of a philosophy of culture? We are convinced that this question requires the following solution: *In modern nationalism there are two conceptually separate, even opposite, but often combined possibilities, one of which can be assessed as a form of degeneration and regression, while the other is a path to higher values and the prelude to rebirth represents.*

In the following essay, an attempt will be made to explain this indication and all its implications. Phenomena like nationalism can only be interpreted within the larger framework of an overall historical picture based on critical value judgments.

What is striking in such a picture is the gradual descent of political power from level to level within that hierarchy of values, within the framework of which the qualitative differentiation of human possibilities was completed in ancient cultures. This process can be traced from the threshold of "historical" time to our day. It has its special meaning in the political history of the West. It is *caste regression* as first described in our book Pagan Imperialism. We have found them dealt with in more detail in the previously unpublished statements of the Italian MP V. Vezzani. Finally, René Guénon gave a systematic and definitive form to these ideas in his work: "Autorité spiritual et pouvoir temporel" (Paris, 1929).

As is well known, even the oldest traditions speak of a similarity in meaning between the political and the human organism. In every higher organic form of appearance, however, there are *four* different functions in a hierarchical relationship : at the lower limit the still undifferentiated, dull life forces - above this already rise the organic exchange functions, which in turn lead to the *will* that moves and guides the entire body in space; Above all stands the power of the intellect and freedom, as it were as the center and

Light of the whole organism.

Traditions that saw the state as a higher, spiritualized being instead of an inevitable accident demanded a similar separation and hierarchical gradation into estates and castes. The series: formless vitality, organic exchange function, will and spirit is reflected in the four traditional castes of *servants* or *workers*, independent *farmers*, *craftsmen* and *traders*, *warriors* and the bearers of *royal-priestly power*. One caste was ranked above the other: the mass man was under the control and domination of those who knew how to utilize natural and economic sources in production, transport and trade. These latter, in turn, led by the authority of the warrior nobility, rallied around the one who, in his mastered perfection, stood as it were a witness to a possibility that led beyond the human.

The ancient world of the Orient (Iran, India, Egypt) and the Far East knew such a type of social organization, which Greece and Rome also approached to some extent. In the political teachings of Plato and Aristotle, a related spirit was revealed, which finally flared up for the last time in the ecclesiastical and knightly world of the Middle Ages.

It is important to note that such an organization met a *qualitative* criterion and bears witness to the development of higher forms of interest and personality. In the ancient Orient, the higher castes were called those of the "born again" (Dwijas), they formed a spiritual elite. The status of warrior and nobility not only had a political meaning, but also that of a kind of sacred status, which was also the case in medieval chivalry. Any activity based on work, industry, administration of common property, and the like, was relegated to the two *lower* castes, equal to those functions which serve the bodily needs of life in the human organism.

Thus the hierarchy of the four castes reflected the gradual ascent of individuality through devotion to higher forms of action than those of immediate life alone. In contrast to the lowest caste, the featureless collective that wants nothing but "to live", the second caste - that of the organizers of work and wealth - already represented the beginning of a higher type, a "person". From the third estate, the heroism of the warrior caste, the ethos of the aristocracy, arises the foreboding of a "more-than-life", of a being that gives itself its own law, beyond the natural, instinctive, collectivistic and utilitarian motives. When ascetic, king and priest merge into a personal union in the original concept of the *leader*, the universal and almost *supernatural* personality is fulfilled in it, the perfect expression of what in everyday people does not find the strength to break away from the world of the accidental and "to be "yourself". To the extent that the rulers, the perfect individuals, formed the axis of the whole social organism, this organism was, as it were, a body governed by the spirit; temporal power and spiritual authority were one; the hierarchy was *legitimate* in

unconditional sense of the word.

So much for the scheme that serves us as a starting point, whose ideal-typical value is of course independent of its time and space-related manifestations, which can more or less reflect its meaning. On such a basis, however, the continuing "decay" of power in the historical age becomes a terrible fact. The era of the "holy kings" - figures of rulers and priests alike - is already on the threshold of "mythical" times.

The peaks of power are removed. From its highest representatives, violence descends to the next lowest level - that of the *warrior caste*. What remains is the profane ruler type of a monarch as military leader, judge and legislator.

Second stage of decline: the great European monarchies perish. The aristocrats degenerate. The attempt by the Holy Roman Empire fails. Through revolutions (England and France) and constitutions, the kings become powerless remnants in the face of the "will of the people". In the realm of parliamentary, republican, and bourgeois democracies, the formation of capitalist oligarchies marks the new fatal step in which political power descends from the second to the *third* caste, that of the *merchant*.

The crisis in bourgeois society, the rise of the "proletariat", the despotism of the masses constituting themselves into a purely collective, economic and international unity announce the approaching end. Power comes to the *last* caste: those who go without name and face. Matter, metal and number become standard. The way of life of the servants - the work - becomes a religion. The earth no longer knows heaven. Unconditional rule of the impersonal and mechanical.

Comparatively: someone can no longer endure the tension of the spirit (sacred kingship): not even that of the will – the force that moves his body (warrior state): he lets himself sink. But then he rises again magnetically, body without soul, under the influence of *alien* forces emanating from the unconscious layers of bare vitality: indignation of the last estate, demonry of the collective.

It's time to free yourself from the illusionary myth of progress and to open your eyes to reality. It is time to recognize the dreadful fate of mental derangement that weighs upon the West: a fate whose final fruits are ripening today.

At the heart of the process of involution presented is the shift in standpoint from the individual to the collective, in the closest connection with the indicated regression of that vocation, which secured the rightful hierarchical authority of the higher castes, to the professional interests of the lower castes.

Man is free only in an unconditional action. Such is the case in both

Symbols of pure action (heroism) and pure knowledge (asceticism and contemplation), which can attain their full validity through an aristocratically oriented rule. Through them, the two upper castes opened up ways for man to participate in that order of the "supermundane" in which alone he can belong to himself and grasp the essential and universal value of personality. If these higher interests are destroyed in the exclusive concentration on practical and temporal goals, or if they are dissolved in economic aspirations and needs peculiar to the lower classes, then man disintegrates and decentralizes himself, he gives himself powers that snatch him and himself away surrender to the irrational and pre-personal energies of collective life. Rising above those powers used to be the aim and purpose of every truly higher culture.

Thus, in recent social forms, the collective has become increasingly predominant, almost going so far as to call to life the *totemism* of primitive communities. Concepts such as humanity, society, party, nation or race today bear the stamp of a mystical personality; they demand devotion and unconditional submission from the individual who is a part of them.

At the same time, hatred is sown in the name of "freedom" against all superior and ruling personalities, who alone may claim a justified and sacred right of subjection and obedience on the part of individuals. This group tyranny is not limited to the political and social expressions of the individual: it usurps moral and intellectual rights; Culture and spirit should cease to be objective modes of activity and ways of enhancing humanity, in order to become dependent organs of the world-bound collective being. A morality is loudly proclaimed which sees the meaning and value of the spirit solely in the service of the body. That man, before he feels his personality value, his ego, should experience himself as a social group, party or nation - that is one of the special and significant demands of the last ideological revolution movements: with this the same relationship returns in which the primitive once had to the *totem* of tribe and clan.

The reawakening of the Russian people, in the belief of Bolshevism in its prophetic-universal mission, confirms the meaning of that relapse into primitive social conditions, which can already be observed in various forms.

The Russian revolution is rightly referred to as the final departure of a barbaric Asian race against the tsar's 200-year attempts to civilize Russia on the European model. And equally correct is the view that Bolshevism consequently spontaneously flows together with all the elements of decomposition in European society today. Bolshevism is nothing other than a primitive Slavic folk spirit reviving in a modern form: this traditionless people in its social mysticism, the fusion of spirituality and sensuality, the predominance of pathos over ethos, the impulsive over the intellectual, points back to pre-personal formlessness and communist promiscuity, such as is peculiar to primitive people. The tremors of the (First) World War set these elements free again: for the still healthy members of Europe

terrible germs of internal decomposition. The "culture" of the Soviets proclaims the "age of the proletariat", dedicated to this goal the annihilation of personality and freedom, which is considered "leprosy", "poison of bourgeois society" and "beginning of all evil". The Soviets not only demand the abolition of private property, they demand, as is well known, the abolition of all free and independent thought and all "motives directed toward the supernatural or toward any interests alien to the working class" (Lenin); their goal is the rise of the "all-powerful mass-man", who should live alone and give shape to every way of life and thought of the individual. What is modern about Bolshevism is only its "method": Mechanization and rationalization are the most excellent means of realizing the "mass man" already mystically pre-existing in the Slavic soul in a universal people's rule built on a purely economic basis.

Thus the culture of the Soviets consciously approaches another race that also assumes a universal mission of world renewal and the claim to have the last word on culture: the American race.

In America the regression process does not betray the primal force of a people persisting in a cultureless state. Rather, at work here is the pitiless law whereby all human beings, as soon as they have turned from the form of the purely spiritual to the desire for the things of the day, inevitably cease to belong to themselves and become part of that irrational collective being which they no longer are to be able to control. The beatification of the world, the laicization of the sacred, to which the Protestant heresy opened the gates, brought America to its present condition. In actually achieving the European ideal of world dominance, the United States has—perhaps unconsciously—reimagined power, health, activity, and personality entirely in practical and physical terms, thereby creating a far more dangerous form of barbarism. Here the ascetic is regarded as a loafer and parasite, as a "superfluous member of human productive society"; the warrior is considered to be dangerous and exaggerated. The humanitarian-pacifist precautions should make it their business to abolish this class in order to replace it with boxers, detectives and cowboys.

On the other hand, the "working, productive person" is the perfect type, "spiritual fighter" and competition winner; no kind of activity, not even that of the mind, has any validity unless it appears under the name of "productive work" and is in the "service of society". This view shows irrefutably that such a "culture" culminates in the type of the *last class known* from antiquity – that of the *work slaves*. Here, too, man, having renounced his spiritual personality, ceases to have any meaning, unless within the framework of those "duties" imposed on him by the collective community driven forward by the fever of performance, the urge to move and realize.

But such "duties" – as in the latest ideologies – can only claim moral, even religious validity illegally; the obvious goal is the standardization of the soul itself and its dissolution into a flattened generality and into the all-dominating economic-mechanical. In the process, even the ability to recognize the degree of this decay is extinguished.

These are the forms in which the circle closes, the decline completes. Russia and America are two equal examples, two identical faces of the same thing. From the formerly so obvious resemblance to the human organism, in the states evolving in the splendor and authority of the higher castes, the social body has now sunk to the type of subhuman torso, advent of the faceless animal.

We are thus given all the elements to approach the problem in all seriousness: *what is the true meaning of nationalism in the modern world?*

After all that has been said, the following type of a clearly recognizable nationalism emerges: it is that state which immediately precedes the international formation of an economic-proletarian collectivism. What is important in this nationalism is not so much the development of a *special* national consciousness, but rather the fact that the "nation" has become a person, an independent being. The inability to transcend those ties of soil and blood that concern only the natural side of man is elevated to an ethical value. It is the impossibility of the individual finding meaning outside of the collectivity and given traditions. The mere fact of being national lends all appearances the aureole of mystical invulnerability, power that demands and guarantees unconditional respect. This ethnic-infra-intellectual element not only does not ascribe any authority to higher principles, but rather submits to them; first is the nation - then in subordination come reality, truth, and culture.

However, certain nationalist groups go even further: they reject all impartial and factual judgment as abstract; demand that one should not disregard national tradition and political interests in questions of reality, truth and culture. Hence they also speak of "our" scientific, philosophical and even religious tradition and express a preconceived contempt, or at least indifferent reticence, towards anything that is not "of us", that is "not necessarily beneficial to the nation".

(When we speak of "tradition" in the negative sense, we are only referring to that view of it that has no intellectual – i.e. trans-ethnic – element in it. But in this case - to use *Chesterton*'s phrase - "tradition" means just that Extension of the democratic majority right over the historical: the totemic right of the dead stands above the living, a right based on the fact of being dead of the same race.)

Just as no higher activity is allowed to flourish freely and create an existence above ethnic requirements, so within the framework of such nationalism there is no room and no appreciation for a higher personality, except as an "exponent" of the nation. Born in the age of revolutions, in the collapse of aristocratic-feudal systems of government, this nationalism therefore expresses the purest "mass spirit" - it is a variant of democratic intolerance, an intolerance directed against everyone

leader who is not exclusively a "servant of the fatherland" and an organ of the "will of the people" and who in everything and for everything depends on the approval of the same.

So we see without difficulty that there is basically only a difference in degree between nationalism and anonymity of the Russian or American type: in the first case the individual sinks back into the ethnic-national primal ground; in the second case, however, the differences between the original ethnic groups also disappear, and there is widespread collectivization, a disintegration into the element mass. In order to move from one degree of collectivism to another, it is sufficient that the idea of a purely economic-mechanical type is substituted for racial mysticism. It is due to the impersonal character of such a structure that the last remnants of the difference in quality are actually eradicated: through the rationalization and mechanization of public life, the gates of the future are opened up to the countryless "mass people". – Since the "culture" of today is based on the point of view of economic-mechanical power development, since all values and scales are more or less reduced to this level, the step from one to the other is perhaps only a question of time.

And yet one asks: can nationalism also have another meaning? We think we can answer this question in the *affirmative*. We have asserted that nationalism appears as a transitional form in the epoch of the political rule of the third caste, but before the final rise of the last estate. This situation in the history of ideas enables nationalism to become the bearer of a double meaning. As a transitional form, it can be found both in the direction of decay and in the direction of reconstruction. Assuming that the regression process has come to an end in the sense of an Americanized or Sovietized world, anyone who still feels the forces for a resurrection would encounter nationalism again in the new ascent - but a completely different kind of nationalism! Like the quantities called "vectorial" by physics, the phenomenon of nationalism can only be determined on the basis of a *directional* factor: the first form of nationalism lies in the direction of the collective realized in the degree of "nation". In the second, on the other hand, the direction is across from the collective to the rebuilding of a new *aristocratic* hierarchy. The premises of this second nationalism can be admirably indicated in the words of *Paul de Lagarde*: "A single nation stands higher than humanity, and every single member of a nation is more - that is, should be more - than just national, more than only what every member of the nation is as such: in nationality a very valuable x enters humanity; and in the individual personality to this valuable x a much more valuable y added." (P. de Lagarde, *German writings*, BI, p. 163. Cf.

P. 423: "We must break with the idea of humanity: for what is common to all people is not our own duty, but what is only our own. the abstract is the collective, the general – the concrete is the differentiated

Individual. *Compared to the formless mass of "humanity" the resurrection of a differentiated national consciousness can already represent a first step forward.* The national consciousness, the ethnic tribe, should in turn only become formless matter in relation to the personality. The personality that finds itself, completes itself according to higher forms of life that go beyond the blood-related, transforms that matter from chaos to cosmos, from potentia to actus. The relationship is reversed: the nation is no longer the purpose of the individual - the individual as a spiritual-aristocratic personality, on the other hand, becomes the purpose of the nation. The nation can certainly be regarded as its mother, but it only has the meaning of the material conditionality of the soil compared to a tree, whose upper parts tear themselves away from the soil and climb to the free heights.

This explains the main point of the difference. For final clarification we still have to refer to the *qualitative* meaning of the old caste hierarchy. A nationalism that is not intended to pave the way for mechanical-collectivist conditions, but rather to overcome such conditions and be a prelude to reconstruction, is only possible on the basis of the following requirement: unconditional power and direct authority for a new, above all practical, "social" and economic far-reaching order of values. Otherwise no true hierarchy can exist, and without hierarchy the return to a higher, spiritualized type of state cannot be achieved. Indeed, hierarchy is not merely subordination, but subordination of the lower to the higher. But everything that can be measured by practical, interested, worldly standards is low; higher is what expresses the kind of pure and objective action. Any other criterion is either illusory or pernicious.

The idea of hierarchy is "illusory" *in the context of the purely economic*, but based on differences in money, skills, political or official rank, "class" in the Marxist sense, etc. Only when interests arise that have a decisive impact on the area as a whole of the economic, the principle of true hierarchy is given. We must proceed from the assumption that our purpose in life does not consist in the development of the economy, but that every economy is a means to an end. The purpose, however, is the inner elevation, the development of the personality in the integral and "overworldly" sense.

Hierarchy is *distortion* when it expresses the enslavement of the non-practical under the practical: somewhat like a body making the mind its organ. This is roughly what *Julien Benda* means with the "trahison des clercs". But in today's "pragmatism", cheap Machiavellianism and general careerism, which prevails in all fields - even in the scientific field - this very distortion is confirmed in the majority of cases. But nothing is more anti-hierarchical, even more *anarchistic*, than such types of apparent "hierarchy". –

We had set ourselves the task of combining the two opposing possibilities of the



explore nationalism. An investigation of the extent to which the various nationalisms ruling and fighting today in the European and non-European states embody one or the other possibility does not belong within the scope of the present consideration.