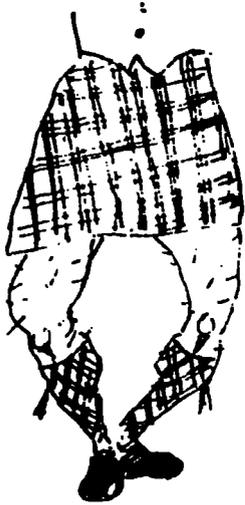


ScOttish Nationalism & Other Passions



James G. Kellas

When a Scotsman wears a kilt, or a Frenchman sings the *Marseillaise*, it seems reasonable to put it all down to strong nationalist feeling. Scotland and France are among the oldest nations in Europe, and most people can recognize instantly the symbols and characteristics that are associated with them because they are so often manifested.

But what does nationalist feeling amount to in Europe today, in political and social terms? Is Europe not at the end of the "era of nationalism" and at the start of an era of supranational unity? The European Economic Community has been enlarged this year with the addition of Britain, Ireland and Denmark, and it is possible to look forward to a sort of federal "United States of Europe" within the next couple of decades.

In this context it is surprising to hear of the revival of Scottish and Welsh nationalism and of the troubles in Northern Ireland within one of the new members of the EEC, Britain. And other EEC countries have their dissident minorities too. The Bretons in France, the Flemings in Belgium and the Austrians in the Italian Tyrol are only some of the ethnic groups in Europe that have recently asserted a sort of nationalism.

It is a "sort of nationalism" because it is obviously difficult to call these groups "nations" in any clear

sense. A nation is a community above the level of the purely local or kinship group but lower than the level of race. It is further defined by certain characteristics such as language, religion, culture, territory and historical experience. In the last resort it depends on feeling, the desire of its members to live together as a community and to determine its own affairs. But if a nation is too small, such a desire may be politically and economically unrealistic. It then becomes difficult to think of it as a real nation at all.

"National self-determination" was a major principle of President Woodrow Wilson when he came to redraw the map of Europe in 1918 along the lines of nation-states rather than of multinational empires. But he found that making states out of nations was not a simple task, nor was it altogether politically acceptable to do so. For example, some "nations" did not form coherent territories but were split into pockets of settlement in different areas. Other nations, such as the Germans, were such a large grouping that a state based on their common nationality would be too powerful.

Nevertheless, the map of Europe as it is today owes much to the Wilson principles, and such countries as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Poland are based on them. Many of these, however, now fall under Soviet domination, and their national aspirations are still unrequited, as was seen in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

In the west of Europe the problem is not now one of nation-states trying to assert their freedom, but of national communities within states seeking to withstand centralization and cultural assimilation. Centralization is a worldwide phenomenon and results from the ever increasing power of governments and from the pressures toward uniformity and standardization. In the United States it has provoked a reaction in the attempts to stem the "power of Washington" and hand back power to the states. In the European context such a reaction is often related to ancient communal loyalties, which become the focus of demands for decentralization.

With this in mind it is possible to see parallels between President Nixon's "New Federalism" and the apparently remote and unrelated happenings in Brittany, Scotland and Wales. Each has for its basis the desire to bring government closer to the people

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in the face of centralization, and each comes up against a crucial problem of the unequal spread of resources. The smaller communities are often restless because they are poorer than the metropolitan centers, and much of their "nationalism" expresses an economic grievance as well as a cultural or political one. Thus Scotland, Wales and Brittany have high rates of unemployment and emigration and low wage rates. What their people want is the same standard of living as the rest of the country, as well as the right to self-government. These aims may cancel each other out. If their people are to stand on their own feet, they may be poorer, through the loss of subsidies from the center in the form of grants to industry, social security and so on.

Would it be possible for central governments to "buy them off" with increased aid? In other words, would the achievement of prosperity and equality of economic opportunities break down their separatism and communal loyalties and make them contented citizens of the centralized state? This question relates not only to the minorities within the states of Western Europe but to the whole question of European unity. If Britain, France and the other members of the EEC gain economically, though they lose their "sovereignty," will this be sufficient to make them good "Europeans" rather than British and French and whatever?

At the moment it is impossible to answer this conclusively, but it is unlikely that the strength of nationalism will ever be purely a function of economic circumstances. For example, much of the national unrest in Europe is related to language differences between the nations. There are linguistic separatists in nearly all European countries: the Welsh and Scottish Gaels in Britain, the Bretons in France, Basques in Spain, Jura separatists in Switzerland, Austrians and French in Northern Italy and Slovenes in Austria. Most of these feel that their language is threatened by domination of the "official" language of the majority, and seek separation in order to preserve their linguistic identity.

This can have strong economic overtones. In the Alto Adige region of Northern Italy most of the best jobs went in the 1950's and 1960's to Italians, though the population was largely Austrian. This led to violent conflict, with bomb outrages. Similarly in Wales the economic domination of English firms led Welsh-language separatists to demand Welsh-speaking qualifications for public employment in education, local government and legal administration. In Belgium a complex balance of power in public life is maintained between the Dutch-speaking Flemings and the French-speaking Walloons, which corresponds also to the religious division between them of Protestant and Roman Catholic.

Religion is clearly at the root of the Irish problem in Britain. Northern Ireland was created in 1920 in

order that the Protestants there might not come under the overwhelmingly Catholic population of the south. The northern Protestants then used their monopoly of power to discriminate against Catholics in political rights, housing and employment. By the late 1960's the Catholic minority was inspired to rebel by the civil rights movement of the United States. After a brief period of demands for civil rights within Northern Ireland, the aim shifted to a nationalist one of union with the Republic of Ireland. This aim is likely to be frustrated, however, by the difficulty of coercing the Protestants in the north and of gaining wholehearted acceptance in the south.

Language and religion are thus key factors in Europe's nationalism. But they have not played such an important part in the rise of Scottish nationalism in the 1960's. The history of Scotland since its union with England in 1707 is in many ways parallel with the position of the nation-states which have joined the EEC. Union with England was sought by Scotland on economic grounds: It would give Scotland a new "common market" which she badly needed to expand her trade. England wanted Scotland within her political system in order to secure her defenses. The bargain that was struck abolished Scotland's "sovereignty," but guaranteed the continuation of certain key Scottish institutions such as the Presbyterian Church, the legal system and the educational system. The success of the union depends to this day on the economic and legal guarantees of 1707. Scotland must not be seen to suffer economically in relation to England, nor must it be assimilated to England in those areas of Scottish life which give it its national identity.

The same could be said of the members of the EEC. They would not continue to be "good Europeans" if their standard of living declined in comparison with other members, nor would they wish to be overruled in matters concerning their national distinctness. President de Gaulle typified this approach when he spoke of the *Europe des patries*—the Europe of the fatherlands.

What then was the reason for the rise of Scottish nationalism in the 1960's, and how does this relate to similar nationalist outbursts in Europe at the same time? The 1960's was a decade of rising affluence in Europe, and indeed in the Western Hemisphere. With it came a heightened level of expectations, both economic and political. In the economic sphere those who fell below the general level of wealth felt a sense of "relative deprivation." Mass advertising and the politicians' optimism about the degree of prosperity made the people of poorer regions, such as Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Brittany, much more unhappy than they had even been before. This discontent was often channeled into a nationalist form.

Political expectations were also rising. The civil rights movement in America gave an early indication of this, and, as we have seen, it was influential in Northern Ireland. But it also showed itself in student unrest in several European countries and in numerous mass demonstrations and campaigns (such as that for nuclear disarmament in Britain). Part of the theme was distrust of Big Government, conducted at a distance from ordinary people, who are unable to control it. One possible answer to this problem was to break up the centralized state into smaller units, and, when it came to selecting such units, the claims of the small "nations" were soon pressed by nationalist movements.

In Scotland the strength of nationalism has been obscured by the different forms which it has taken. The most obvious manifestation is the Scottish National Party (SNP), which wants total independence for Scotland. It has had only one member of Parliament since 1967, and at the last general election (1970) secured only 11.4 per cent of the Scottish vote. Nevertheless, for a time in the 1960's it was commanding 30 per cent in opinion polls and local government elections, and recent parliamentary by-elections have repeated this total. But Scottish nationalism is more pervasive than the votes for the SNP would suggest. Most Scots have a strong sense of national identity that goes well beyond kilts and haggis, into law, education, religion, sports and politics. Scotland has its own government department, the Scottish Office, and there are special committees for Scottish legislation in the House of Commons. Scottish politicians and pressure groups combine in a degree of log-rolling for Scottish interests that would be familiar to American state politicians. But what Scotland does not possess, unlike American states, is a parliament and administration elected by the people: Whatever government is elected to govern Britain at large will also govern Scotland. That is why the Conservative government rules Scotland, though Scotland's parliamentary representation is heavily Labor.

This paradox is the subject of scrutiny by the official Commission on the Constitution (established 1968). The Commission is expected to report in favor of setting up a Scottish parliament to deal with those matters which are exclusively Scottish. But this is not likely to have much impact on the root causes of Scottish nationalism as they expressed themselves in the late 1960's. At that time the grievances were largely economic and related to unemployment rates, emigration and wage levels. A Scottish parliament might not be able to do much about these.

What is true of Scotland is true of Britain as a whole. The poor economic performance of Britain in the 1960's was a source of discontent, not only in Scotland and Wales, but in England itself. Hence the application to join the

European Common Market, followed by entry in January, 1973. It was obvious that Britain needed a larger market and more widespread control over industrial forces than could be achieved in one, fairly small, state. If this was true for Britain, how much more true for Scotland? And so the nationalist aim of separating Scotland from England, if realized, is unlikely to have desirable economic effects.

As in the case of the union of Scotland and England in 1707, there must be guarantees in the EEC. No member state and no region with a member state can be allowed to suffer "relative deprivation." Thus regional policies become of prime importance, and the needs of the regions must be articulated.

This leads to political decentralization. The rising expectations of people in the political sphere must be satisfied. It is not enough to take decisions bureaucratically in some distant capital or supranational center such as the headquarters of the EEC in Brussels. There must be "community control" to the greatest extent possible. President Nixon's "revenue sharing" is an indication of how this can be financed, despite regional inequalities. For Scotland, Wales, Brittany and the other "submerged" nations it means regional government and a reversal of centralization.

The Church of Scotland has expressed its point of view on this. In evidence to the Commission on the Constitution in September, 1969, it stated:

The value of self-government is spiritual as well as economic. When units become too large there comes a point where responsible democratic participation becomes increasingly difficult and a sense of alienation develops between the government and the governed. The value of self-government must be psychological and cultural, even spiritual, no less than economic . . . a form of self-government for Scotland is sought as a means of preserving and developing the distinctive national life. It is believed that democratic control of the country's affairs by those intimately concerned with them would make for efficiency, would strengthen the feeling of responsibility among Scottish people, and remove their sense of frustration and sometimes helplessness.

With this in mind it is perhaps possible to reinterpret the general thrust toward universality which a decade or two ago appeared to many people to be inevitable. There *are* strong forces pulling people together, in their ways of life and in their common humanity. But this does not mean that they must lose control over their own destinies, either as individuals or as communities, to large supranational organizations. The resurgence of nationalism in Europe is thus not a harking back to the bad old days of Hitler and Mussolini, but a creative desire to strengthen democracy and make more secure the diversities of social life.