

# Killing the State on the battlefield of ideas

An Israeli academic exposes the way Labour is destroying the British nation

What's Left anymore? What counts as radical when a Labour Government spends its weekdays drilling troops to deal with industrial unrest? What's Right when the Conservatives are happy to accept ever-rising state spending?

Happily, for confused of Wapping, and indeed, the questioning voter everywhere, there is an answer. It comes not in any politician's speech, but in an academic text, on a subject seemingly distant from our concerns, but with a message central to our future. Quite simply the best guide to appear this year to the dominant ideological questions of our time is a book by the Israeli author Yoram Hazony called *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul*.

Hazony was an adviser to the former Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. A man of the Right, Hazony maps out with rare skill and scholarship the territory on which the Left has now chosen to advance. Although his subject is Israel, his theme, like the fate of his nation, is of universal concern.

Now that the Left has made the commanding heights of the economy a demilitarised zone, it is setting about an assault on the historical, cul-

tural and philosophical roots of nationhood. Hazony identifies a pattern, of intellectual disaffection and then political transformation, which threatens the survival of Israel as a sovereign power, and which is uncannily replicated in our own state.

In Israel the phenomenon has become known as post-Zionism, and Hazony identifies its roots in academe, finding everywhere evidence of a corrosive self-disgust. He quotes the Hebrew University sociologist Baruch Kimmerling's assault on Jewish nationality as the product of an "invented" past, the historian Moshe Zimmermann's attack on the "blatantly ethnocentric" concept of the Jewish State and the philosopher Adi Ophir's gibe that Israel is the "garbage heap of Europe . . . a site of experiments in ethnic cleansing".

Those influential voices on the Israeli Left find an all-too-sympathetic echo in our own intellectual life. British historians, Marxists like Tom Nairn and fellow travellers such as David Cannadine, are equally ready to dismiss our national



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traditions as "invented" and thus bogus. Linda Colley, in her punningly titled *Britains: Forging the Nation*, treats national identity as an imagined construct, born out of prejudices we have outgrown, and ready for dismembering. On to their work clamber the sociologists, historians and commentators of the Runnymede Trust, dismissing Britain as an "imagined community", its belief in unbroken traditions of liberty a "fantasy" and Britishness the "racially" coded residue of Empire.

The impulse towards self-laceration anatomised by Hazony is much more than just a sickness of the salons. Across the globe the Left has identified the nation state as the universal enemy, replacing capitalism as the main antagonist. It may seem like a new development but is, in truth, a reversion to type. For the Left's roots, from the time of the French Revolution, lie in a desire to uproot the local, the particular, the inherited and the tested, in order to replace them with the uniform, the mechanical, the featureless and homogenous. And the success of the intellectual Left in deconstructing nationhood, a success better documented by Hazony than any writer I know, has gone unchallenged for so long that it has direct and pressing consequences for the survival of the State.

In his conclusion, Hazony explains that "the State is an idea, bereft of existence outside the human mind. When people stop believing in the cultural artefact that is a particular State, it is only a matter of time before the construct proves as shallow as the belief in it, crumbling into the dust of memory at the first unfavourable wind. As a consequence the State need not be defeated militarily to be defeated utterly. The entire job may be done on the battleground of ideas."

And that job is being done now, in Israel, Britain, and throughout the West. As Hazony explains, the architects of the current Middle

East peace process, such as the Israeli Labour politician Shimon Peres, are products of the swelling intellectual current that sees no value in national sovereignty. In Peres' own words: "National political organisations can no longer fulfil the purpose for which they were established . . . the social group has expand-

ed, and today our health, welfare and freedom can be ensured only within a wider framework, on a regional or even super-regional basis."

Peres' view of sovereignty has placed his nation in greater peril than at anytime since 1973, undermining the rationale for national survival, depriving citizens of any justification for collective sacrifice. But the Peres view is very far from being peculiar to Israeli Labour politicians. It's the authentic position of the British Labour Party.

Everywhere it can, Labour progressively effaces the symbols and reality of national sovereignty. The Northern Ireland Office strips the Royal Ulster Constabulary of its crown and title. The Northern Ireland Secretary dismisses the services as "chinless wonders", the Defence Secretary subsumes them in new structures whose sole purpose is not security, but the ideology of greater European integration. Talks go on towards a treaty at Nice in which the sole question is not whether Britain should accept the dilution of its veto, but by how much.

Because Britain has not had to live with the mortal threat Israel has faced since its inception, the erosion of our national foundations seems less perilous to us than it must to Hazony. But when the next call on our national capacity for collective sacrifice is made, as it has been throughout history, what will we find? What, indeed, will be left?

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