

Can Great Britain survive without 'Attila the Hen'?

by Mark Burdman

In her valedictory address to the House of Commons on Nov. 22, outgoing British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher delivered a characteristic tirade on the Persian Gulf crisis, threatening Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, warning of "the dangers ahead," and likening the defense of Kuwait to the defense of "our people in the Falklands." Then she crescendoed: "But there is something else which one feels as well. That is a sense of this country's destiny; the centuries of history and experience which ensure that when principles have to be defended, when good has to be upheld, when evil has to be overcome, then Britain will take up arms."

This bombast is revealing about the ideological features of British orchestration of the drive toward war in the Gulf, and about why elements within the British Establishment that decided to dump Thatcher, are at the same time terrified about her passing. The fact that her replacement, John Major, is Thatcher's chosen heir and is being dubbed "Thatcher's pet" or "Thatcher's foal," will not lessen that terror. The deeper fear within such British circles is an *historical-cultural* fear.

This fear was expressed in short-hand form by the *Daily Mail* tabloid, whose owner, Lord Rothermere, is connected by marriage to the British Royal Family. On Nov. 21, the day after Thatcher had failed to win in the first Conservative Party ballot against challenger Michael Heseltine, the *Mail* wrote that there is "more than a little of the Twilight of the Gods about the political tragedy" unfolding in Britain.

'Attila the Hen'

The more fundamental issue than the Gulf crisis as such, is that while the monarchy still exists to satisfy the British oligarchs' passion for fetishizing their political institutions and to keep the population in an infantile state of dependency, Thatcher had become the mouthpiece for a notion of "England's special role" in the world. This is linked to a mystification of "British political institutions," particularly the monarchy and Parliament. The question faced by the professed guardians of the cultural and historical continuity of the United Kingdom is: Can these hallowed institutions survive under conditions where continental Europe is achieving a new power and status in the world?

The British Establishment is on the horns of a dilemma. If the U.K. doesn't get into the European Community to manipulate it from the *inside* with the usual balance-of-power and divide-and-conquer methods, then it has no way to control the continent except by crude, confrontationist, Thatcherite methods. But if the U.K. becomes more accommodating to Europe under the non-entity John Major, can its "specialness" survive?

There was no alternative but to dump Thatcher. She had become a megalomaniac in an intolerable way—earning the nickname "Attila the Hen" from British observers—at a moment when Britain's economic capabilities are in desperate straits, especially in relation to Germany.

But this same Establishment, whether in its English, Anglo-Scottish, or Anglo-Irish forms, agrees with the underlying "free-market" and "post-industrial society" policy assumptions that motivated Thatcher. Moreover, there is her embodiment of the mythos of the "special role" for the English.

'What makes Britain special?'

Insiders in the Oxford-Cambridge university circuit point out that British ideology, especially as projected by the English aristocracy, has for centuries embraced the notion of the English as a "chosen people," an "Israel" with a special "God-given Protestant mission." This mythos was propagated in earnest after England's defeat of the (Catholic) Spanish Armada in 1588, and reinforced by the 1688-89 "Glorious Revolution," which was portrayed as the "divine deliverance" of Britain from "Catholic absolutism." They stress that the mythos has been embedded in a political system that has been, for the most part, an absolute monarchy and theocracy in fact, with the absolute monarch being the head of the established state church.

In the 20th century, this ideology was expressed in the World War I-era poetry glorifying war from a quasi-mystical "heroic English" standpoint. Cases are known of soldiers in the trenches in Belgium who thought angels were coming to deliver them when they saw the bright light of bursting shellfire. In World War II, the mythos was revived as the powers-that-be exploited the war against Hitler's Nazis for a

more cynical ideological purpose. It is expressed today by the likes of former Trade and Industry Minister Nicholas Ridley, who had to resign after his frothing attacks on the “new German Fourth Reich,” and by London *Sunday Telegraph* editorial writer Peregrine Worsthorne.

Worsthorne, in his first post-Thatcher editorial on Nov. 25, entitled “Who’ll speak for England?” wrote: “Mrs. Thatcher had become the unique embodiment of British nationalism—or even patriotism—and her departure will diminish Britain scarcely less seriously than did de Gaulle’s equally sad and involuntary exit in 1969 diminish France.” He noted that the Gulf crisis would continue to be a major challenge, but “from Britain’s point of view, the real challenge comes from Europe; from, in particular, a united Germany.”

Thatcher’s “faith in Britain is mystical, beyond reason; the kind of faith that moves mountains,” he continued. “The great and the good have the kind of faith that would make them stand up against ogres; but not against decent, sensible Europeans who put forward beautifully constructed blueprints for European monetary and political union, the only fault of which is that they would *do away with what makes Britain special*” (emphasis added).

Worsthorne argued that there is a threat to Britain posed by “a Europe dominated economically by a friendly Germany.” He wrote: “The heart of the matter is quite simple. France is culturally chauvinistic. Its certainty about itself has to do with its language, with its civilizing mission, with its Cartesian clarity, with its *douceur de vivre* [sweetness of life], with its wit and grace. For its political institutions it has nothing but contempt. What has the Chamber of Deputies ever done for France? Most Frenchmen see it as a sink of corruption and would happily welcome its demise. So great is France’s faith in its culture, however, that the French are convinced a Euro-state would have a French soul.

“Post-Nazi Germany is no longer a rival in this respect. The Nazi blight put an end to any Teutonic claim to cultural hegemony. Economic strength is another matter. The Germans today are certainly more economically nationalistic than ever. They are convinced that such is the productive power of German industry that a new Euro-state would have a German body.

“Only the British care about, and take pride in, their political institutions, which have developed over 1,000 years of unbroken constitutional history. Our nationalism is not so much cultural or economic as political, and only an ignorant fool could believe that a Euro-state would adopt the British parliamentary system. Europe’s Continental political tradition, as much on the Catholic right as on the socialist left, is almost wholly *dirigiste*—a tradition of enlightened despotism at best. In other words, the British have to be so much more suspicious of European federation because they have so much more to lose. The specialness of France and Germany could well be preserved; that of Britain would have no chance at all.”

‘Product of the arrogant South’

One Establishment concern is whether the entity Great Britain will survive. As one Oxford insider told *EIR*, “Great Britain, you must realize, is a composite, like Austria-Hungary. It was created by marcher-lordships and principalities, anchored in an absolute monarchy.” He expressed concern that there will be increasingly centrifugal tendencies toward greater assertion of self-determination by the Scots, Welsh, and Irish, as Europe becomes an increasingly attractive partner.

Within days of Thatcher’s resignation, an opinion poll released in Scotland showed that only 20% of Scots polled favor the status quo, 45% favor the creation of a separate Scottish Parliament, and 35% favor outright independence. The Nov. 28 *Financial Times* claimed, oddly enough, that Thatcher’s resignation would, for the moment, soften Scottish antagonism to remaining in the U.K. “The Scots’ intense dislike of Mrs. Thatcher, who was widely seen as an overbearing product of the arrogant south of England, revived a sense of Scotland’s separate identity, reminding Scots how different many of their attitudes are from those of the English,” wrote James Buxon in the *Financial Times*. “These feelings may well subside now that Mrs. Thatcher has gone.”

Another dilemma for the Anglo-Saxons, is that Thatcher provided the central ideological-emotional impetus for North-South resource-grab conflicts. *Financial Times* writer Peter Riddell asserted Nov. 23 that President Bush had “lost a central public prop” for his Gulf policy, and that Thatcher’s leaving had caused “a profound shock” in U.S. policy circles, especially given the “curious irony that the news from Downing Street came just as Mr. Bush was in Saudi Arabia visiting American and British troops.” Under the headline “Americans astonished by fall of loyal ally,” London *Times* U.S. affairs editor Peter Stothard wrote on the same day that “Americans have watched the fall of Mrs. Thatcher with disbelief as well as alarm,” especially as she had “set the intellectual framework for Operation Desert Shield.”

Both Stothard and the *Independent*’s Peter Pringle drew attention to Thatcher’s seminal role in having set Bush on a course for confrontation with Iraq, when they met in Aspen, Colorado in early August right after Iraq had invaded Kuwait. According to Pringle, Thatcher has been around ever since to “straighten him out” and “keep him in line.” Thatcher’s resignation was “like the team losing the trainer; it will be a little harder for Mr. Bush and his men to pursue their policy from now on.” As Worsthorne put it in his Nov. 25 editorial, “the danger [in the Gulf] is serious enough; who is going to put iron into Mr. Bush’s backbone if not Mrs. Thatcher?”

For herself, Thatcher told a meeting of Conservative Party loyalists immediately after she resigned that she intended to be “a very good back-seat driver” for Bush in the Gulf. Unless the United States gives Bush the “Thatcher treatment,” any number of accidents lie ahead.