

# Patriotism and Nationalism

by Michael Curtis



100th Armistice Day Celebration in France Nov. 11, 2018

What is America to me? A name, a map , or flag, or a certain word, democracy? One of the great lines in American movies is that from *The Man who Shot Liberty Vallenge*: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the portrait of Shakespeare's Henry V played by Laurence Olivier as the paragon of English patriotism and chivalry, commanding and celebrating one version of England's "finest hour." In fact, he and his troops, "noblest English whose blood is fet (derived) from fathers of war-proof," were ruthless. At the crucial battle of Agincourt 1415 his troops hacked French soldiers to death, and executed prisoners taken during the battle. Was this behavior patriotic or nationalist, similar in nature to the appalling nationalism of the past, with Napoleon, Stalin,

Hitler, and the countries in World War I.

The question of patriotism and nationalism has now become a conspicuous political issue because of the remarks of French President Emmanuel Macron on November 11, 2018 at the 100th Armistice anniversary ceremony in Paris. In a speech alloyed with implicit comments critical of policies of President Donald Trump, he was concerned with the increase of nationalism in the U.S. and in European countries. After World War II, humiliation, the spirit of revenge, economic and moral crises, dislike of elites, immigration from the Middle East, fed the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism.

Wars again twenty years later, came to ravage the path of peace.

Certainly in view of developments, Serbian nationalism in Bosnia in October in 2018, in Germany (AfD), Austrian coalition, Sweden Democrats, FN in France, and Brexit, Macron's complaint is justifiable, since almost all of these movements are associated with the political far-right. But Macron's remarks were also aimed at Trump's speech in Houston on October 22, 2018.

Patriotism, Macron asserted, is the exact opposite of nationalism. He defines nationalism as "putting our nation first, and not caring about the others." By saying our interests first, and not caring about the others, "we erase what a nation holds dearest, what gives it life, what makes it great and what is essential, its moral values."

There are two interrelated issues. One involves the distinction between the two terms patriotism and nationalism, abstract terms that can be defined in different ways whether emphasis is on territory, people, race, religion, or language, or enemies. How is one to interpret, "Allons, enfants de la Patrie," as patriotism or nationalism? How is the extraordinary outburst of emotion displayed when the

Marseillaise is sung, drowning out the Nazi song, in the film *Casablanca* to be construed? The second issue is the call for European military and political detachment to some extent from the U.S., and stress on the ability of France and Europe to defend itself against aggression, such as cyberattacks, in independent fashion.

It's curious that President Macron most of whose previous years have been involved in global finance should also be influenced by past and present philosophy. Some studies have show that his thinking has been influenced not only by giants of the past but also by Paul Ricoeur, whom he helped write the work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, published in 2004. From Ricoeur he took the ideas of rejecting political utopia and the need to accept compromise solutions to problems. Macron, at least in theory, maintains belief in individual autonomy, reason, progress, and universal laws, enabling people to be the masters of their own destiny. Politically, this has meant faith in the effectiveness of markets, and the need and ability of government to empower individuals.

More important, Macron as a multiculturalist and pro-European, and as an opponent of and concerned about the spread in Europe of populism has denounced nationalists. Yet , there are two problems. One is that the denunciation of nationalists has strong overtones of opposition to Trump's rhetoric of America first. The other is that the proposed alternative of European collaboration is to be based on strengthening European military forces, and on the ability of Europe to defend itself alone, without relying on the U.S., in a more sovereign manner. One can ask, is this a form of European nationalism? If nationalism means loyalty and devotion to one nation, and exalting that nation above all others, putting primary emphasis on the promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups, this formula might be applicable to a European entity that is supposed to defend itself alone, though NATO exists for that

purpose. In this regard is Macron wearing the face of a nationalist?

The second issue is reminiscent of the policy of Charles de Gaulle fifty years ago. Although there were changes in his rhetoric throughout the years relative to changes in France and in international politics, de Gaulle's outlook was largely nationalistic, from his speech in London on June 18, 1940 to his presidency with calls for restoration of France, its self-reliance and sovereignty, and the need for sacrifice if necessary. A champion of the politics of grandeur, his policy was based on French national independence.

In practice, this meant in June 1966 withdrawal from NATO's military integrated command, and the launching of an independent nuclear deterrent, though France remained politically within the organization. He called for France to lead a Europe of Europeans, not under Americans. France did not return to the NATO military command until 2009. The comment of Richard Nixon was apt; de Gaulle's assertiveness vis a vis the U.S. caused American presidents never to take France for granted.

The essential Gaullist argument was voiced by Macron at the Armistic gatherings in Paris and at Compiegne where the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 between the Allied powers and Germany. Noticeably, German Chancellor Angela Merkel joined the position of Macron, wanting closer defense co-operation between EU member states and creation of a "real" or "true" European army. Part of their argument is that Trump policy, "America first," makes the case for European self-reliance more pressing. Already, there are preparations to create a European joint intervention force for military operations, with 17 projects of cooperation in military logistics, and proposals for development of joint weapons systems.

In the analysis of the two terms, patriotism and nationalism,

an essay *Notes on Nationalism* by George Orwell written in May 1945 has been influential. He identified nationalism as the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests. Patriotism he saw as devotion to a particular place and way of life which one believed to be the best in the world, but has no wish to force on other people. He concludes that patriotism is of its nature defensive both militarily and culturally. Nationalism is inseparable from the desire for power.

Yet this is not the whole truth. Orwell was writing about Hitler and Mussolini. Nationalism can also be a spur and unite peoples. Contemporary nationalists, such as Narendra Modi in India, Shinzo Abe in Japan, Benjamin Netanyahu, of whom criticisms can be made, do not fit this Orwell category. Nor would Mohandas Gandhi, with his doctrine of swaraj, self-rule, and nationalism that was realistic, a uniter of peoples, Hindus and Muslims.

Love of one's country can take different forms. Perhaps the most eloquent eulogy of one's country is that of John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England," but two things are forgotten; that he was French speaking; and that in real life Gaunt was in favor of peace negotiations with France.