

THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND THE NEW EUROPEAN AND BRITISH DISUNIONISM

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Libertarianism is about how government should be conducted. There should be as little of it as possible. It is not about where the boundaries between different governments should be. We libertarians therefore tend to ignore arguments like the ones now raging about how unified the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should be, for such debates are distractions from what we really want to talk about. Never mind how the territory is carved up. What matters, we say, is that within it the scope of government should be minimised. But whether we attend to such arguments or not, still they rage. Why? And how will such battles affect libertarianism?

“EUROPE” DID NOT PACIFY EUROPE

“Europe” is now unravelling. There has been much speculation about the “real” motives of the Euro-enthusiasts, the preferred British Euro-sceptic theory being that it is all pure thievery and bossiness, such as one must expect from foreigners. But all politics is thievery and bossiness, and there is always more involved than the mere cynicism and greed of those doing best out of it, or why would this political scheme rather than that one do best? Why did the Euro-thieves and the Euro-bosses do so well for so long? And why is their project now running out of steam?

The enthusiasts who, just after the Second World War, embarked upon the creation of a single European state believed — or said they believed — that they were preventing war from ever breaking out again between the people of Europe. But wars are just as likely to start because of attempts to unify distinct peoples as because of the distinctness of peoples. Think of the American Civil War, which would never have begun had the North not been determined to preserve the unity of the “United” States. From 1945 until the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia there has indeed been peace in Europe, but it was the Red Army that kept the peace for fifty years, not “Europe”. The nations of Western Europe dared not quarrel too severely with one another, for fear that this might embolden the USSR to launch the Red Army westwards.

Throughout the Cold War, the nightmare of all responsible European politicians was that the American army might leave Western

Europe before the Red Army had been persuaded to leave Eastern Europe. If the Americans had left, Europe would have had to become much more united, at which point all the Euro-enthusiasts, however bizarre or unworthy their motives, would be essential. Those Americans who wanted communism contained also favoured a united Europe, for they too wanted something to take the place of their soldiers if they ever had to withdraw them. Accordingly the Euro-enthusiasts were allowed to assemble in Brussels and Strasbourg, to pay each other their salaries and to eat their free lunches, just like real politicians, and their mostly rather fatuous claims about what they were doing remained unchallenged. Throughout the Cold War, the Euro-momentum never flagged.

Because time was on their side, the Euro-enthusiasts never had to explain in public what they were really doing, and many of them were able to lie with impunity about their intentions, especially the British Euro-enthusiasts (the most dishonest and/or stupid Euro-enthusiasts of the lot, I suspect), who would regularly claim that there was “no question” of this or that piece of Euro-unification being even attempted, which they would later announce had now been agreed to. The people most angered by this Euro-humbug tended to be those who, unfortunately for them, were also most keen to oppose the Soviet threat, Margaret Thatcher being an extreme case of this syndrome.¹ The great British right-wing exception was Enoch Powell, who also — be it noted — dissented from the orthodoxy that the USSR threatened Western Europe.

Then the Cold War suddenly ended. At which point a British politician could insult a French politician or a German politician, and *vice versa*, without endangering the security of Western Europe or the peace of the planet. Remember all those insults that flew back and forth between Britain and Germany on the day in 1992 that Sterling fell out of the ERM. Or think of how, more recently, a bunch of Euro-judges condemned the SAS for gunning down some Irish terrorists, and how British Defence Minister Portillo responded so fiercely at the 1995 Conservative Party Conference soon afterwards. Euro-rows like these were never allowed to go public during the Cold War.

The reason why the wheels are now falling off the Euro-project is not that a single European currency is impossible, or that there’s too much Euro-regulation going on, or that Euro-politicians aren’t “accountable”. Nor is it that the European “Community” is really some kind of Catholic/Masonic conspiracy, or a gigantic swindle for the benefit of French farmers, or a Mafia plot, or an attempt by the British Foreign Office to establish a new empire, or the Germans trying to set up another of *their* Reichs, or a poor man’s Nato for the USSR’s ex-colonies in Eastern Europe, or a huge welfare state for the lesser Mediterranean nations, and that consequently the various peoples on the receiving end of this maelstrom of conflicting fantasies and frauds won’t stand for it. It isn’t even that Europe contains about two dozen languages. If enough powerful European people still wanted “Europe”, then some viable combination of the various fantasies and frauds on offer would be made to stick and would be turned into the official Euro-ideology. Since when did the presence of huge piles of bullshit mean that politics

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

as usual couldn't proceed? If the determination existed to solve all the problems of Euro-state making, then solved they would be. No, "Europe" is now fading because it isn't now *for* anything. The grief and chaos and deception necessarily involved in any exercise in unification is not now justified by any great resulting benefit.

A REAL EURO-DEBATE

Now that the Euro-debate has become so public and so frenzied, it's hard to remember just how dull it used to be. All the nonsense that used to be tolerated in silence by everyone of importance can now be seriously argued about, and we libertarians, just like everyone else, now have a real Euro-debate to participate in.

Do we need "Europe" to get a "single market"? Hardly. Two traders need not share the same government in order to trade with each other. All that is needed is for both their governments to refrain from meddling. If all the governments in a particular region merely allow their citizens to trade with whomever they like, then a "single market" will be the inevitable and highly desirable result. It is not necessary for government bureaucrats to agree with one another about desirable levels of factory safety or what exactly "beer" is. People can sort that out amongst themselves.

If many Europeans would benefit from using the same "single currency", then that too could be sorted out by those directly concerned, just as most people now use the same kinds of computer with the same sized floppy disks, or in the way that the world's business people and scientists mostly now speak and write English.

Apart from the claim that a unified Europe was "inevitable", the other main argument that we in Britain were faced with was that we couldn't afford to be "isolated" from Europe, to be "left out". Here Britain's Euro-sceptics have made their one important contribution to the Euro-debate, in the direction of Euro-unification. Many Euro-phobes, being themselves a minority within an otherwise contentedly cosmopolitan Britain, *do* want Britain to be isolated, from foreign dog diseases, from foreign pornography, from foreigners. Since their fellow countrymen don't want isolation, they have mostly voted for the Euro-state, as and when they have been asked to choose between that and the petty nationalist rhetoric of the Euro-sceptics. What the Euro-sceptics should have said was that a country being "isolated" from the Euro-state is not the same as it being isolated from civilisation, and if anything rather the reverse. (Consider Switzerland, which "isolates" itself from all multi-national political bureaucracies, and laughs all the way to its banks. And how about Hong Kong, "isolated" from mainland China for fifty years, and now hoping against hope to remain so?) The Euro-sceptics also make a great fuss about parliamentary "sovereignty", as if being bossed around by London is a fundamentally different experience for the average Briton from being bossed around by Brussels. It is only Britain's dominant local politicians who are sovereign, not its people. If the Euro-sceptics are now winning the Euro-debate this is no thanks to their arguments, but thanks rather to the larger tide of world events. (Not that the Euro-phobes will be able to stop foreign porn, whatever happens about Europe.)

The Euro-project won't drop dead. It now has colossal momentum and will blunder on in a state of semi-importance, like its sister enterprises in other parts of the world such as the Organisation of African Unity (also encouraged by the Americans, and for the same reasons). "Europe" will remain a significant arena of conflict, in which the various different Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-visionaries will battle it out. Euro-regulations will continue to fly around, and Euro-politicians will continue to stab one another in the back while orating about their "European credentials". Had the Cold War lasted longer, a European State would have happened, followed, I dare say, by a European civil war — Yugoslavia style — when the Cold War eventually did end. As it is, and unless and until Russia surprises us all by gathering itself together for another go at world conquest, or until some other common European enemy arises, the notion that there will soon — still less "inevitably" — be a United States of Europe to rival the United States of America can be set to one side as one of those great historical might-have-beens.

THE INCOHERENCE OF THE BRITISH UNIONISTS

Now for that other great enterprise in unification, Britain, the "United" Kingdom. This too shows signs of breaking apart.

Whereas "Europe" was a defensive alliance, Britain was — until recently — an offensive alliance, a combination to go out there and boss the world. This is one of the reasons why "Britain" got going so splendidly, and why "Europe" is now dying in the water. Europe is a flock of sheep huddling together in a big, bad world, terrified of Russian armies and Asian industrial prowess, with only a couple of quarrelsome dogs (Germany and France) at the centre of it, and another mangy and sly old dog (Britain) torn between trying to bust it up from outside and trying to bust it up from within. Britain, by contrast, began as a small pack of wolves assembling for a hunting expedition, a much more inspiring project. It was the prospect of imperial gain and glory that caused the lowland Scots to turn on their more independent and anti-English highland cousins and crush them. It was the fear of isolation from something real that got the Welsh so enthusiastically in on the deal. And very impressive the deal turned out to be. It was the fact that we English were so delighted by the massive Celtic contribution to our empire that we were so content to mutate into being "British".

Now that empire is history. All its overseas appendages (except a few accidents like Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands) have been given back to the locals, and the question stands starkly isolated. What is "Britain" for? Nothing, reply many Welsh and many more Scots. There are now no spoils to be divided, so to hell with it. And of course most of the Irish were never that persuaded, that particular British Island having long been in semi-mutiny.

Most ominously of all, for those who still care about "Britain", we English are starting to become restive. What are the Scots and Welsh for? If we were still engaged in ruling India, or seriously in need of gullible, desperate and energetic people to populate our new Martian colonies, then Celts would be useful. As it is, they are just a pack of welfare addicts, alternating like all scroungers between duplicitous charm and self-righteous shouting. Seriously, are non-Londoners aware of what an appalling proportion of the beggars in the streets of London are from the Celtic fringes? We English now pretty much assume that the same pattern is reproduced indoors when it comes to the economic relationship between England and Scotland, and between England and Wales.

All of which acrimony must give great pleasure to the Celtic nationalists, who well understand that all opportunities to irritate the English must be seized with enthusiasm. No doubt they have special training weekends at which Scotsmen and Welshmen teach themselves how to wind up the English. These cunning nationalists perfectly understand that for them to persuade their fellow countrymen to leave Britain may not be necessary, if they can persuade the English to kick them out.

England contains few passionate Unionists, but Scotland and Northern Ireland are crawling with them. These Celtic Unionists are fluent enough at explaining how deeply they hate their local enemies, and how very much they don't want to live in a separate little Scotland or Ireland with these people, and how unfair that would be. But when asked to explain why it would be to the advantage of the English to be part of the same nation state with them, instead of just letting them go, in the way that the Czechs recently said a polite and peaceful goodbye to Slovakia, they have no answer. Worse, they don't seem to understand the force of the question. We English outnumber all the Celts put together.² We will decide whether we remain attached to Ireland, and Scotland, and Wales. Not the Irish, not the Scots, not the Welsh. If we kick any or all of these places out of "Britain", then out they will go. Yet the Celtic Unionists talk as if their desire to remain part of Britain is enough to settle the matter, whether we English want to remain attached to them or not.

From time to time I ask Unionists this same question. Why should I, an Englishman, care whether Scotland or Ireland remain part of my own country or not? They just boom on about how horrid and violent the "Cartholics" are and how determined they are not to surrender to these terrible people. If we English "betray" them, that

would be unfair. Perhaps the Celtic Unionists think that waving our shared flag helps, but in England to wave the Union Jack proclaims you not as a solid citizen but as a job. Betraying sad little clumps of Union Jack flappers in faraway places hasn't troubled us English for the last forty years. Why should we suddenly start worrying about that now?

I recently met a couple of vaguely intelligent Ulster Unionists, living in London, who put a rather different slant for me on why Unionists don't try to persuade the English that the Union is in England's interests. It's not, they said. There's nothing in it for the English, they said, so we don't talk about that. So, just like the most derelict Scottish beggar, they too were begging for charity from the English. We solve their problems by subjugating their local rivals, thus sparing them the bother. This amounts to an admission of defeat, for if this is what is going on, it's only a matter of time before the English realise it.

Anyway, the "Carthlics" are not that nasty, to English eyes and ears. They are men of violence, but they have long demonstrated themselves to be rational and intelligent men of violence, just like us and like the British army. The IRA are just the sort of people — violent if thwarted, intelligent and negotiable-with if surrendered to — that British Foreign Office officials have spent their entire working lives dealing with. By comparison, the Unionists might as well come from another planet for all the sense they make when trying to communicate with us English. Supposing as they do that cursing the Catholics won't work on English TV, they cut that out, and are left with ... nothing. Seriously, I recall countless television performances when I have not understood *one word* that the Unionists have been saying. It sounds like English, but it isn't. It is a special dialect of English invented by Unionists for saying nothing on English television. Gerry Adams is a model of lucidity by comparison. Get out of Ireland, or we'll start letting off bombs again. That's his message. It isn't nice, but at least it makes sense.

A DOMINO THEORY FOR BRITAIN

The irony is that if the Unionists were prepared clearly to threaten violence they might achieve something. Would it be to England's advantage to have to share these islands with independent states, all of which are liable to wracked by civil war? Now you're talking. If the Celtic Unionists made it plain that if the Union is ended, they will seize control of their bits, at whatever cost in blood and mayhem and ethnic cleansing and refugee columns pouring into England, and rule them as they — not the Nationalists — see fit, and Fuck You Jimmy if you English change your minds and start to interfere again, that might cut some ice with the English. That might just persuade us not to leave in the first place.

Serious pro-Unionist propagandists — pretending for a moment that such people exist — could put together a fine Domino Theory of the United Kingdom. If British Prime Minister John Major continues with his plans to hand Northern Ireland over to the IRA, then that could mean more "troubles" in Northern Ireland per week than for the entire last three decades. If Ireland goes, that will signal English willingness to end the Union generally, and Scotland will be next, sparking off the same slaughter and mayhem as will happen in Ireland.

And what of Wales? Given that the determination of England to kick all non-English countries out of Britain will now be a firm habit, Wales too, with a hearty cheer or a fatalistic shrug, will also break off. And Wales contains potentially the nastiest Celtic civil war of the lot. The Welsh have their own *language*, which lots of them speak in addition to English and which some of them even speak instead of English. There's nothing like different languages to get a civil war going. Ask the ex-Yugoslavians.

Those Druids who now only compose Welsh poetry to sing at each other at their Welsh festivals, having only Welsh poetry as an alternative occupation, might try to make Welsh the single language of Wales. Welsh signposts would be *only* in Welsh. Maybe Druids will kidnap the children of English speakers and send them to Welsh Language Camps in the hills. True, the English speakers now heavily outnumber the Druids, but the Druids will reckon that

many English speakers will flee to England, and that the worse the Druids behave the more this will happen.

It might not even stop there. Once the habit of new nation making had become established in "the former Britain" it might be hard to break. So might the Cornish have a go? And what of the ancient enmity between the North and the South of England? Would long forgotten words like "Wessex", "Mercia" and "Northumbria" start to surface again?

Now you may say that all this is impossible. We British are not like this, the Welsh in particular being charming people.³ We may not love each other, but we don't hate each other enough to have wars. But hatred doesn't cause war; war causes hatred. Wars are like child custody battles; the nicest people can get embroiled in them, and then find themselves doing the nastiest things.

DESCRIBING DISASTER MIGHT PREVENT IT

Why don't the Unionists say things like this? Partly it is because they are fools, and partly it is because they are reluctant to threaten violence. But more fundamentally — and I suspect this applies with particular force to those now totally silent people in England who still favour the Union — the Unionists believe that if they talk about all these horrors, they will make them more likely to happen.

I believe the opposite. I believe that the one thing of all things that starts wars is optimism about how impossible they are and how quickly they will be settled if they do start. But if people are aware of the possibility of war and fearful of its outcome, war is far less likely to start.⁴ Compare two famous and famously destructive wars: World War One and World War Three. A few obscure writers did predict what the First World War was going to be like — trenches, barbed wire, machine guns, and above all blood, blood, blood, like the worst horrors of the American Civil War, but for most the catastrophe was a surprise, which is why it happened. By contrast, the horrors of World War Three have been one of the great shared assumptions of the last half century. We all knew that World War Three would have been a catastrophe for all. Any imaginable diplomatic reverse or ethnic maltreatment was preferable to starting it, and so no one did. A pessimistic and warlike futurology about the former Britain — complete, I suggest, with nuclear explosions — would now be a decidedly helpful to the cause of British unionism and of peace in Britain generally. If the price to the English of avoiding such horrors is permanent membership of the same country as the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party and their incomprehensible descendants, then so be it, I and my countrymen would be wise to pay this price. Even if such gruesome domino theorising fails to hold the UK together, it will still be of huge benefit to the people who end up living in the resulting bits, for whatever deal ends up being done, the fear of disaster will make all concerned far readier to reach some sort of peaceful settlement.

The other great reason for Unionist propaganda incompetence has been, yes, the Cold War. Just as the Cold War propelled Europe towards union, so too it caused Britain's rulers to forbid disunion in their own back yard. Celtic soldiers were useful for scaring the Reds. British Unionists, just like European Unionists, have lived in a false propaganda paradise in which they didn't have to put forward serious arguments in favour of what they wanted, because arguing of any kind wasn't allowed.

LET'S HAVE A DECISION

As for me, I come down hard on the side of the don't-knows. I agree, now, with whoever eventually wins. The debate about the unity of Britain is, for me, like one of those food ordering conversations in a Chinese restaurant. We have decided that we will order collectively, and now we must decide what, collectively, to order. On and on the discussion goes. I sit there growling, waiting for someone to win. Let's have some *food*. *Now*. That's how I feel about what country I'm going to live in. I just want a decision, any decision, so I can get on with living in the result.

The way to decide where to put national boundaries is to think which ones have the feeling that they just might last for ever, and

which ones we can already say may soon have to be redrawn. The latter can be eliminated, because any whiff of impermanence will defeat the whole exercise.⁵ The reason I think the British Union is doomed can be put in the form of two questions. One: If we decide to keep the Union, will that end the argument and make future disunion unimaginable? Two: If we decide to divide up the Union, will we subsequently argue about putting it together again? (Please note that I do not ask, Two: if we break up the Union will some of us regret it? That's a different question, and an irrelevant one.) The answer to question One is: No that won't end the argument. And the answer to question Two is: No we won't then try to put the Union back together. Union will always be controversial. Disunion will settle the matter. And settling the matter, in my opinion, is what the debate should be about.⁶

I'm now a Euro-sceptic not because I have a particular preference for being bossed about by my more unpleasant fellow countrymen instead of by the more unpleasant sort of foreigner. I'm a Euro-sceptic because reality is now one also. European disunion is always going to be an option for the foreseeable future, and European union a permanent struggle with little reward to show for it. If I thought that reality was now a Euro-super-statist, then I'd settle down and become one too, in the sense that this would be the state I'd be trying to roll back.

A further reason to expect British disunion is that although "Europe" won't be strong enough to unify itself, it will remain strong enough to cause discord between the English and the Celts. The break-up of the British Union may even occur when England leaves the European Union, but the Celts decide not to.⁷

It is everywhere getting harder to run large governments of large territories. Think of Canada. Or the old USSR. Libertarians in the USA have long been aware of what the Oklahoma bombing made into world news, namely that the USA also is facing a potential war between a fiercely centralising Federal Government and an increasingly strong separatist movement which is reacting against the new Federalism. The unity of the USA is shakier now than at any time since the Civil War.⁸

The story here is one of transformed global communications, which make the average crofter in the Western Isles of Scotland as well informed about the world as the average senior civil servant in London. London no longer feels to the Scottish crofter like a connection to the world; it merely gets in the way. Ditto the average American and Washington, and the average Russian and Moscow, and ditto everywhere else. The number of independent nations looks like increasing rapidly, as each little place bids to deal with the world in its own preferred way. That "Europe" may help the Celts to break away from England won't be much comfort to the people in Brussels, because the same problem confronts them as confronts their rivals in London.⁹

CELTIC THATCHERISM

Finally, what has this to do with libertarianism? Quite a lot. When people are fighting about where the borders of their nation are going to be, they are not going to be so interested in other arguments, about what to do about the top rate of income tax or whether to introduce road pricing. Even a serious political argument about whether the state of "Britain" will survive in its present form, and about what relationship Britain or its fragments will have to the rival state of "Europe", is likely to overshadow all talk about how states in general are things that ought to be rolled back. Insofar as the Euro-debate is already raging this is already happening.

If the arguments described in this paper take off in a big way, the balance of power within the libertarian movement will for the duration of the debate about where the borders are to be, shift away from "practical" politics and towards long-term idea spreading and long-term mental utopia building. The movement as a whole may suffer, but such groups as the Libertarian Alliance will loom larger within it. In times of social turmoil, little of immediate importance can be influenced; everyone is too caught up in the necessities of the struggle for their preferred national arrangement. But in the evening discussions around the camp fires, while the din of battle is temporarily stilled, the atmosphere of shared derangement can

entice weary minds in search of diversion towards the "fundamentals". Think of how socialism spread through the British army at the end of World War Two.

If Britain does break up, my Thatcherite friends in London believe that England, freed of its Celtic burdens, will leap ahead. I doubt this. The English still seem to want as much government as they think they can afford, Thatcherism having been, in practice and whatever the speeches said, the mere realisation that they can't have any more than that. The English wasting less on the Celts will merely mean them wasting more on other things. Only when the English decide to roll back their own state will they leap ahead.

I see the Celts changing far more. Insofar as they are now paupers trapped in a dependency culture, alternating between snarling at their English paymasters and bragging about how much better they would do if liberated from them, then independence will do them a power of good. Independent Celts will have to learn the lessons which in England we call Thatcherism, but which they now still refuse to learn. They will translate Thatcherism into language that is locally acceptable, and then do it, much as the English Labour Party is now translating Thatcherism into the language of "community" and continuing with it here in England. For the Scots and the Welsh to blame their miseries on the English will no longer be an option. Libertarianism (which is the claim that the anti-statist ideas which "Thatcherism" merely circulated should be acted upon) will thus thrive in places where now it struggles.

Such are my views on the future of the European and British Unions. Now back to sex, drugs, rock-and-roll and road pricing.

NOTES

1. This also explains why Thatcher was so feeble about Hong Kong. For as long as the Cold War lasted the priority was to keep Red China and Red Russia apart, hence all the Hong Kong concessions.
2. Polly Toynbee, writing in the *Radio Times* (23-29 September 1995) about a Radio 4 series by David Dimbleby on the future of the British Union, gives the figures as England 48 million, Scotland 5 million, Wales 3 million, and Northern Ireland 2 million.
3. Indeed they are. My sister and her husband recently moved to the bottom left hand end of Wales and are delighted by their new neighbours.
4. For the importance of optimism in starting wars (and of pessimism in stopping or preventing them) see Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, Macmillan, London, 1973; my paperback, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1977.
5. Robert Axelrod, in *The Evolution of Co-operation*, Basic Books, New York, 1984 (British paperback, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1990), emphasises the importance of *stability*. Any hint of a future cessation of a relationship, *however far into the future*, feeds back into the relationship and makes it uncooperative *now*. He puts into the language of game theory the widespread feeling that only if a national re-arrangement feels *completely* permanent can it work *at all*.
6. Carrying on from note 5 above, the reason I was and remain uneasy about Britain's huge investment in keeping the Falklands is that however long this may last, it surely can't last for ever. So, say I, let's get the surrender over with and let everyone get on with their lives. This is also the attitude that Enoch Powell attributes to successive British governments with regard to Northern Ireland. I recall a talk a few years ago by Powell repeatedly featuring the phrase "The settled determination of Her Majesty's Government" (in an unforgettably high-pitched monotone) to get shot of Northern Ireland.
7. Another source of discord might arise if the world ever decides to discuss the curious fact that Britain is the only country in the world with four different football teams trying to win the World Cup. How many red blooded English, Scots, Welsh or Irish would tolerate just the one British World Cup football team? Smashing up the Union might well be judged a very affordable price to pay to avoid that horror.
8. See Vince Miller, "America at Critical Crossroads", *Freedom Network News*, June/July 1994. *FNN* is the journal, edited by Miller, of the International Society for Individual Liberty, which also runs the annual Libertarian International gatherings. The latest *FNN* (October 1995) contains stuff about Waco, and especially about the Oklahoma bombing. Why was so much evidence (the bombed building itself!) destroyed within days of the explosion(s)? Why were the B(ureau of) A(lcohol) T(obacco and) F(irearms) people, supposedly the target being attacked, given the day (of the bombing) off? America is getting one story from its mainstream media and another from the Internet, and from right-wing radio jocks like Rush Limbaugh.
9. See Ian Angell, *The Information Revolution and the Death of the Nation State*, Political Notes No. 114, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1995.