

Letter From England

by Michael McMahon

The Hunt Is Up

On September 15, 2004, Tony Blair cried havoc and let slip the dogs of war. They were particularly ugly dogs. Ill-bred, untrained, snarling, spitting, hate-driven mongrels led the pack; half-witted lap-dogs yapped along behind, their pampered noses tight up against the backends of those in front—except when taken momentarily away to add a feeble, unintelligent yelp to the general hue and cry. There was never any chance that their quarry might get away, for the pursuit was not across open country but in a confined space: the debating chamber of the House of Commons, where resistance to the massive New Labour majority is as futile as the struggles of a bear tied to a stake.

That day, the object of their unequal pursuit was not a social evil, a burning injustice, a rotting immorality, or a threat to the freedom of the nation: It was a pastime, a sport. MP's voted by a majority of 339 to 155 to criminalize foxhunting, a pursuit that has, for centuries, brought color to the English landscape and kept down the population of a pest.

And yet, to listen to the speeches made by the abolitionists, you would think that foxhunting was as great an affront to humanity as cannibalism, human sacrifice, or slavery. MP's vied with one another

to produce superlatives adequate to the Great Cause on which they were embarked, but there are only so many ways of dressing up the words *barbaric* or *cruel*, and their efforts were no more imaginative than they were appropriate—for neither term can be properly applied to foxhunting, and they know it. The “cruelty” argument was lost long ago, when a committee appointed by Parliament to consider the case against hunting concluded that the killing of foxes by hounds could not be shown to involve more suffering than other methods, although it could be shown that it sometimes caused less. But Lord Burns’ report was not what the abolitionist majority wanted to hear, so they ignored it, and carried on ranting regardless.

So the madness barked that day was hypocritical, and the expressions of compassion false, for those MP's know their arguments are nonsense. And even if they were valid, there are many greater cruelties visited upon animals in contemporary Britain, and on an incomparably greater scale. If the abolitionists were genuinely concerned for the welfare of animals, they would be puffing themselves up to pontificate on factory farming, in which millions of creatures endure half-lives in little-ease cages so that their processed carcasses can be sold cheaply in supermarkets.

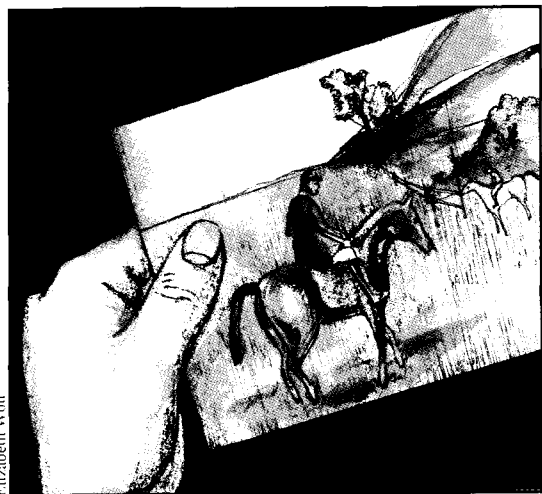
They aren't, however—because they are not motivated by any sympathy for or understanding of the fox; they are motivated by hatred of the huntsman. And now that a law to ban hunting is in the bag, that hatred is being openly expressed. Writing in the leftist *Guardian* and speaking on national radio the following day, the campaigning journalist George Monbiot acknowledged that hunting ranked “about 155th” on the list of animal-welfare issues demanding attention, but, in the struggle for a classless society, its importance was second only to the abolition of independent schools. In the same newspaper a few days later, Polly Toynbee acknowledged that “killing a few foxes is not more cruel than battery farming,” admitted that “liberals should always be wary of banning people from doing as they like,” and asked why “the left” is “unable to summon up a fraction of that anger about the things that really matter.” She then unwittingly answered her own

question by devoting most of the rest of her article to mocking a class that she identifies as “the countrysiders,” whose members “cannot and will not reconcile themselves to their new place on the far margins of national consciousness in a profoundly urban culture.”

The war that Tony Blair unleashed on September 15 is a war against anyone who dares to hold to the traditional values of the countryside, and it is a war motivated by ignorance, resentment, and spite. The New Britain that New Labour is striving to build is indeed “a profoundly urban culture,” in which the countryside is valued only as a leisure amenity to be roamed over by retired office workers in rustling nylon anoraks. The clever-dick denizens of latte-land that have divvied up political power between them chant the manipulative mantra of multiculturalism, but its all-embracing liberality does not extend to the hunting fraternity, because the culture of hunting is identified with a hated, alien class.

That class and culture has immediate and obvious connections with the past and is thus doubly damnable in Blair's Brave New Britain, which exults in such vacuous, transient modernity as the Millennium Dome, and where reminders of what have gone before are an embarrassment. Our capital city's iconic red Routemaster buses have been consigned to the scrap heap, and the same fate is planned for our countryside's men in red coats—not because either has ceased to perform a useful service, but because both are reminders of times when values held in common were different.

The bullies that run Britain burn to eradicate such vestiges of tradition. The closed-shop control-freaks think that to allow a man or woman to dress in hunting pink and mount a horse is to allow the perception that an equestrian class still exists, and that people might defer to it rather than to them. The fact that many hunting men and women are absolutely ordinary folk is irrelevant; it is what things look like that matters. It looked as if Saddam Hussein was harboring weapons of mass destruction, so we were justified in waging war on him, even if he wasn't; and the man in the red coat on a horse has to go, too, because he looks like a “toff”—even if he is a farm worker living in a tied cottage on one hundredth



of the salary earned by the prime minister's wife.

According to the rural affairs minister—the feeble figure at the dispatch box when those plucky protesters made it onto the floor of the Commons—these and any other arguments now count for nothing. The lower house has voted for the abolition of hunting, and that's that; in our democracy, it is now incumbent on the minority to accept the will of the majority. That the second chamber exists and has the right to delay, amend, or challenge the folly of the legislation is just as confidently dismissed. We have already been told that, if the lords get in the way, they will be pushed aside by the use of the 1911 Parliament Act—a measure created to resolve profound constitutional crises, not to force through measures banning a harmless sport. As one sneering New Labour MP put it, if the lords attempted to block the bill, they should be told to “go to hell”—an expression that under any speaker but the present one, would have earned a formal rebuke but which was allowed to pass. The speaker is a member of New Labour.

The minister's appeal to rural Britain to accept and obey a democratic decision made by Parliament is doubly disingenuous. New Labour promised a ban on fox-hunting in its manifesto for the 1997 election, in which it won a massive majority of parliamentary seats—but the votes of only 31 percent of the electorate. For every three that voted for Blair's reforming vision, seven voted for somebody else or no one at all. Even if every one of the voters that put Tony Blair in power did so in order that he ban foxhunting, the suggestion that such a law reflects the will of the people as a whole is an absurdity—particularly when surveys commissioned by pro-hunting groups record 59 percent opposition to a ban.

And yet banned it must be, in an act that defies reason, destroys civil liberties, abuses the British constitution, and demonstrates the ever-growing gulf between the created world and the artificially crafted cocoon of sanitized urban existence. It has come about because Britain is now ruled by the kind of government that Lord Hailsham warned of 30 years ago: an “elective dictatorship,” in which domination by one party leads to “potential for tyranny.” In this case, the tyranny is practiced not by the leader but by the mob. Tony Blair let it loose. He allowed a free vote knowing exactly what his howling majority would do with it and promised

that he would let nothing in the constitution prevent them having their way.

All this must seem rather puzzling in the United States of America, where, less than 18 months ago, Tony Blair told both houses of Congress that our two countries were fighting for “the inalienable right of humankind . . . to be free—free . . . to be you, so long as being you does not impair the freedom of others.”

No man has a window into Tony Blair's soul, so no man can confidently damn him for a liar, a fraud, or a hypocrite. But no man possessed of reason could deny that his behavior in the hunting debate makes him look like all three—and, in Blair's Britain, it is what things look like that counts.

Michael McMahon does not hunt, but he shoots. And shooting will be next.

Letter From Victoria

by Kevin Michael Grace

Just Win, Baby



In 1968, George Wallace said that there wasn't a “dime worth's of difference” between Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey. Implicit there was the suggestion that Americans were not satisfied with echoes and preferred choices. As it happens, Wallace was the last third-party presidential candidate to win Electoral College votes. Besides 14 percent of the popular vote, he took Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In 2000, the difference between George W. Bush and Al Gore was barely quantifiable. Yet, despite the Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan candidacies, the Republicans took over 96 percent of the popular vote. In 2004, they will likely top 98 percent. In America, third-party votes were once thought wasteful; now, they are sinful.

In Canada, we have many choices: third, fourth, even fifth parties. Forming new parties is easy and cheap, as there are strict limits on campaign spending. Any party that manages two percent of the vote gets taxpayer funding and free airtime. In the 2004 election, the two leading parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, together won less than two thirds of the vote and only 234 of the 308 seats.

Curiously, however, the leaden echo of political uniformity is as loud here as in America.

No, I haven't forgotten Canada's separatists, the Bloc Québécois, who rebounded to take 54 of Quebec's 75 seats. However, considering that Quebec independence can occur only as the result of a provincial election, the presence of separatist MP's in a federal assembly remains something of a mystery. Yes, the Bloc fights for ever more money and privileges for Quebec, but given that, for 34 of the last 36 years, Canada's prime ministers have been Quebecers (Pierre Trudeau, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin), its efforts in this respect appear somewhat otiose.

In all other respects, the Bloc is a typical Canadian party: “fiscally conservative, socially liberal.” That is, corporatism and globalism in economics and perpetual revolution in society: the destruction of the historical and traditional Canada and its replacement with the proposition nation set out in the 1982 Constitution and Charter of Rights.

One method used to accomplish this transformation is the election of a new people—a continuous onslaught of Third World immigrants combined with official multiculturalism, ethnic quotas, hate speech laws, etc. You might think that the Bloc, sworn as it is to the preservation of French culture, would oppose these policies. Separatist Premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the defeat of the 1995 separatism referendum (by a mere 50,000 votes) on “money and the ethnic vote.” The ethnic vote did split at least 9-1 against separation, while the Francophone majority (80 percent at the time) split 60-40 in favor. So Parizeau was correct, and, clearly, Canada's immigration policy is death to the separatist cause. The Bloc has never stopped apologizing for Parizeau, however, and it has become received wisdom that he must have been drunk that night. You don't need to be drunk to speak the truth in Canada, but it helps.

Canada already has the highest legal immigration rate in the world, but the Bloc believes it isn't high enough. Neither does the New Democratic Party, which purports to speak for the “working class.” I once pointed out to a leading NDP intellectual that Canada's immigration policy separates the working class from its work and constitutes an enormous transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. Judging by her astonishment, she had never this before. She called it a