



A nation of drunks at ease with itself

AS ANOTHER ENGLISH summer drizzles to a muggy close it is perhaps worth pondering upon the disgraceful behaviour of our fellow citizens abroad: screaming, cross dressing, stripping off in the street, brawling, and vomiting, attempting to clamber out of aeroplanes at 30,000 feet, beach fellatio, vodka bottle hurling, and abusing policemen. Apparently we export more drunk hooligans than any other country in Europe: another Gold for Team GB. Our youth go in search of the sun, sea, and sand and end up doing what they do downtown every weekend at home (apart from the beach fellatio, that is). This drunken carrying on provides excellent opportunities for us to engage in another pastime at which we excel: being embarrassed. When confronted by our awful compatriots abroad we can often be driven to extremes, like pretending to be Irish or even Americans rather than bear the shame of association with boorish Brits drinking themselves into oblivion; this queasiness can also extend to observing perfectly sober English people patronising those unfortunate enough to be foreigners.

Ever since we stopped ruling the world and started 'punching above our weight' we have been in trouble. Prosperity has made our drunks mobile and assertive. Once the preserve of the middle classes, our city centres have been invaded by mobs of clerks, secretaries, sales assistants, plumbers, warehousemen and white van drivers, at play. Airports, banks,

and even universities, have fallen prey to *hoi polloi*. Rowdy indiscipline is everywhere, eroding respect, threatening the very fabric of our national life.

One has to thank God for the Tories who are going to mend “our broken society”. They have noticed that as well as being drunken oafs, we’re also *fat* drunken oafs. Shadow health secretary, Andrew Lansley, believes that “there is no excuse for being obese”. Consequently, he is promising that the next Conservative government will promote healthy lifestyles by deploying role models and “social marketing techniques”. Lansley promises a blizzard of initiatives to get us running to work, eating our greens, and drinking moderately in nice family groups, just like Italians. We “must be positive – positive about the fun and benefits to be had from healthy living”. Oh yes, it will be as much fun as getting wasted on Bacardi Breezers, even more fun than fellatio on the beach!

I can’t wait to see the role models David Cameron comes up with. But while we’re waiting the Shackleton clan have stepped into the breach. In keeping with our tradition of celebrating disasters like the *Charge of the Light Brigade* or *Dunkirk*, the descendents of Ernest Shackleton are going to recreate their illustrious forebear’s Nimrod Expedition to the North Pole, which he embarked upon in 1908 after failing to win Dundee for the Liberal-Unionists. This modern team of City workers and advertising executives have unwisely, perhaps, decided to take the very same compass that Shackleton used when he failed to get to the Pole; he had to give up and go home. Because, of course, Shackleton did not die honourably like Laurence Oates and Captain Scott, he insisted on returning home to dear old Blighty to be knighted for having walked a long way over ice and snow.

Now while we’re still delirious about coming fourth in the medal table in Beijing it is worth remembering that our very own Tim Henman was also ranked fourth in the world of tennis. We should also take note of the startling news from Eurostat: sometime over the next fifty-two years there will be more Britons than there will

be Germans. The author of these population projections Konstantinos Giannakouris, did not dwell upon whether this would mean more Gold medals or more hooligans and beach fellatio, his interest is narrowly actuarial. But all the same there is no need for national malaise, or dwelling upon “our broken society”, there’ll be six or seven million more of us than there are of them. This will, no doubt, be a cause for celebration until some killjoy points out that we’ve cheated: becoming more numerous simply by *importing more foreigners* than the Germans, not by out-breeding them.

Progressive patriots, the descendents of Billy Bragg, no doubt, will then have to step into the fray and point out that we, even those of us from Barking, were all foreigners once, and it is our capacity for absorbing foreigners that makes Britain (and England in particular) such a great country. Forward thinking people will point out that the flag of St George is really a very nice flag for a Greek saint . . . or a Phoenician, or a Turk . . . and that, consequently, it’s all right to wave it when supporting England against Germany. In this way, fighting our tendency to grow beer bellies and brawl, with the use of appropriate role models and social marketing, we will overcome our anxiety concerning the decline of Christianity and good punctuation, and the seemingly ineradicable persistence of polyglot schools and ethnic drift.

We will arrive at a new stage of national development in which out of 40,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 25 only five will have heard of Lord Nelson, and 3 of them will think it was the name of an old pub rather than the name of the column in Trafalgar Square. Our national story will continue to be re-modelled by a combination of new generations and recent arrivals. Historians will offer an array of admirable events and personages for us to choose from. They might be rock stars, footballers, TV personalities, artists, entrepreneurs, or charity fundraisers. They are however, unlikely to be Arctic explorers, sixteenth-century monarchs, nineteenth-

century admirals or any of the awful descendents of the *House of Wettin*, better known as the family of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and, since 1917, as the Windsors of Windsor Castle. No, our role models then, in the days when we outnumber the Germans, will be wholesome, democratic, and at ease with themselves and the *abroad* from whence they will come.

Now, it is unclear whether we will still be the leading delinquent boozers of Europe. However, the weather will still be appalling and politicians will, no doubt, still be attempting to convince us that our society is broken because of our sterling capacity to continue to produce a veritable epidemic of fat drunks.