

EU May Spell End to Britain's Sovereignty

by Robert Stacy McCain

Americans who think their society is going to hell should pay attention to Great Britain, which is already there, according to Peter Hitchens.

Not only is Britain infested with many of the same problems — bad schools, rampant illegitimacy, political correctness — that worry conservatives in this country, but the nation of Shakespeare and Churchill may be about to vote itself out of existence.

"We are on the threshold of national abolition and the merger of Britain into the European Union," says Mr. Hitchens, a veteran journalist for the London *Daily Express*.

"The European Union actually has far more in common with the old U.S.S.R. than it does with the U.S.A.," he says. "Its so-called Parliament is much more like the Supreme Soviet than the U.S. Congress. And its Council of Ministers and the Commission, where power really lies, are not democratically accountable. And now it's launching a new currency

that seems to be modeled on the ruble."

The prospect that the United Kingdom might abandon its sovereignty to the European Union horrifies Mr. Hitchens and most other British conservatives, but they are nearly powerless to stop the process, he explains.

The prospect that the Tories can recapture Parliament from Tony Blair's Labor Party are "very Slim," says Mr. Hitchens, in Washington recently to promote his new book, *The Abolition of Britain: From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana*.

British conservatives "are not united on the cultural and social issues that I discuss in the book," he says. Among other things, they are divided about homosexual rights, feminism and drug policy. And some of the measures implemented in the 1980s and '90s by Tory Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major are disastrous, in Mr. Hitchens' view.

"Many of the worst changes in our education system were made under the Conservative government, and some of the worst attacks on the married family were made under the Conservative government, using the tax system to de-privilege marriage," he says.

American conservatives are both stronger and more interested in cultural issues than their British counterparts, Mr. Hitchens says.

"Here, there's a conservative counterculture that hits back ... But in Britain, the conservative culture is embattled and sort of complacent."

A spokesman for the British Embassy in Washington declined to comment on Mr. Hitchens' book.

The book — published in the United States by Encounter Books — was intended to shake British conservatives from their complacency. The book certainly outraged British liberals.

"Our leading liberal daily published no fewer than four hostile articles about it, which I took as a compliment," Mr. Hitchens says. "They saw it quite rightly as a well-targeted attack on everything they stand for. Until now, they've got away with the cultural assault because conservatives haven't been interested in it."

The book grew from an essay in which Mr. Hitchens compared the 1965 funeral of Winston Churchill — a solemn, dignified event — to the hysterical emotionalism of the 1997 funeral of Princess Diana. Though separated by little more than three decades, he says, the two events took place in "completely different countries. ... Britain had changed so much, it had become a foreign country."

The difference, he suggests, is that the left had "taken over cultural power largely unnoticed" in the past 30 years.

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Mr. Hitchens knows about the left. His older brother is left-wing journalist Christopher Hitchens.

"Neither of us is in the mainstream or ever will be," Peter Hitchens says. "What we both have is independence of mind, which means that you are very likely to dislike the same thing, especially fraudulence in politics, but you are not likely to like the same things. We both despise (President) Clinton. We both believe in principle — saying what you mean and meaning what you say. That's quite rare in modern politics."

The younger Mr. Hitchens was himself a left-winger until the 1980s, when British labor unions refused to support Lech Walesa and the Polish shipyard workers in their stand against the Soviet Union.

"It just seemed to me that social democracy had much more in common with anti-democratic Communism than it liked to admit, and I couldn't call myself a socialist any more after that," he says.

The Abolition of Britain explores what Mr. Hitchens calls his country's "cultural revolution" in entertainment, education, politics, language, manners and sexual morality. As in America, political correctness now reigns in Merrie Olde England.

"The liberal mind believes that a person's character can be judged by his opinions, and is fantastically intolerant," Mr. Hitchens says. "This is why political correctness is not a joke — I always get very irritated when people make fun of it. It's actually an elaborate system to make certain thoughts unthinkable by first making them unsayable, and it does this by

making opinions into a character issue."

"Therefore, if you oppose homosexual equality, you are a, quote, homophobe. If you don't buy the extreme feminist agenda, then you're a sexist."

Mr. Hitchens cites history textbooks as an example of how much Britain has changed.

"A nation is the sum of its memories," he says, explaining how patriotism has been purged from the British curriculum. "The teaching of history in British schools and colleges has been transformed into ... an entirely critical slandering of the past."

The egalitarian ideals of socialism now control how history is taught to British children, he says. "The whole idea of hierarchy ... is derided to make it seem a matter of guilt."

Education "was changed because the cultural left saw education as a social engineering project," Mr. Hitchens says. "They wanted to create a classless society in which people were brought up to believe in equality, and it didn't matter if they couldn't spell, read, write or count — which most them now can't. ...It's failing to teach people to spell, then telling them how good they are."

Conservatives typically retreat in the face of such socialist criticism, he says. "Conservatism often doesn't have any moral confidence in itself. It secretly accepts its opponents constant claims that there is something selfish and wicked about wealth and authority."

This is a major problem of Britain's Conservative Party,

according to Mr. Hitchens. "They don't really believe their own case. Persuading some conservatives that you don't have to be a socialist to be a good person is not an easy thing to do. This is my great advantage, that I've been a socialist and I know it's not true."

His book "shows how easy it is for an established civilization to overthrow itself by failing to care," Mr. Hitchens says. "It's a danger that faces the U.S. as much as Britain. I would hate to see what has happened to us happen to you."

The rise of the European Union is a threat to both Great Britain and the United States, he says. "I hope to alert American conservatives to the eminent creation of a potentially hostile new socialist superstate on the continent of Europe," Mr. Hitchens says.

"There's been a general feeling here that the European Union is in some way good for America — easier to deal with and understand than a lot of squabbling nations — and flattering because superficially it appears to be an imitation of the U.S.A. "Actually, it's driven by a profound jealousy of America, amounting in France, at least, to something like hostility." •