

"A Strategy for Southern Freedom"

By Ronald Kennedy

The results of the November elections, bolstered by recent polling data, reveal that most Americans have completely lost confidence in the federal government. They have come to the harsh and undeniable realization that Washington, though incompetent and ineffective, is extremely dangerous to life, liberty, and property. Unconstitutional government, about which Southerners long have voiced untiring concern, has finally moved "middle America" to action. But already, at nearly every turn, the mainstream Gingrich-Dole Republican leadership has moderated its stance and thereby has betrayed the radicalized electorate.

The Southern League offers a solution to the problem of big government -- Democratic or Republican -- run amok: a return to the traditional constitutional principles of state sovereignty, states' rights, and limited federal powers, as well as the rights of sovereign states to interpose themselves between their citizens and an abusive federal government or to secede from the Union if no other remedy is available. Under the compact of 1789, the sovereign state was the last bulwark protecting individual liberty from oppressive federal government. It is this bulwark that the Southern League intends to reestablish to contain a government that for the last 130 years has refused to limit its own power.

That the Founding Fathers intended to create a federal government with specific and limited powers is beyond question. Though they clearly expressed their fears of "consolidated" national government, there are those who deny the right of the people of the states to nullify blatantly unconstitutional federal laws or to secede from an oppressive central authority. The average Southerner is shocked when told that nullification and secession are legitimate means of protections from unwarranted federal intrusion. Many respond "that won't work, we've already tried it." Richard M. Weaver in *The Southern Tradition at Bay* noted that one of the South's greatest mistakes was to view the decision at Appomattox as irrevocable. As a result, Southerners tend to give ground before the onslaught of liberal (and Northern conservative) ideas and interests. But are their fears well grounded? Could the South try it again and succeed?

The threat of secession can certainly be used as an effective tool in forcing an abusive government to recognize and respect the rights of states or of peoples. The Scottish National Party recently used it to force the British Parliament to allocate a larger share of North Sea oil royalties to the Scottish people. In Quebec, the Canadian government was forced to make specific cultural concessions to that French-speaking province. Quebec's right to secede has been tacitly acknowledged by the Ottawa regime. Now, the far western province of British Columbia is talking secession. Lithuania's secession story is well known. For more than half a century the Lithuanian people lived under the yoke of the Soviet empire, but finally won their freedom without widespread bloodshed. In India, Gandhi used moral persuasion and non-violent action to persuade the British to grant independence to the subcontinent. These successful freedom movements found it unnecessary to appeal to force.

Irishman Charles Stewart Parnell's political revolt against British tyranny might well serve as an

example for future Southern action. Ireland's separation from the British Empire occasioned numerous armed insurrections, yet Parnell led a movement predicated on a political rather than a military challenge to Westminster. He initiated a policy of organized obstruction in Parliament, refusing an alliance with either English party. His objective was to control the balance of power. Thus every question became an Irish question and every debate was interrupted by arguments regarding the Irish issue. Irish grievances and the plight of the Emerald Isle were drummed into English ears day after day. Within a decade, Parnell controlled a faction of 86 MP's and after the election of 1885, he became the de facto political power broker between the two rival English parties. Parnell's ultimate failure to secure Home Rule for Ireland stemmed from a scandalous affair which discredited him politically, impaired his health, and shortened his life, and not from any inherent weaknesses in his Home Rule strategy. Had he remained at the helm of his party, Irish Home Rule would have been a reality by 1900.

Could such a strategy be made to work in the American South? Suppose the Southern League initiated a campaign advocating secession (or at least the threat thereof) as the best means of forcing the federal government to recognize, say, the Tenth Amendment. Such a move would put the issues of federalism and state sovereignty solidly before the public. Perhaps people then would demand that legislators begin to address these heretofore "untouchable" issues. We could sponsor political candidates who would challenge the voting records of both Republicans and Democrats in the South who have meekly acquiesced in busing, affirmative action, higher taxes, larger welfare benefits, and other increases in federal power. Their inability to defend the indefensible (even the Conservative Contract with America) would open the way for us to build our own faction in both the state legislatures and Congress and thus eventually control the balance of power between the two major parties. We could reintroduce "gridlock" as it was understood by the Parnellites.

How much support would there be for this strategy of defending the South? Recent polling data support the conclusion that Southerners still think of themselves as a people with a unique culture and civilization. Over seventy percent of us support the use of the battle flag in the overall designs of state flags (i.e., Mississippi and Georgia's). An Atlanta Constitution poll reveals that twenty percent of Southerners think the South would be better off as an independent nation. This is truly an amazing figure considering the endless barrage of Northern propaganda pounding the South. Twenty percent of the South (the states of the old Confederacy, excluding Florida) would be roughly 11.6 million people. We thus should have a strong base of support from which to begin building a political movement. The examples of Scotland, Quebec, British Columbia, Lithuania, India, and Ireland all suggest that peaceful secession is possible if it is pursued with a well-conceived and aggressive strategy. If we are able to get beyond "politics as usual," wean ourselves from supporting mainstream Democrats and Republicans, and secure ballot access, the Southern people could serve as a catalyst for the development of a force capable of overturning an entrenched, self-serving Establishment and reestablishing ordered liberty.

Deo Vindice!