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Murder Victim Wins the Dutch Elections

The first political murder in its democratic history shocked the Netherlands to the core. One week before the parliamentary elections, planned for 15 May 2002, the publicist and politician Pim Fortuyn, branded by the American and British press as the maverick of Dutch politics, was shot dead as he was leaving a radio station in Hilversum. A dramatic end for a politician who relied on the theatrical and strong statements on migrants, in particular Muslims.

The 54-year-old courted controversy with his robust style, being blunt, outspoken and flamboyant, an approach formerly unseen in Dutch politics. The former Marxist, sociology lecturer and newspaper columnist stood out with his shaven head and bright, colourful ties, and was also conspicuous, travelling around in a car with a driver and blacked-out windows. Proudly homosexual, he spoke out against immigration and high taxation and accused the Dutch government of poor performance', as CNN reported on 9 May. Fortuyn was not too tightly bound by the facts. Unemployment in the Netherlands is at its lowest in decades, the economy is in reasonably good shape, and

leading Dutch newspaper. On the same occasion he characterized Islam as a backward culture. Only weeks before the elections he created a new party, called the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). Fortuyn denied being another exponent of the extreme-right populist trend in Europe, insisting, and hating to be compared with the French Jean-Marie Le Pen or the Austrian Jörg Haider. 'My politics are multi-ethnic and certainly not racist', he once said, 'and I want to stop the influx of new immigrants. This way, we can give those who are already here the opportunity to fully integrate into our society.' However, he continued to question the ability of (Muslim) immigrants to assimilate into a liberal and sexually tolerant culture. In his view, immigration had to be curbed in order for the Netherlands' liberal values to survive.

pletely 'liveable'. It is true that there are waiting lists, but health care is of a high standard; education could be better, but compares excellently on an international scale; there are traffic jams, but it is notoriously difficult to control mobility. And yet, notwithstanding the fact that the Netherlands is pretty well placed in the welfare premier league, a large number of Dutch people have chosen to vote for a party with no agenda and no experience. Prime Minister Wim Kok, the most popular politician the Netherlands has ever known, and his Labour Party, which dominated politics over the last decade, were razed to the ground in a matter of a few months.

It seems that voting for populism is an expression of people's fear of losing their own roots, more than an expression of xenophobia. European integration and the introduction of the Euro have forced the voter out of his *vaterland* – a political term, bordering on *heimat*, one's own familiar environment. The coloured man next door is the most tangible and visible proof of globalization.

And this brings us to the question of whether the Netherlands is a multicultural society; or whether multiculturalism has become an alibi for not calling problems by their true name. If you take the mere presence of cultural minorities in the Netherlands, then the country is certainly multicultural, but there is no question of 'multicultural equality'. A multicultural society which is more of a 'salad bowl' than a 'melting pot' is little more than a multi-ethnic society. Multiculturalism demands a social cohesion which goes further than the individual's own group, and for which diverse groups take responsibility. It means a society in which newcomers are clearly called upon for their values, behaviour and organization. A society which asks them to contribute, but which also takes them seriously. The latter aspect means that their cultural capital should no longer be viewed as a candy store, where the others can pick and mix as they wish ('they have such delicious food'), but rather as a coherent, pluralist identity, which can contribute both individually and in a group context to the consolidation and resilience of the society. But it does mean that demands must be made on the newcomers. A dominant culture reinforces its fundamental values by absorbing new groups. It is weakened, however, by mechanisms of exclusion, and also because some newcomers are themselves only too glad to grasp at these mechanisms, precisely so as not to be called upon as citizens. In this way they can continue to remain in the comfort of victimization. A society which dares to change, dares to face its problems straight on. Who is going to tell the Netherlands – and Europe – that we cannot manage without immigrants? Economically, socially and culturally, we need these people to renew ourselves.

Soul-searching

We should stop trying to explain multicultural problems merely in terms of disfavoured positions. It is not acceptable that young Moroccans and Antilleans steal from old ladies because they apparently have such a rough life. Nor is it acceptable that Turks get into drug-dealing because they no longer have any prospects for the future. For as long as the Turkish, Moroccan, Antil-

lean, Surinamese, and others do not have the courage to raise their voices against the ills in their own communities, things look grim for their integration. The new Dutch citizens must not only deal with their external issues, but also the internal ones. The 'self-cleansing' potential of immigrant communities must increase, and that is primarily their own responsibility. Turks and Moroccans were all too ready to call on two particular policy-makers to justify their statements the moment they laid a finger on the sensitive spot of immigrant criminality. But in the meantime they have neglected to delve into the facts behind the statements issued by the two men.

The progressive members of Dutch society will have to think again about the issue of multiculturalism, and they should take to heart the words of William Pfaff (*International Herald Tribune*, 16 May 2002): 'In terms of the political system that a given community has adopted for itself, and the human values to which it is committed, it has every right to set terms on which it is prepared to welcome and harbor immigrants. Whatever the merits of other cultures, a nation has the right to give priority to its own historical culture and to its established values and practices. One can even argue that it has a duty to do this, since if it does not it may experience the violently obscurantist reaction against immigrants mobilized by the far right in France and other democracies, and it risks undermining its own values.'

An active re-evaluation of their own identity can also help immigrants in their own integration. For after all, identities can experience further development and renewal in their encounters with other strong identities. Muslims must also rise to the challenge of this confrontation. Moreover, along with individual Muslims, we must also naturalize Islam. Muslims must re-read the Qur'an in the light of their new country (the Netherlands). Dare to call yourself a 'Dutch Muslim'. For as long as we Muslims do not view ourselves as part of Dutch society, others will not do so either. To bring about this change in attitude Muslims need the help of society as a whole. Society must stop branding Islam as a heresy. Help Muslims to develop a Dutch version of their faith. This means that as well as a far-reaching social debate, multiculturalism (and please view culture as one of the mainsprings of society) requires, above all, a great, great deal of practical work.



Photo in commemoration of Pim Fortuyn, Rotterdam town hall, 6 May 2002.

the government was boring but nonetheless sound. Nevertheless, by way of an electoral agenda, he published a book entitled *The Shambles of Eight Years of Purple*. Purple stands for the government of the former Prime Minister Wim Kok, from the colours of the social democrats (red), left-wing liberals (green) and right-wing liberals (blue). Fortuyn's agenda is inconsistent, sometimes even self-contradictory, financially unsubstantiated, and unattainable in several respects. And yet more than 100,000 Dutch people bought the book (an unprecedented occurrence for an electoral agenda in the Netherlands, where they are normally distributed for free).

And the contradictions of Fortuyn went further still. A Moroccan imam had declared that homosexuals were worse than pigs. He had every right to say so, commented Fortuyn, since freedom of speech is a great good. And then in his second sentence came the punch line: 'but then, I know what I'm talking about, because I go to bed with Moroccan boys, and the imam probably doesn't.'

In November 2001 Fortuyn was elected leader of the new populist party *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Netherlands). In February 2002 he was expelled after calling for the abolition of article 1 of the Dutch Constitution – which bans discrimination – in a

Headless party

After his death, the List Pim Fortuyn made it into the new parliament with 26 seats (out of 150). At first the party, which for its governmental position relied entirely on the one man who headed its list, had difficulty coming to terms with its political success. The confusion was immediately noticeable in the first days of the cabinet discussions, when three LPF spokesmen gave completely contradictory accounts about a possible general pardon for resident illegal asylum-seekers. Apparently the future cabinet members had not quite mastered the distinctions between immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. After that a news blackout was declared to ensure that these beginners' blunders were not given too much media attention. The party is based on 'Pim's' philosophy, but in light of the contradictory conclusions which the different members draw from Fortuyn's publications and speeches, it is not entirely clear of what precisely his heritage consists. 'Pim would have wanted it that way' has already become proverbial.

But what is up with the Netherlands? People abroad have reacted with bewilderment to the country's political earthquake. With amazement, *The Economist* of 4 May confirmed that the Dutch welfare state is still perfectly intact. The Netherlands is com-