

The New Criterion

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Who's afraid of Geert Wilders?

by Michael Weiss

Charles Krauthammer and Bill Kristol have been making the rounds on television dismissing Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders as a "demagogue," which has got many conservatives abroad disgruntled and confused. Wilders, who was denied entry to the United Kingdom last year by the ever-fatuous (now sacked) Home Secretary Jacqui Smith on the grounds of his being a hate-figure and someone whose arrival might incite Muslims violence, has been idealized -- one hesitates to use the term "martyred" in this context -- by those on the right who see him as a platinum-dyed Cassandra of our time. Is Wilders not a minority voice challenging the suicidal Western passivity toward the "Islamization" of Europe? Are there not double standards in place which bar him, a mere speaker, essayist and documentarian, from travel to London whilst admitting radical imams who preach the murder of Jews, Christians and apostates and back up their preachings with material aid to jihadists?

There is merit to much of the right's defense of Wilders, but only up to a point. A fair summation of his willy-nilly politics is offered by this [profile](#) at the Swiss-German newspaper Neue Zürcher Zeitung (in an admittedly rough English translation):

His opinions do not arrange themselves into the left-right schema. The self-declared admirer of Ariel Sharon and Margaret Thatcher is opposed to big banks, the liberalization of the labor market and increasing the retirement age. He wants to close the borders... and is in agreement with the Social Democrats that the Netherlands has done enough in Afghanistan. At the same time, he

constantly insists on the universal validity of human rights, especially for women and homosexuals. Dutch culture must be protected from foreign influences. Subsidies for the welfare [state] and culture, however, should be abolished. Pensioners, animals, disabled persons and the police should receive more state funding.

A gay-friendly feminist isolationist who applauds free-market principles and the war on terror as waged by others in the Levant. This sounds like a postmodernist's retelling of *A Pilgrim's Progress*. But Wilders has also called for the banning of the Koran, a view I've heard euphemistically described as "provocative" but is more accurately described as idiotic and totalitarian. Here is where Krauthammer and Kristol have their well-founded grievances.

It is impossible to believe in the notion of Muslim-run democracy without also believing in Muslims who do not adhere to the orthodox tenets of their faith, much less the Salafist and Wahhabist renditions of it. Clearly sixty percent of adult Iraqis have demonstrated that they are quite comfortable with terrestrial legislation and the electoral process, a statistic that, according to Wilders' theological-political interpretation, is simply impossible. Also, neoconservatives shouldn't be the only ones to point out that it is inadvisable in a cold war against a toxic ideology that must be fought intellectually and culturally to advocate for the censorship of that ideology's core literature. Would Richard Pipes or Robert Conquest or George Kennan have ever suggested banning the Communist Manifesto or Lenin's *State and Revolution*? Of course they wouldn't. They'd have also apprehended that the Velvet Revolution and the Solidarity movement could not have been successful without the participation of socialists, trade unionists and variegated intellectuals who still found something worth salvaging in Marxism even after seventy years of failed Marxist experimentation.

The "Wilders phenomenon," as NZZ calls it, has been best expressed in Switzerland's recent decision, undertaken by plebiscite, to prohibit the further construction of minarets, those architecturally optional adornments which function as call-to-prayer towers on some mosques. While Switzerland has hundreds of mosques at present, it has only four minarets, making this constitutionally amended rule both otiose and harmful at the same time: it does nothing to stop Islamism but everything to alienate law-abiding Swiss Muslims. There's also a sad irony in the fact that this referendum was the joint yield of the Swiss People's Party and the Federal Democratic Union, or as I prefer to call them, the only xenophobic parties in Europe that must express themselves quadrilingually. Try stumping for bourgeois cultural "unity" in German, Italian, French and Romansche.

I don't blame Ayaan Hirsi Ali for never wanting to see a minaret again in her life. And I don't blame Wilders for worrying that his homeland is becoming a playground for messianic butchers whose mantra is, as the great Wole Soyinka aptly phrased, "I'm right, you're dead." (For what's it worth, I also agree with Soyinka that England is the cynosure for Islamic radicalization, much more so than Yemen or Nigeria or Pakistan.) But a distinction must be drawn between liberal necessity and illiberal excess. Wilders has thrown in his lot with excess. And while his travel

schedule should be as promiscuous as he likes, his allies and apologists might be a bit more discriminating.

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