UK government deports Dutch politician

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Anti-Muslim Dutch politician Geert Wilders was refused entry to the UK after landing at Heathrow Airport February 12. Wilders, leader of the far-right Freedom Party, had been invited to show his film "Fitna" in the House of Lords, Britain's upper chamber of parliament. The film describes the Koran as a "fascist book" and has passages from it mixed with images of suicide bombings and the 9/11 attacks. Wilders has demanded that the Muslim holy book be banned.

The film sparked protests in the Netherlands last year. Initially an MP for the conservative VVD party, Wilders now leads eight other Freedom Party parliamentarians. A staunch Roman Catholic who regularly equates Islam with Nazism, Wilders presents himself as the political heir to right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, the anti-Muslim Dutch politician murdered in 2002, and Theo van Gogh, a film-maker stabbed to death in Amsterdam after making a documentary denouncing Islam.

After his deportation, Wilders was told that he was banned from entering Britain on the grounds of public safety. A UK Home Office spokesperson stated, "The Government opposes extremism in all its forms. It will stop those who want to spread extremism, hatred and violent messages in our communities from coming to our country, and that was the driving force behind tighter rules on exclusions for unacceptable behaviour that the home secretary announced in October last year."

In her statement on the deportation, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith claimed that Wilders would, "pose a genuine, present and significantly serious threat to one of the fundamental interests of society."

"The secretary of state is satisfied that [Wilders's] statements about Muslims and their beliefs, as expressed in the film and elsewhere, would threaten community harmony and therefore public safety in the UK," the statement continued.

The Netherlands' Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen responded to the deportation, saying that it was "highly regrettable that a Dutch MP should be denied entry to another EU country."

Wilders is a racist provocateur, who is seeking to whip up anti-Muslim chauvinism. However, the deportation of Wilders by the UK government is an attack on, not a defence of, democratic rights, which has only aided Wilders in his self-promotion as a "martyr" for free speech against "Islamic fascism."

The Labour government's claim that Wilders's presence at the showing of the film is a threat to public order is absurd. The film, which can be seen on the internet, was shown despite the absence of Wilders. Hosted by two lords from the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a right-wing anti-European Union and anti-immigrant party, around 30 people attended the screening.

The Labour government has banned Wilders on the basis of his political views. That these views are extremely right-wing, racist and offensive is beyond question. But the government can and will use the same arguments now employed by Smith against the far-right against those it considers a genuine threat to the interests of the ruling class in future, including socialists, as it attempts to contain growing resistance to attacks on workers' jobs and living conditions.

The ban on Wilders undermines the right to freedom of movement in the European Union. He is subject to a legal challenge for inciting hatred and discriminating against Muslims in the Netherlands, but he has not been convicted of any criminal offence. As such, the British government has arrogated to itself the right to make arbitrary judgements as to who can enter or leave the country on grounds of "unacceptable behaviour," in contravention of basic democratic principles and

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possibly also of European law.

Last year government rules on immigration were tightened in October to permit the home secretary to stop people entering Britain if they are believed to be "a threat to national security, public order or the safety of UK citizens."

Smith stated that extremists will have to prove their innocence under new rules supposedly aimed at radical Islamists, neo-Nazis and violent animal rights activists. Hitherto the onus of proof of a threat rested with the government. Even before this move was announced in October, the government had banned 230 individuals.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband defended the government's decision on Wilders, stating, "We have a profound commitment to freedom of speech, but there is no freedom to cry ‘fire' in a crowded theatre and there is no freedom to stir up hate, religious and racial hatred, according to the laws of the land."

This is hypocritical bunk. Using the odious views of Wilders, a government soaked in blood from its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that has attacked fundamental civil liberties such as the right of habeas corpus and jury trial, has sought to cloak itself in the mantle of liberal defenders of Muslims. In fact, Wilders has visited Britain on several occasions, most recently having been to the House of Lords two weeks before the ban, with virtually no publicity or public reaction.

Wilders has shown his film in Denmark's parliament and he plans to show it in the Italian parliament and the US House of Representatives. Like the UK, all have been active participants in the US-led "war on terror" and the invasion and occupation of Iraq, with significant demonization of Muslims as the domestic corollary of this aggressive foreign policy.

Responding to the deportation, Labour peer Lord Ahmed told the BBC, "This man doesn't have any respect for law. He's doing this for publicity and he's seeking that and getting that."

But it is as a result of the deportation and ban from entering the UK that Wilders has received extraordinary publicity. Cast as a wronged individual, he is now being championed by other right-wing forces for their own purposes.

Writing in the *Daily Mail*, February 12, columnist Melanie Phillips stated that Wilders is a "controversial politician" speaking "unpalatable truths... If anyone had doubted the extent to which Britain has capitulated to Islamic terror, the banning of Geert Wilders should surely open their eyes."

Going on to equate the mass demonstrations in January against the Israeli assault against Gaza with "screaming support for Hamas," Phillips demanded to know why the government considered such demonstrations to be acceptable when the statements of Wilders are not.

Phillips also repeated a claim, denied by the peer, that Lord Ahmed threatened to bring "a force of 10,000 Muslims to lay siege to the Lords if Wilders was allowed to speak." The government, Phillips warns, "[T]akes no action against a Muslim peer who threatens mass intimidation of parliament, but it bans from the country a member of parliament of a European democracy who wishes to address the British Parliament on the threat to life and liberty in the west from religious fascism."

There is a political logic to the government's actions regarding Wilders that aids those like Phillips, who broadly support the views of Wilders and demand that the government use the prerogative to ban and deport individuals on the basis of their political views to put down anti-war or anti-government protests.

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