

The End of Tolerance

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An address by Rt Hon Winston Peters to members of Far North Grey Power, Thursday 28 July 2005, Far North Community Centre, Kaitaia, 2pm

What happens when tolerance collides head on with intolerance?

It's what we are witnessing first hand on our television screens.

London and Egypt now endure the horrific impact of terrorism, as Spain, Bali and New York did on that shocking day which is permanently imprinted on our consciousness – September 11, 2001.

These images beg the question – who could do such a thing?

And perhaps the more sobering thought: Could it happen here?

Most importantly, these images make us appreciate the freedoms we enjoy here in New Zealand.

Freedom of speech is one of our most cherished values.

It is at the heart of our democracy.

Well, we in New Zealand First think so.

The other political parties are more equivocal.

They pay lip service to freedom of speech.

To them it is nice in theory but they put some topics off limits.

And one area that all the other parties have trouble with is immigration.

On one level this is odd because clearly immigration is a very fundamental issue to the future of New Zealand.

After all we are a nation with many migrants.

The problem is that political correctness has contaminated immigration with all sorts of misleading ideas and fallacies.

So to talk about immigration is to be immediately branded as xenophobic and a bigot, or even Nazis as the drug soaked culture of the Greens would have it.

Despite this attempt to close down debate, New Zealand First has been the one party that is prepared to talk about the consequences and implications of immigration.

And our supporters know that we will not be silenced.

Because there is a very important link between immigration and freedom of speech.

The other parties cower from what it means to be losing tens of thousands of Kiwis and replacing them with people from an entirely different cultural background.

The obvious needs to be stated.

Many of the migrants coming to New Zealand come from societies that have no tradition of tolerance or freedom of speech.

On religious matters, they are unwilling to see the other person's point of view; not prepared to compromise or to be open to challenge or criticism.

The other parties peddle the old line when we raise concerns about the quality of immigration into New Zealand.

They say – ah yes – but New Zealand has always been a nation of immigrants. They miss a crucial point.

New Zealand has never been a nation of Islamic immigrants and in this connection the role of the bogus asylum seeker Ahmed Zaoui is instructive.

It is ironic that Zaoui has been lionized and fawned upon by many Christian religious groups in New Zealand.

They have all extolled his virtues as a man of faith, portraying him as the innocent victim of harsh and unfair treatment.

He must chuckle at the naiveté and innocence of his supporters who clearly have no understanding of radical Islam.

Anyone who has any knowledge of what was happening in Algeria because of religious fanaticism will know what devastation and mayhem it was causing.

And that is why three European countries kicked Zaoui out.

They want to keep that fanaticism out.

Zaoui was part of a party in Algeria which promoted radical Islam.

Its tactics were much like his approach here.

The party was called the FIS or the Islamic Front for Salvation.

The party had two leaders. A more moderate face in Shaykh Abbasi Madani, a Western-educated professor of comparative literature and a radical militant in Ali Benhadj, a high school teacher known for his fiery rhetoric and radical notions of the role of political Islam.

When a more restrained face was called for it was Madani who fronted the party, while Benhadj fronted the more militant actions of the party.

This two-faced approach is how radical Islam works – present the acceptable face to one audience and the militant face to another.

In New Zealand the Muslim community have been quick to show us their more moderate face, but as some media reports have shown, there is a militant underbelly here as well.

These two groups, the moderate and militant, fit hand and glove everywhere they exist.

Underneath it all the agenda is to promote fundamentalist Islam.

Indeed, these groups are like the mythical Hydra – a serpent underbelly with multiple heads capable of striking at any time and in any direction.

We have already seen media reports of an Auckland University student claiming that Muslim terror groups have sent representatives to New Zealand to preach their hate filled message.

The most disturbing aspect of this is the fact these messages were met with welcoming ears – that the message of terrorism, violence and intolerance was well received in some quarters.

Such pockets of discontent are what led to the London and other bombings – and it now seems they are here.

And nothing is in place to monitor these types of activities.

The same media report said they were free to spread their literature and preach their divisive hate filled message.

And before the Lilly livered liberal's start to jump and up down that we are targeting one group – it is worth noting that these so-called "preachers" were pitting one group of Muslims against another.

This is a truly awful brand of intolerance.

These views are based on Islamic fundamentalism which is a brand of religious intolerance that would brush our own 'tea and sympathy' brigade of do-gooders aside in an instant.

In many parts of the world the Christian faith is under direct threat from radical Islam – and that threat is taking an extreme form.

Like death, and there is nothing more extreme than that.

Yet the apologists for radical Islam, and they exist in this country, are prepared to overlook its virulent anti-Semitism.

Do we want that sort of prejudice in New Zealand?

Let us be clear – radical Islam is not a ‘live and let live’ religion.

We cannot take our tradition of toleration for granted when we are importing fanatics for whom that tradition is alien.

In New Zealand we need to take heed of the European experience.

In Europe, in countries like the Netherlands, France and Britain large Islamic communities have not integrated into the general society.

They have formed into enclaves that barely interact with the broader host society.

The devastating results are now plain for all to see and the implications of these ghettoized communities is now starkly confronting those societies.

And remember these countries are old and mature democracies –they have deep rooted traditions of freedom of speech and tolerance going back to Shakespeare and Voltaire.

But they are confronting an entirely new phenomenon.

They now have large communities that do not share the very basic ground rules of a democratic society.

The Dutch, for example, have a tradition of tolerance that is second to none.

They have been the European ‘poster boy’ for a multi-cultural society.

Sadly for them, it has not worked.

With an Islamic population of a million, the Dutch are finding out about the limits of tolerance.

Like New Zealanders, the Dutch hold that tolerance of other cultures, religions, and ways of life is a virtue – but what happens when tolerance itself becomes a form of indulgence?

What happens when tolerance allows other forms of extremism to take root in a society?

Because what is clear is that extremist theologies are a threat to free and democratic societies.

The murder in November 2004 of the controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh by an Islamic fanatic highlighted the fundamental conflict of values that now exists in the Netherlands.

One group of people, the Dutch built a society based on freedom of expression while the Islamic migrants brought their religious fanaticism and intolerance.

And in the light of the ‘War on Terror’, people are now asking where does the loyalty of those Islamic communities lie if it is not with the country that has adopted them?

In New Zealand First we say New Zealanders should look at the European experience and learn from it.

It would be willful stupidity to ignore the warnings of failed immigration policies elsewhere.

For example, one of the situations the Dutch face is the presence of a large minority that does not speak Dutch.

A shared language is the most obvious way of promoting cohesion and allowing access to full participation in the political, economic, and cultural life of a country.

It is reasonable to ask then why New Zealand has allowed large numbers of people to migrate here who do not speak English.

The last census revealed that about 300,000 residents of this country speak little or no English.

We should err on the side of caution in importing large numbers of people until they affirm their commitment to our values and standards.

New Zealand First’s interest is in migrants who are prepared to assimilate our values and become productive and loyal citizens.

We are not enamored with those who want to cling to alien values.

We need to spell out very clearly to prospective migrants the fundamental New Zealand values of:

freedom of speech.

freedom of association

freedom of religion

And that those who do not subscribe to them are not welcome.

Those who want to practice religious intolerance have no place in New Zealand.

The United States has often been described as the “melting pot”. When the melting pot worked the USA was the final point of destination and not a bolthole to somewhere else. Those early immigrants signed up to the USA and its values. Today the States are alarmed at the number who have recently come there and refuse to sign up, all the while shouting freedom of speech, expression and alternative action.

Well, to extend the metaphor, New Zealand is a very small mixing bowl.

We do not have a huge population – and we cannot afford to take risks on immigration.

There is still time to avoid the path to social disintegration that many European nations have taken.

Let me say this in conclusion.

New Zealand First has a clear position on immigration.

We are not opposed to it.

But we are working for an immigration policy that preserves New Zealand as a free and tolerant country.

And we say that to preserve our traditions of tolerance we need to be vigilant in excluding those who would undermine that tradition.

So we will work tirelessly to stop those people whose intolerance threatens New Zealand values from settling in our country.

Today we are sending copies of a letter to all of the leaders of Islamic groups in New Zealand calling on them to commit to naming any radicals, troublemakers and potential dangers to our society.

We want to know if they will let the authorities know who is sending money out of New Zealand to support these groups.

The reality is that it will not be the police or intelligence services which break these plotting webs, but the communities themselves.

While other parties cringe with political correctness when it comes to asking the tough questions we will not.

We must not be so naïve as to believe that it won't happen here.

If causing a little offence means we protect our borders, then so be it.

But at the end of the day we must face the reality – that a tolerant society can only emerge from those committed to those values.

There is no place for intolerance here.