

Step 9 – 04-05-09

The entire Netherlands reacted in shock last week to the Queen's Day attack (<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/04/30/netherlands.queen.car/index.html>) on the Dutch royal family. A security guard who had lost his job and could no longer make rent drove his car through the barriers, and tried to hit the bus containing the Dutch royal family. He did not succeed in his mission, but he did mow down 27 members of the crowd, six of whom died.

This was a terrible scene and it has evoked some strong reactions. After an event such as this, you can really see just how much tension exists in our current society and how this can out in such extreme actions as this.

The very first question people asked was 'what colour was the perpetrator's skin?' Could it have been a Muslim? Could this have been a terrorist act? Once the perpetrator proved to be white, forums on websites buzzed with the speculation that perhaps it could have been an animal activist. The Queen does wear fur after all, as well as allow hunting in the royal forest and is generally not considered as a patron of Dutch animal protection. When any great traumatic event occurs, people look to profile the perpetrator so they can immediately stigmatise one group of people.

This is simultaneously dangerous and educational. It fits nicely into existing prejudices. The FBI demonises Muslims and animal activists as the greatest dangers to democratic constitutional state. Just look at which two groups are first suspected when an event that beggars belief occurs.

The perpetrator proved in this case to be an out-of-work security guard without any apparent connections to a particular ideology, religion, politics or social group. People suggested that perhaps he was a divorced man who was no longer allowed to see his children, but these reports were not confirmed, nor did they lead to the stigmatisation of other men in that position.

Nor did public opinion swing towards suspicion towards security guards.

This would not have been the case had the perpetrator been Muslim or an activist. His actions would have been explained away by the fact that he belongs to a certain group, thereby causing irreparable damage to that group's image. It is therefore a good idea for nascent political parties to choose their alliances carefully. You must clearly delineate the choices you make to create a parliamentary, democratic path to change as it concerns animal rights. Those who break the law to not belong in a Party for the Animals because just such a party must always choose to respect the law or change it using legal avenues.

The only way I believe we can deviate from this is civil disobedience, that is to say to break the law with clear intent, to prove that the law as it stands does not work. Never do it on the sly, always make it clear who is breaking the law and why and always accept the consequences of your actions such as a legislative review of the violation. Examples of this sort of civil disobedience are letting animals that are to be culled in the name of disease prevention escape.

A Dutch nun, mother Maria did this during the bird flu scare in the Netherlands. She bore the responsibility for her actions to the public and in front of a judge. Her action had a clear purpose: to show that legislators were prepared to sacrifice healthy animals on the altar of the economy, which in its way is more deadly than an outbreak of the bird flu could ever have been.



Next week I will tell you more about how to conclude alliances with social groups and parties. The choices you make can break or break your new party!