

DUTCH COURAGE

Maverick gay leader Pim Fortuyn assassinated

by Bob Roehr and Rex Wockner

Pim Fortuyn, one of the world's most prominent gay political leaders, was assassinated May 6 near Amsterdam, the Netherlands, just nine days prior to national elections.

He had appeared on a radio program and was leaving the studio when an assailant pumped five bullets into his head and chest at close range. He died on the spot.

Police captured Volkert van der Graaf shortly after the shooting and charged him with murder. Published reports said the white 32-year-old is a Dutch national who is married, has a child and worked for Environmental Offensive, an animal rights and environmental group. According to media sources, van der Graaf might have been upset that Fortuyn favored lifting a ban on raising animals, such as mink, for their fur.

This was the first political assassination in modern history for the Netherlands. Gay leaders are in shock.

"It still feels totally unthinkable, and it feels like our democracy and our way of life have been deeply wounded," veteran Dutch activist Grada Schadee said. "I was much against his political ideas, but I deeply respected him on his openness [as a gay man]. He was so sharp in his debating techniques. He was serious yet also caused much laughter with the public."

Fortuyn's (pronounced fore-TOWN) meteoric political rise had been highly controversial.

Opponents tried to link his anti-Muslim immigrant position with the rise of neo-Nazi politicians in Austria and France, but he denied those associations. His nonideological popular appeal seemed more closely akin to that of Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura.

Fortuyn, 54, was a striking figure with his shaved head and well-tailored suits. He was a former professor of sociology, an ex-Marxist now with a libertarian bent, a political adviser and columnist before plunging into elective office, and a man of some wealth who strove to be the world's first openly gay prime minister.

He viewed the growing ghettos of Islamic fundamentalist immigrants as a threat to Dutch tolerance.

"How can you respect a culture in which the woman has to walk several steps behind her man, has to stay in the kitchen and keep her mouth shut?" he said in a recent interview. "For Muslims, as a homosexual, I am less than a pig. I am proud that in the Netherlands I can come out for my homosexuality, and I'd like to keep it that way."

Many media outlets had dubbed Fortuyn a right-winger, but he disputed that.

"I find it intolerable that I am being compared with statesmen such as [Joerg] Haider and [Jean-



"You either loved him or you hated him," said Hans Verhoeven, editor of the Amsterdam magazine *Gay & Night*

Marie] Le Pen," he said April 8, referring to right-wing politicians in Austria and France. "My policies are multiethnic and certainly not racist."

In the June issue of *Partisan Review*, U.S. journalist Bruce Bawer writes of those Islamic fundamentalist communities, drawing upon his experience living in Amsterdam and Norway with his lover. He explains how they cling to rural medieval traditions of Koran-based sexual morality where women are chattel and homo-

sexuals are put to death. "If fundamentalist Muslims in Europe do not carry out these punishments, it is not because they've advanced beyond such thinking but because they don't have the power," he says.

Bawer takes on those who defend fundamentalism in the name of tolerance. "Fundamentalist Islam is not a race or an ethnicity; it is an ideology. Its critics are not racists, any more than critics of Nazi or Stalinist ideology were racists." He sees it as a threat to concepts of equality and individual rights that are at the core of Western society.

Fortuyn's solution was for immigrants to learn to speak Dutch, accept secular law and integrate themselves into European society. Those who were not willing to do so would have to depart.

He also reflected the frustration of a working class that did not see the government bureaucracy as responsive to their needs and a population troubled by rising crime, which often seemed tied to immigrants. He rode those frustrations to political power, much as Ventura did four years ago.

His newly established Pim Fortuyn's List party garnered 35 percent of the vote and control of the municipal government earlier this year in Rotterdam, the nation's second largest city. Polls had his candidates drawing 15 percent to 20 percent of the vote in national elections, which would have given them a leading role in forming the next government, as the Dutch political system is fragmented into several small parties, and coalition governments are the rule.

The election will go forward. It is difficult to predict the effect Fortuyn's assassination will have on its outcome. **JR**

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