

Step 7 - 30-03-09

One of the accusations you will continually face as a new party for the animals is that you don't distance yourself from violent animal activism. Not because this is the case, but because people expect you to distance yourself from them on all levels. Because animal activists are the new usual suspects, considered subversive, undermining of authority or socially disruptive. Our senator, Niko Koffeman, wrote an op-ed for the Dutch daily newspaper TROUW that I would like to share with you:

People's behaviour towards animals is extreme. They fully knowingly surrender the bodies of animals to science, they use animals as living, moving targets, they murder millions of day-old chicks just because they are male, they force-feed geese until their livers swell up to ten times their normal size, they torture bulls as a form of public entertainment. As the world's most cattle-dense country, the Netherlands hardly has clean hands either. Although you could not tell by looking at our pastures, our cattle-rearing industry is responsible for the deaths of 500 million animals each year.

More and more people are no longer willing to accept this situation. They realize that, for an animal, its life has just as much value as the life of a person has for the individual concerned. The Netherlands has more than 4 million members of animal, nature and environmental organisations, and is the first country in the world to launch a party for the animals which now has 20 elected representatives.

Yet at the same time, the Netherlands' parliament also permits eels to be driven to extinction in cold blood. All because of the short-term interests of fishermen and fans of eel sandwiches. And so tensions arise, as well as accusations of extremism, a word that is always very tied into the perceptions of the person using it. For some, 'extreme' is setting up a party that does not focus on people, but on animals, nature and the environment.

For others, 'extreme' is allowing farmers to use so many antibiotics that public health is put at risk as a result of massive MRSA infections among people and animals. 'Extreme' is allowing the meat industry to sell products infected with salmonella and campylobacter, which causes the deaths of hundreds and the illness of thousands more each year. Or to prepare for the H5N1 pandemic, predicted by the WHO to affect millions, with only a scenario involving the "elbow bump" greeting to counter infection. We know from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency that the costs of urgently needed climate control could be 50-70% lower if we seriously attempted to reduce meat consumption. Yet the government's attitude is one of "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die".

It is this that motivates a very small percentage of the 4 million animal, nature and environmental activists to break the law. Anyone who reads General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) reports on the subject will conclude that these activists represent no more than a tiny fraction of people who fight for the rights of animals, nature and the environment. Their law-breaking must be condemned and our legal system does provide the government with ample instruments to tackle the issue. This has nothing to do with terrorism, and any comparison to terrorism is an obvious exaggeration to anyone, including those that reject any form of violence, such as the Party for the Animals.

To paraphrase Tertullianus, in the blood of laboratory animals, food animals and production animals lie the seeds of activism.

People who stand up for the rights of animals are not criminals. And they should not be criminalized having to sign contracts in which they declare their allegiance to the law.

And neither should they be constantly harassed with the question: "and what do you think of radical animal activism."

Just as representatives of the Liberal Party in the Netherlands are not asked to contractually distance themselves from the culture of greed at banks and insurance companies, those who support animal rights should not be distrusted out of hand because of their sympathy for animals.

The job of the government is track down and try suspected felons and not to engage in imputation or insinuation against anyone.

Niko Koffeman, Party for the Animals senator in the Dutch Upper House of Parliament.