Heirs to Fortuyn?
Europe's turn to the right.

By BRUCE BAWER

When the New Left emerged in the 1960s, something else was born that would mark American elites for decades thereafter: the notion that social-democratic Western Europe was far superior to the capitalist United States. Pity the poor American professor whose every junket to a European academic conference was marred by his continental colleagues' sneering over cocktails about his nation's shame du jour—Vietnam, Watergate, Iraq—or about American racism, capital punishment or health care. For much of the American left, Western Europe was nothing less than an abstract symbol of progressive utopia.
[City Journal]

This rosy view was never accurate, of course. Europe's socialized health care was blighted by outrageous (and sometimes deadly) waiting lists and rationing, to name just one example. To name another: Timbro, a Swedish think tank, found in 2004 that Sweden was poorer than all but five U.S. states and Denmark poorer than all but nine. But in recent years, something has happened to complicate the left's fanciful picture even further: Western European voters' widespread reaction against social democracy.

The shift has two principal, and related, causes. The more significant one is that over the past three decades, social-democratic Europe's political, cultural, academic and media elites have presided over, and vigorously defended, a vast wave of immigration from the Muslim world—the largest such influx in human history. According to Foreign Affairs, Muslims in Western Europe numbered between 15 million and 20 million in 2005. One source estimates that Britain's Muslim population rose from about 82,000 in 1961 to 553,000 in 1981 to two million in 2000—a demographic change roughly representative of Western Europe as a whole during that period. According to the London Times, the number of Muslims in the U.K. climbed by half a million between 2004 and 2008 alone —a rate of growth 10 times that of the rest of the country's population.

Yet instead of encouraging these immigrants to integrate and become part of their new societies, Western Europe's governments have allowed them to form self-segregating parallel societies run more or less according to Shariah. Many of the residents of these patriarchal enclaves subsist on government benefits, speak the language of their adopted country poorly or not at all, despise pluralistic democracy, look forward to Europe's incorporation into the House of Islam, and support —at least in spirit—terrorism against the West. A 2006 Sunday Telegraph poll, for example, showed that 40% of British Muslims wanted Shariah in Britain, 14% approved of attacks on Danish embassies in retribution for the famous Mohammed cartoons, 13% supported violence against those who insulted Islam, and 20% sympathized with the July 2005 London bombers.

Too often, such attitudes find their way into practice. Ubiquitous youth gangs, contemptuous of infidels, have made European cities increasingly dangerous for non-Muslims—especially women, Jews and gays. In 2001, 65% of rapes in Norway were committed by what the country's police call "non-Western" men—a category consisting overwhelmingly of Muslims, who make up just 2% of that country's population. In 2005, 82% of crimes in Copenhagen were committed by members of immigrant groups, the majority of them Muslims.

Non-Muslims aren't the only targets of Muslim violence. A mountain of evidence suggests that the rates of domestic abuse in these enclaves are astronomical. In Germany, reports Der Spiegel, "a

disproportionately high percentage of women who flee to women's shelters are Muslim"; in 2006, 56% of the women at Norwegian shelters were of foreign origin; Deborah Scroggins wrote in The Nation in 2005 that "Muslims make up only 5.5 percent of the Dutch population, but they account for more than half the women in battered women's shelters." Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-Dutch advocate for democracy and women's rights, would no doubt say far more than half: When she was working with women in Dutch shelters, she writes, "there were hardly any white women" in them, "only women from Morocco, from Turkey, from Afghanistan—Muslim countries—alongside some Hindu women from Surinam." When she and filmmaker Theo van Gogh tried to highlight the mistreatment of women under Islam in the 2004 film "Submission: Part I," he was killed by a young Muslim extremist.

More and more Western Europeans, recognizing the threat to their safety and way of life, have turned their backs on the establishment, which has done little or nothing to address these problems, and begun voting for parties—some relatively new, and all considered right-wing—that have dared to speak up about them. One measure of the dimensions of this shift: Owing to the rise in gay-bashings by Muslim youths, Dutch gays—who 10 years ago constituted a reliable left-wing voting bloc—now support conservative parties by a nearly 2-to-1 margin.

The other major reason for the turn against the left is economic. Western Europeans have long paid sky-high taxes for a social safety net that seems increasingly not worth the price. These taxes have slowed economic growth. Timbro's Johnny Munkhammar noted in 2005 that Sweden, for instance, which in the first half of the 20th century had the world's second-highest growth rate, had since fallen to No. 14, owing to enormous tax hikes.

Government revenues in Western Europe go largely to support the unemployed, thus discouraging work. Over the last decade or so, the overall unemployment rate in the EU 15—that is, Western Europe—has hovered at about 2.5 to 3 points higher than in the United States. In France and Germany, it has ascended into the double digits (and that was before the global financial crisis that began in 2008). Western Europe's rate of long-term unemployment has consistently been several times higher than America's, denoting the presence of a sizable minority either permanently jobless or working off the books, often for family businesses, while collecting unemployment benefits.

These two factors—immigration and the economy—are intimately connected. For while some immigrant groups in Europe, such as Hindus and East Asians, enjoy relatively low unemployment rates and healthy incomes, the largest immigrant group, Muslims, has become such a burden that governments have made extensive cutbacks in public services in order to keep up with welfare payments—closing clinics and emergency rooms, reducing staff in hospitals, cutting police and military spending, eliminating course offerings at public universities, and so on. According to a report issued last year by the think tank Contribuables Associés, immigration reduces France's economic growth by two-thirds. In 2002, economist Lars Jansson estimated that immigration cost Swedish taxpayers about $27 billion annually and that fully 74% of immigrant-group members in Sweden lived off the taxpayers. And in 2006, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise warned that Norway's petroleum fund—which contains the massive profits from North Sea oil that have made the nation rich—could wind up drained to cover outlays to immigrants. (This in a country whose roads, as a report last year indicated, are in worse shape than Albania's.)

The past few decades in Europe have made three things crystal-clear. First, social-democratic welfare systems work best, to the extent they do work, in ethnically and culturally homogeneous (and preferably small) nations whose citizens, viewing one another as members of an extended family, are loath to exploit government provisions for the needy. Second, the best way to destroy such welfare systems is to take in large numbers of immigrants from poor, oppressive and corruption-ridden societies, whose rule of the road is to grab everything you can get your hands on.

And third, the system will be wiped out even faster if many of those immigrants are fundamentalist Muslims who view bankrupting the West as a contribution to jihad. Add to all this the growing power of an unelected European Union bureaucracy that has encouraged Muslim immigration and taken steps to punish criticism of it—criminalizing "incitement of racism, xenophobia or hatred against a racial, ethnic or religious group" in 2007, for example—and you can start to understand why Western Europeans who prize their freedoms are resisting the so-called leadership of their see-no-evil elites.

The November 2001 general election in Denmark is the most decisive—and successful—rejection so far of a Western European left-wing establishment. Alarmed by a widely publicized study showing that their country would have a Muslim majority within 60 years if immigration rates didn't change, Danish voters sent the Social Democrats down to defeat for the first time since 1924. The new Liberal-Conservative governing coalition, which voters returned to power in 2005, has introduced the Continent's most sweeping immigration and integration reforms, including rules designed to thwart the near-universal practice in Europe's Muslim communities of marrying one's children off to cousins abroad so that they, too, may immigrate to the West. As a result, the flow of new Muslim arrivals has decreased significantly, allowing the government to focus resources on the immense challenge of trying to integrate Muslims already living in Denmark. Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen also defended free speech strongly during the 2006 Muhammad cartoon crisis, standing firm while Muslims around the world raged against Denmark and Western leaders begged him to back down.

The rightward shifts in Europe most widely reported in the U.S. have been those in Germany, where Angela Merkel became chancellor in 2005, and in France, where Nicolas Sarkozy took over the presidency in 2007. Those developments, as well as the third term that Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi won in 2008, were grounded largely in public recognition of the need for economic liberalization. By French standards, Mr. Sarkozy's campaign rhetoric was nothing less than stunning: arguing that "the revolution of 1968"—a sacred event for the left-wing French establishment—had not liberated France but "brought us into moral decline," Mr. Sarkozy insisted that if the French wanted growth, they needed to spend less time in cafés and more on the job.

In brave little Denmark's backyard, two more countries have moved to the right. In Norway, the Progress Party—which the political and media establishment has smeared for a generation as racist and fiscally unserious—now rivals the Labor Party, architect of the country's welfare state, thanks to voter concerns about immigration and public services. Though the financial crisis had caused support for the Progress Party to slip a bit, recent Muslim riots and debates about hijab have sent poll numbers skyward again, and the party seems a good bet to come out on top in next September's parliamentary elections—though it will be in trouble if, as appears likely, other right-of-center parties refuse to join a Progress Party-led coalition. And in Sweden, perhaps the ultimate symbol of social democracy, voters motivated largely by concerns over unemployment and other economic issues unseated the long-powerful Social Democratic Party in 2006. In its place they installed a center-right coalition led by Fredrik Reinfeldt's Moderates, who promised to help businesses and lower taxes.

But demonstrating a distinctively European species of schizophrenia, many on both the right and the left, while acknowledging the need for welfare-state reorganization, have ultimately resisted it—as if the philosophical leap required were simply too great. In Western Europe, after all, even the mainstream right tends to be statist. "The concept of the cradle-to-grave welfare state is so deeply embedded in the Danish psyche that even the conservatives don't dare touch it," noted NPR correspondent Sylvia Poggioli in 2006. Ivo H. Daalder made the same point in a 2007 Brookings Institution report, writing that "when one talks about the right in Europe, you are talking about a very state interventionist political class that still believes that the government has a fundamental

role in guiding how the economy is supposed to be run."

It's no surprise, then, that Europe's new leaders have made relatively modest economic changes. True, Mr. Sarkozy has raised state employees' retirement age (precipitating a transport strike) and ended France's 35-hour workweek. But from the start, Social Democrats in Germany, whom Ms. Merkel's slim margin of victory forced her to accept as coalition partners, have limited her ability to implement serious economic reforms. In April 2008, Judy Dempsey noted in the International Herald Tribune not only that the coalition had "run its course" but that Merkel herself had been "forced to move leftward," hiking pensions and "rolling back radical labor reforms, ironically introduced by her Social Democratic predecessor, Gerhard Schröder, which were designed to bring older people back to work by reducing social welfare payments." And with the onset of the economic crisis, notes German author Henryk Broder, "there is even an ongoing discussion about Enteignung [expropriation] and Verstaatlichung [nationalization], which was unthinkable a year ago."

As for Sweden, shortly after the 2006 victory, BusinessWeek writers Stanley Reed and Ariane Sains paraphrased Mr. Reinfeldt as saying that his "idea isn't to dismantle the cherished Swedish welfare state. . . . That would be too controversial." Mr. Reinfeldt's one major innovation has been a "partially successful" effort "to force people off the welfare rolls and into the labor market," University of Lund social thinker Jonathan Friedman tells me. Mr. Reinfeldt's economic plan has also involved increased privatization, somewhat lower taxes, and encouragement of entrepreneurship—all policies, as Mr. Friedman notes, "that were started by the previous government."

Meanwhile, with the notable exception of Denmark, the new nonsocialist governments have left their predecessors' disastrous immigration and integration policies almost entirely intact. Mr. Sarkozy's defiant campaign rhetoric about Muslim rioters in the suburbs raised hopes for major change. But though he announced last July that illegal immigration would be a major focus during France's EU presidency, he has done little even about legal immigration, most of which, in Western Europe, involves the importation of new spouses in arranged, usually forced, marriages. Mr. Sarkozy seems to believe that job creation and other economic measures will resolve France's colossal integration challenges.

Ms. Merkel, meanwhile, shone briefly when she insisted that the Deutsche Oper proceed with a 2006 production of Mozart's "Idomeneo" that Muslim leaders condemned as offensive. But the heavily hyped "national integration plan" that she introduced the following year rested on such half-measures as an increase in the number of government-sponsored German classes, an effort to encourage immigrants to play sports, and (incredibly) a program that addressed wife-beating—permitted by the Koran and extremely common in Muslim communities—by offering advice on the Internet. Ms. Merkel actually described these pathetic gestures as a "milestone"; Mr. Broder, more accurately, calls them "make-believe action," another way to avoid conflicts in her coalition.

In Sweden, says Mr. Friedman, Mr. Reinfeldt has pursued "a variant of politics as usual" on immigration and integration. Lars Hedegaard, president of the International Free Press Society, insists that Swedish efforts to encourage employment "will undoubtedly prove ineffective over the long haul" because "the fundamental problem is demographics. Sweden remains Europe's main importer of Muslim immigrants who are unwilling to assimilate and whose imams order them to detest Swedish culture. So long as the current government is unwilling to tackle this basic problem, everything else will be for naught."

Mr. Sarkozy has undertaken one high-profile initiative, which seems disastrously ill-conceived in a uniquely Gallic way: developing closer, more formal ties between France and the Arab countries

from which it receives most of its immigrants. At one point, he even spoke of a "Mediterranean Union." Haaretz writer Michalis Firillas summed up Mr. Sarkozy's plan tidily in January 2008: "For some, his Mediterranean Union is a containment policy. For others it is neocolonial. But there is also a sense that Sarkozy is betting on French grandeur, that aura of greatness, to bridge the disparate Mediterranean with a new and serious political body. Unfortunately, he may find that there are others with similar visions of grandeur, from Ankara to Cairo, from Jerusalem to Tangiers, who have their own Mediterranean visions." Indeed, Mr. Sarkozy's scheme appears to be a continuation of his left-wing predecessors' efforts to bring the Arab world under French influence—efforts that ended up subsidizing the colonization of French suburbs by Arabs who now consider them part of the House of Islam.

Not only has Europe's move to the right not always had concrete results; it also hasn't been an across-the-board phenomenon. In Britain, the Tories seem poised to resume power after Labour's long, slow decline. Yet the ideological gap between the parties has narrowed so much in recent years, and the leadership vacuum is so pronounced, that it's difficult to imagine a Tory takeover's having an impact remotely comparable with that of Margaret Thatcher's 1979 election. On the contrary, conservative columnist Peter Hitchens recently charged that nowadays "you cannot become the government unless you bow to the views of the 'Centre-Left' media elite, especially the broadcast media elite." That elite, alas—as vividly demonstrated last year by the archbishop of Canterbury's speech contemplating the legitimacy of Shariah in parts of Britain—is bent on appeasing fundamentalist Islam.

And Spain, in a move widely seen as capitulating to Islamists, responded to the March 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid by voting for José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's Socialist Party, which had vowed to withdraw troops from Iraq immediately. Mr. Zapatero narrowly won re-election last year. As libertarian columnist Antonio Golmar explains, the centrist consensus established after King Juan Carlos's introduction of democracy in the 1970s has been shattered by Mr. Zapatero's hard-left initiatives. These include the Historical Memory Law—which portrays leftist mass murderers during the Spanish civil war as heroic freedom fighters, while stigmatizing many of their innocent victims as fascists—and the introduction in all schools of "citizenship" classes that teach scorn for capitalism and representative democracy.

In response, some Spaniards have lurched rightward toward the national-Catholic, protofascist ideology of Franco's time and become increasingly vocal within the conservative Partido Popular. Consequently, says Mr. Golmar, "moderates in Spain are trapped between a far-left administration and their cronies and the revival of the extreme right disguised in conservative and even libertarian clothing." While America struggles to move beyond the antagonisms of the 1960s, then, Spain has entered an ideological battlefield reminiscent of the years preceding its civil war of the late 1930s. There seems little room for those who loathe both the neo-Marxists and the neoreactionaries.

The situation in Spain is a reminder that not all "right turns" are created equal. If the Danes have affirmed individual liberty, human rights, sexual equality, the rule of law, and freedom of speech and religion, some Western Europeans have reacted to the mindless multiculturalism of their socialist leaders by embracing alternatives that seem uncomfortably close to fascism. Consider Austria's recently deceased Jörg Haider, who belittled the Holocaust, honored Waffen-SS veterans, and found things to praise about Nazism. In 2000, his Freedom Party became part of a coalition government, leading the rest of the EU to isolate Austria diplomatically for a time, and last September his new party, the Alliance for the Future of Austria, won 11% of the vote in parliamentary elections. Or take Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has called the Holocaust "a detail in the history of World War II" and advocated the forced quarantining of people who test HIV-positive—and whose far-right National Front came out on top in the first round of voting for the French presidency in 2002. The British National Party (BNP), which has a whites-only membership policy

and has flatly denied the Holocaust, won more than 5% of the vote in London's last mayoral election. Then there's Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), formerly Vlaams Bloc, whose leaders have a regrettable tendency to be caught on film singing Nazi songs and buying Nazi books. In 2007, it won 5 out of 40 seats in the Belgian Senate.

For establishment politicians, journalists and academics, these parties serve an exceedingly useful purpose: Their existence makes it easy to tar any nonsocialist party with the fascist brush—labeling it racist and xenophobic, equating its leaders with the likes of Mr. Le Pen and Haider, and stigmatizing its supporters. No party in Europe has been subjected to more unfair attacks than Norway's Progress Party, whose extraordinary electoral successes have outraged that country's socialist elite. Like other parties on what we may call Europe's respectable right, the Progress Party has expressly distanced itself from parties like the National Front and Vlaams Belang. Yet despite these disavowals, American media have routinely echoed the leftist establishment's unjust calumnies.

A seminal example was a March 2002 New York Times article by Marlise Simons about Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch politician who, according to the article's headline, was "Proudly Gay, and Marching the Dutch to the Right." Though Ms. Simons acknowledged that Fortuyn criticized Islam because it offered "no equality for men and women and because . . . the imams here preach in offensive terms about gays," she nonetheless echoed the Dutch establishment's characterization of him as a menace to Dutch values, making sure to mention that he had been widely compared with Mussolini and Haider. A few weeks later, Fortuyn was murdered by an environmental fanatic taken in by similar claptrap.

The same kind of incendiary rhetoric that Dutch journalists used against Fortuyn can now be seen in American left-wing coverage of any nonsocialist European party or politician. Typical was Gary Younge's 2007 piece in The Nation: "In Europe, It's the Old Right That's Full of Hate." According to Younge, "the primary threat to democracy in Europe is not 'Islamofascism' . . . but plain old fascism. The kind whereby mostly white Europeans take to the streets to terrorize minorities." This was nonsense on a breathtaking scale: Though the rise of parties like the BNP is indeed distressing, the truth remains that for every act of anti-Muslim violence in Europe, there are—to make an exceedingly conservative guess—100 acts of Muslim-on-infidel violence.

Who will win the war for the soul of Western Europe? The Islamofascists and their multiculturalist appeasers, many of whom seem to believe that their job is not to defend democracy but to help make the transition to Shariah as smooth as possible? The nativist cryptofascists? Or Pim Fortuyn's freedom-loving heirs? Interestingly, while Western Europeans have been heading in one direction, Americans have chosen to go the other way, replacing a president more loathed by the European elite than any in history with a man whom the same elite has celebrated to an unprecedented degree, often depicting his election as a mystical act of atonement for all of America's past sins, real or imagined.

The final question, then, is whether the Western European left's condescension toward America, and the American left's habit of holding Western Europe up as a socialist paradise, can survive the combination of Europe's right turn and the elevation of Barack Obama. Stir in the international financial crisis, which will almost certainly cause a socioeconomic upheaval of untold dimensions in both hemispheres, and it seems reasonable to expect that the old pattern may be broken for good. Meaning that American professors will have a far less stressful time of it at European cocktail parties—at least until Shariah comes along and forbids cocktails entirely.

Mr. Bawer is the author of the upcoming "Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom." He blogs at brucebawer.com.

Copyright 2008 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved