

The Intellectual Temptation: Dangerous Ideas in Politics

Frits Bolkestein



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... an absorbing (and beautifully written) study that deserves a very wide audience - Joshua Muravchik "... an erudite account of where [the] vision [of individual liberty] comes from, why some ideologues set themselves against it, and how our contemporaries have ceased to treasure it" - Christopher Caldwell "Bolkestein exposes today's fashionable, yet dangerous ideas, doing a great service not only to Europe but indeed to the whole of Western civilization" - Ayaan Hirsi Ali The dangers of intellectuals and their ideas in politics have rarely been written about by politicians themselves. This is not surprising, for few politicians are up to the task. However, Frits Bolkestein is a notable exception, bringing rare if not unique qualifi cations to this examination. Not only has he held national and international offi ce in Europe, but he has also studied, read, taught and published broadly. The thesis of The Intellectual Temptation is simple but penetrating: intellectuals' ideas are problematic as political ideas because they are often neither derived from nor falsifi able by experience. These ideas are frequently dreams attempting to become reality through power politics. There is also a cultural problem. Intellectuals are pack animals, looking to one another for approval. This affects the quality of their ideas, as they are susceptible to fashionable ideology and group pressure frequently attracted to ideas that are appealing rather than sound. Very few of them are brave enough to stand against the prevailing orthodoxy. Beginning with a history of ideology, Bolkestein traces a nearly 300 year trend of bad ideas making worse politics, sometimes disastrously so. From his own experience he offers a vision of a politics of prudence, proper pragmatism and Classicism as a way out of the "intellectual temptation" that we have fallen under.

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