



National Review's Kevin Williamson Compares Immigration Restriction to Totalitarianism

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Kevin Williamson recently published an article at [National Review Online](#) which may be very charitably described as poorly reasoned and poorly written. Somehow Williamson manages to turn an opinion piece attacking Sen. Bernie Sanders as a “socialist grifter” into an attack on immigration restriction. According to Williamson’s logic, because Sanders once recognized that guest worker programs hurt the wage and job prospects of American workers the junior Senator from Vermont is no different than President Trump, and by association anyone who wants to restrict immigration is as awful as Williamson believes Sanders and Trump to be.

There is no dearth of uninformed and unfounded attacks on those who advocate for lower immigration levels. It’s one of the ways to succeed in journalism without really trying. Normally it wouldn’t be worth engaging the arguments Williamson puts forward, as they are self-refuting, but it is necessary to do so here for two reasons. One, he takes a pot-shot at NumbersUSA President Roy Beck, and, two, his work appears in National Review, which for some reason continues to give a prominent platform to a man who believes that “dysfunctional, downscale communities” that have been devastated by the failed economic policies of our political elite “deserve to die.”

This is from Williamson’s February 20th misanalysis U.S. of immigration politics:

To the very limited extent that Senator Sanders is a man of ideas, he is — not that he’d ever admit it — a man of Donald Trump’s ideas. Who does this sound like? “I don’t know why we need millions of people to be coming into this country as guest workers who will work for lower wages than American workers and drive wages down even lower than they are now.” President Trump? Yes, indeed, but it is Senator Sanders. Representative Steve King of Iowa, immigration restrictionists such as Roy Beck of NumbersUSA, and President Trump himself all have found occasion to praise Senator Sanders for his beady-eyed, zero-sum view of immigration.

No matter what you may think about Sen. Sanders, President Trump, Rep. Steve King, or Roy Beck (a great guy by the way), to lump them all together when it comes to their views on immigration policy is just plain silly. And beady-eyed or not, restrictionists don’t view immigration as “zero-sum.” That’s only promulgated by Williamson and a couple of his fellow travelers at the Cato Institute. Any degree of difference is lost on them, as is any possibility that there can ever be a downside to mass immigration. Their worldview does not permit it.

Anyone who has even a passing familiarity with Williamson’s work knows, again being very charitable, that substantive analysis is not his forte. The complexities of immigration politics confound him, and so, when confronted with one of the great political challenges of our age, he

reverts to what is his forte -- hurling meaningless insults at those with whom he disagrees. Whether he calls one a fascist or a communist matters not. They're all socialists, as is anyone who wants to restrict immigration.

Perhaps Williamson believes that by calling Sanders "Comrade Muppet" his readers will overlook the fact that Williamson is building his case on a Sanders quote from 2007, well before the Senator embraced a much different immigration platform.

In 2013, Sanders voted for the Gang of Eight bill, which would have doubled the number of guest workers admitted into the United States every year, along with doubling annual legal immigration and amnestying 12 million plus illegal aliens. There was his much-publicized statement in 2015 about open borders being a "Koch brothers thing," but Sanders has abandoned his previous position on immigration restrictions. That's why NumbersUSA once praised his support for worker protections, and why we pointed out that he flip-flopped on the issue. Just last week Sanders announced he has hired a twice-arrested illegal alien as a press secretary.

The irony here is that Sanders is now much closer to Williamson's views on immigration -- which is basically the Koch brother's position -- than he is to NumbersUSA. Despite this, Williamson accuses Sanders of appropriating the rhetoric of "alt-right knuckleheads...denouncing those who take a more liberal view of immigration as advocates of 'open borders' — a position held by approximately zero figures in American public life." We'll again point out here that Sanders now supports a massive increase in immigration as we take up Williamson's contention that no one in American public life supports open borders.

Putting aside the three opinion pieces calling for open borders the The New York Times ran last month, there is Hillary Clinton in 2013 telling an audience of bankers she dreams of "common market with open trade and open borders." And until his retirement as House Speaker in January, open-borders advocate Paul Ryan was hailed as the intellectual leader of the Republican Party. Those two certainly qualify as being "in American public life."

Beyond that, Williamson himself is arguing for open borders, even if he does not acknowledge, or even realize, that is what he is doing.

Notice he doesn't attack immigration reduction, but immigration restriction, two very qualitatively and quantitatively different things. And he uses no qualifier. Williamson doesn't oppose a more restrictive immigration policy, he opposes all immigration restrictions. One might chalk this up to his propensity to conflate terms and concepts, and there is probably some truth to this, as evidenced by how Williamson structures his arguments. But the one thing Williamson makes crystal clear is that any restriction on immigration is, at best, unintelligent.

The most striking thing about Williamson's view is his insistence that nothing should ever come before "private business interests," not the national interest nor the well-being of local communities. Williamson denounces nationalism, by which he mean the preference for one's own country over that of another, and places Sanders, Trump, Franklin and Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Elizabeth Warren, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Benito Mussolini in the same basket of deplorable nationalism, which he then equates with "corporatism" (he clearly has no understanding of that term), that inevitably results in moving toward the "Marxist-Leninist model of outright appropriation of the means of production."

This is obviously patently absurd, as Williamson contends that any national government which seeks to promote the general welfare through restrictions on private business interests is on the path to totalitarianism. In our specific case, Americans who wish to limit the ability of employers to bring in foreign workers are, in effect, channeling Mussolini, Marx, and Lenin.

One wonders what informs Williamson's thinking on these matters, but he writes as one whose take on Adam Smith is that the free market consists of the invisible hand giving everyone the middle finger.

I would urge Williamson to read some of the classics of political and economy theory (definitely not Jonah Goldberg's Liberal Fascism, which seems to be where his grasp of political theory begins and ends). Or to read his colleagues at National Review who write sensibly on immigration, particularly his editor, Rich Lowry, Mark Krikorian, Victor Davis Hanson, or Michael Brendan Dougherty. Or his former colleague, Reihan Salam. It is curious Williamson chose not to acknowledge or engage any of them on their support for immigration restrictions.

One must suppose the "brilliance" of Williamson is he has figured out that these days invective is generally valued higher than intelligent discourse, and that one may promulgate political opinions totally divorced from what is or what has ever been as long as one's writing has sufficient zing.

Yet, it is unlikely Williamson is ever going to convince any informed reader to come over to his side. His work is red meat for those who conceive modern conservatism as a fixation on GDP growth combined with utter disdain for working-class Americans.

And, so, Williamson will continue to lose the political argument to Trump and Sanders, and just about everyone else. For politics is, at least for now, still about winning elections.

Which sounds more appealing to voters: "I will put the interests of my fellow citizens first and foremost and I will protect the dignity of the American worker" or "You losers deserve to die"?

Careful now. If you favor the first statement you just might be a communist, or a fascist, or a nationalist, or a corporatist, or a liberal, or a boy named Sue. Anything but that!