

Socialism 101: Finland

The *Christian Science Monitor* is running a series on the economies of Europe. Don't miss today's *piece* by Peter Ford on the Finnish "social model."

Some fast facts:

- Ranked #1 for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders (U.S.? #22)
- Ranked #2 (after Sweden) in investment in research and development (R&D)
- Free university education
- Subsidized day care
- Most competitive economy in the world by World Economic Forum ranking
- Among the world's most egalitarian societies

As is typical of anything you may learn of the successes of socialism through the U.S. media, the author—either by editorial requirement or acculturation—needed to find reasons why socialism may work in Finland but not here. Or why it might not be desirable.

There were slim pickings. Ford managed to come up with homogeneity, high taxes, a high suicide rate and an overcrowded healthcare system.

Let's take a brief look at these—

Homogeneity

The largest minority in Finland is Swedish, which accounts for 6% of the population. (They all look the same to me.) While this has the undoubted advantage of reducing intrasocietal tribalism, I have to wonder if one of the advantages of this homogeneity (which you will never see mentioned) is that it makes subversion of the society by capitalists and autocrats more difficult.

The Finns managed to maintain their neutrality and independence during the Cold War despite sitting atop the Soviet Union. But the ways of capitalism are far less benign than most Americans can bring themselves to imagine. Western oligarchies will spare no expense to make any form of socialism appear "unworkable," and in all likelihood, some such effort is being made with the Finns.

Meanwhile, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, who's trying to use Venezuela's oil money to bring education and health care to the Venezuelans over the objections of You Know Who, must contend with made-in-America efforts at subversion.¹

High taxes

Since the Finns are among the world's best educated, it wouldn't occur to them that they are going to receive social services for free. But since they also live in a democracy, they

are free to insist that all citizens have the basic requisites of life. The capitalist myth is that if you must share your wealth with your fellow citizens, you will just take your toys and go home. No innovation. No invention. Stagnation, stagnation, stagnation.

This has certainly not proven to be the case with the Finns. In fact, I can't imagine that what the Finns have discovered would not apply in just about any society—

High suicide rate

I believe it was the Swedes who invented this. I recall that back in the 60s everybody was worried about anomie, which is an affliction of the comfortable. (Did anomie kill Christine Onassis? we wonder.) Nowadays we don't have time to suffer from anomie; we're too busy scrambling for our daily bread.

Socialism is not a finished work. At best it is a system of satisfying only the first two levels—physiological needs and safety needs—of what Abraham Maslow identified as a hierarchy of needs.² There is no reason to think, however, that success may not be had in satisfying higher level needs if we put our collective minds to the task.

Overcrowded health-care system

I have always thought this was the strangest objection to socialized medicine, but it plays well in a society based on greed. By not treating people, as is our wont in the U.S., we have certainly solved the problem of overcrowding. Meanwhile it may be hoped that the Finns will devote even more resources to caring for themselves.
