

Opinion

If it's freedom and success 'they' hate, why aren't they attacking Norway?

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September 21, 2005—Most Americans like to believe they live in the best country in the world. They don't. According to the United Nations Human Development Report for 2005, Norway is number one. Why? It's a welfare state.

There is a pleasant economic equality enjoyed by the Norwegian polity. No one is too poor; no one is too rich. In fact, great wealth is regarded as some sort of social disease. Third oil exporter after Saudi Arabia and Russia, Norway is tucking away a national fund of over \$180 billion for when the oil runs out, guaranteeing each family the quaint sum of \$22,000 per year—in addition to guaranteed health care, education, pensions, and paid maternity leaves and vacations to die for! True, a glass of beer will cost you \$8, but the waiter makes a good salary.

Americans like to think that terrorists attack them because they are rich, free, and number one. Not true. They don't attack Norway—another benefit for keeping to your neck out of the woods, minding your own business, taking care of your own people, and planning for tomorrow—not to mention preventing your government from being drowned in the bathtub by snake-oil salesmen posing as public servants, so it can't help when an iceberg hits a fjord, or equivalent natural disaster. Norwegians seem proud of having government on their backs! Not too heavy when they can request and obtain any government record they please for their review! They are also disgustingly healthy. Must be the lack of stress. Thirty million Americans are on anti-depressants. You wonder why.

Lots of Americans like to think they have the most generous government in the world. Again, not true. The US is the stingiest donor of foreign aid among rich nations. Current foreign development aid is up from \$52.3 billion to \$57 billion per year but quite short of the \$100 billion needed to meet the goals of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for 2015, which pledged to reduce poverty and inequality in a Declaration of Millennium Goals signed by 175 UN member nations in 2000. Rich nations contribute 0.25 percent of their GDP (gross domestic product); the US contributes 0.1 percent. Among Ambassador John Bolton's 700 amendments to "reform" the UN, his wish list includes gutting the MDG.

Americans like to think they are spreading freedom and democracy around the world. You guessed it. Not true. The war in Iraq has cost \$200 billion so far, but the Iraqi justice minister can't prosecute foreign fighters on Iraqi soil who detain and manhandle Iraqi citizens without judicial procedure. As many as 10,000 Iraqis are in detention in grossly abusive locations, of which Abu Ghraib is only the most notorious. Foreign fighters, of course, are the multinational forces, made up of an effective coalition of two—Britain and the US. Iraqi women have come under Sharia law, after 50 years of sharing legal equality with men. Think about that, as a test of spreading democracy! Iraqi farmers are required to buy seeds from corporations after five millennia of giving the world the genius of their wisdom and experimentation. Now, by virtue of Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority "intellectual property" law, included in the current Iraqi constitution, Iraqi farmers have no right to plant seeds not licensed by the state.

Then, too, Americans like to think their government cares about the poor, the unfortunate, and the stricken. They mention the Marshall Plan every chance they get. They forget the Marshall Plan was a very shrewd investment, which made America rich in the post-war. With the \$200 billion spent on Iraq since 2003, their government could have done the following: for \$100 billion, it could have single-handedly donated the money to the UN toward reducing the steady rate of death of 1,200 children per hour, the single cause of which is the pathology of poverty. That's equivalent to three tsunamis per month, every month! There would have been money left over to provide education for every child on the globe, reducing child mortality and infectious diseases. With the other \$100 billion it could have fixed the levees in New Orleans, and prepared shelters stocked with food, water and medicines, staffed by doctors and public safety experts to protect its own citizens at home. That's what a government that cares for the poor might do.

Last week, President Bush spoke at the UN summit, held primarily to discuss the progress of the MDG. In the shadow of the UN Human Development Report—which reported that the world's richest 500 individuals have an income greater than the world's poorest 416 million; that 54 nations are poorer now than they were in 1990; that life expectancy has fallen in 34 countries; that the populations of 21 countries are hungrier now than they were in 1990; that in 14 countries more children are dying before the age of five; that primary school enrollment is declining in 12 nations—the leader of the free world urged the United Nations to support the American people's march to spread democracy because this march "is an exciting opportunity" for the world. If this miserable record of widening divide between rich and poor is a march to spread democracy, I'd like to know what its opposite looks like!

So, judging by their response, did the 150 heads of state, who listened with deafening silence to the US bromides and cliches! Members of Bush's entourage solemnly and reportedly declared to anyone who cared to listen that it was traditional among members of this type of audience not to interrupt orators with applause, but "traditional" or not, the wonder of it was they didn't break out in laughter—or tears! When Bush demanded that member nations approve his little democratizing venture in Iraq, the silence became ominous. Perhaps the little man had not heard of the day's death toll from Iraq? Over 150 people had been killed in Baghdad, most of them bricklayers waiting on line to apply for jobs, in a country with over 60 percent unemployment.

Most Americans (55 percent) do not believe, according to the Gallup International Voice of the People Poll (2005), that their country is governed by the will of the people. In this they are in tune with the rest of the world. Across the planet, 65 percent of the people believe their governments do not express their will. In Europe the percentage is 82. But unlike Europe where the percentage is dismal, US people are second to Africa in believing that more power should be given to religious leaders! Ironically, for a country babbling of family values, and uniquely for the globe, US people cite the family as the least influential institution in their decision-making considerations. In the US, the number of people who say a soldier or policeman has the most influence over their decisions is well above global average. You could say this is either a militarized mentality or a scared one. Self-determination, it ain't.

So, Americans, whose politicians congratulate themselves in exporting democracy, have little confidence in enjoying it at home, while a dangerous number of them crave theocracy. I would say this is a people in crisis. And until they can sort it all out, they had better start thinking that "the rich will do anything for the poor, except get off their backs," according to the unmentionable political philosopher, who the likes of George Bush would rightly define as his scourge. For George Bush and the ruling elites the goal is clear: to maintain the status quo. It is time for ordinary Americans to decide what's theirs.

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