

“Sweden hardly a socialist nightmare”

Written by Johan Nylander

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Despite the socialistic rumor, Sweden is an ultra-capitalistic country conducting more liberal reforms than the US, American critics say.



[Communist May Day demonstration at Medborgarplatsen, Stockholm 2006]

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American president Barack Obama is being accused of turning the US into Sweden as he tries to rein in Wall Street and raise taxes on the wealthy. But Sweden is far from being a socialistic country, an American newspaper writes. Rather, they see Sweden as ultra-capitalistic.

As the global economic downturn has worsened, a growing number of economists and spin-doctors have urged Obama to take influence from the Swedish social-liberal model with high taxes to support the welfare society. Not surprisingly, Obama’s recent tax change proposals were quickly accused of being “socialistic”.

“Do we really want to change America into Sweden?” conservative commentator Bill O’Reilly asked his television viewers.

But is Sweden really such a hardcore socialistic state as some Americans think? The daily newspaper Christian Science Monitor thinks not.

For example, last month Sweden’s country’s center-right government began selling off state-owned pharmacies. It’s part of an ambitious program of liberal economic reforms started three years ago.

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Some 80 percent of all new schools are privately run. Also the railroads and the subway system are private.

“State pensions, schools, healthcare, public transport, and post offices have been fully or partly privatized over the last decade, making Sweden one of the most free market orientated economies in the world”, the newspaper writes.

The same month, the Swedish Unemployment Insurance Board revealed that almost half of the country’s jobless didn’t have full unemployment benefits as a result of raised membership fees.

“To speak of Sweden as socialist today is pretty far off the mark,” said Brian Palmer, professor of anthropology at Sweden’s Uppsala University and former lecturer at Harvard University.

“Neoliberal reforms have gone much further here in some sectors than in the US. Sweden has become a sort of laboratory for privatization in a way that the Heritage Foundation or the American Enterprise Institute could only dream of.”

The stereotypical image of Sweden is in many respects due to a best-selling book by Marquis Childs in the 1930s where the country’s political system was described as a middle way between capitalism and socialism.

“Eisenhower also helped to propagate a number of myths in the ’60s when he said that Swedes were ‘addicted to sin, socialism, and suicide,’ ” said Brian Palmer to the Christian Science Monitor.