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### Perfect Prisons, in America?

In Michael Moore's film *Where to Invade Next*, he visits different countries around Europe with the purpose of collecting the best ideas from those countries that could be applied in the U.S. throughout Moore's "Invasion" of Norway we learn about the Norwegian prison system and the philosophy behind it. Norwegian prisons sometimes are referred to as "Perfect Prisons." They are built on the idea of rehab and second chances, where the biggest punishment is taking away inmate's freedom, not their rights and comfort. During Moore's trip to Norway, prisoners are seen doing different types of activities such as cooking, singing and studying. In doing so, they have access to many dangerous objects like knives, glass, electric tools and weights. Inmates and guards showed a lot of positive energy around prisons regardless of high level criminals having access to dangerous tools, it was never used by an inmate to harm another. Norwegian guards in the film speak about the success of humane treatment of inmates, and how their prison system has been proven to be effective by reducing the rate of recidivism and crime in the country. Moore's documentary caused a lot of Americans to question the effectiveness of the American prison system. Some believe adapting the Norwegian system is the solution to reduce recidivism, crime and prison violence. Now should the U.S apply Norwegian prison system as it is? There are a lot of factors comes in play

that allows the Norwegian prisons to be successful, factors that the U.S doesn't have.

Therefore, I don't think the Norwegian prison system should be applied in the U.S, because it will cause more harm than good.

It may sound awkward to claim that such a great prison system would cause a negative effect if the U.S decides to adapt it. But we need to look at all the puzzle pieces that makes up the picture of the perfect prison. Early in the documentary *Where to Invade Next* Michael Moore says, "My mission is to pick up the flower, not the weeds." However, there are some types of flowers that can only be found in certain regions of the world due to the environment that allows them to grow. And if you move those flowers out of their environment, they'll end up dead. One of the major negative impacts the Norwegian prison system could cause if its applied in the U.S, is the reaction and backlash from the taxpayers. Social welfare, healthcare system and the education system in the U.S are some of the things that are highly criticized by the citizens, we even see that criticism in Moore's film *Where to Invade Next*. During his journey in France and Finland, he shows what services regarding welfare and education they provide for their people using their tax money in comparison to the United States. In Norway, they have a welfare state system, where high tax rates are drawn from the rich and used to provide a lot of different services for people with lower status. In the U.S, the past few years prisons spending has been outpacing spending on education. Currently, we have 18 states where taxpayer's money is spent more on prisons than colleges according to a Washington Post article that was referring a studying about spending on education vs prisons. Back to the Norwegian welfare system, that state welfare system leaves the government with a high budget to try out new ways to enhance the services they provide for their people. One of those

services is the prison system. In Norway the government spends up to 93,000\$ per prisoner per year compared to 32,000\$ in the U.S according to a New York Times article. And based on a statistic by prisonstudies.org, Norway's prison population is around 3900, and the population in American prisons is around 2.1 million. So, with the welfare, healthcare and education systems the united states already provide for its lower-class citizens, I don't see Americans accepting to pay taxes that goes for the luxury of over 2.1 million inmates who committed crimes against them. It would be unfair for students, homeless people and others of lower status to put the priority of inmates ahead of theirs.

A big backlash from the people may not sound the biggest negative impact out there to think twice about adapting the Norwegian prison system. However, when there is a possibility of more people getting hurt in prisons, we need to think more before we claim applying certain system would be a good idea. The United States is one of the most diverse countries in the world, diverse cultures have a lot of positive and bright aspects, however, there is a dark aspect to it as well. More diverse areas seem to have more conflicts and a higher violence rate due to the different ideas and perspectives each culture has. For example, in Arabic culture, a lot of people are still ok with beating women, there is even things such as "Honor Killing" that still exists! When Arabs who hold that mentality move to the U.S and try to apply it, it leads them to prison. Now according to CIA.gov, Norwegians makes up 83% of Norway's population, other Europeans makes up around 8% and the rest come from mixed cultures. Another issue diverse places have, is each culture tries to prove their superiority which sometimes leads into violent conflicts. According to bop.gov 15% of inmates in American prisons are from countries in south and central America, and about 5% comes from other regions around the world, in Norway

according to Statistisk Sentralbyra, 87% of inmates comes from Europe, similar culture and a similar mindset that makes it less likely for them to start conflicts between each other. As small as Norway's prison population is, it did witness a rise from 2007 to 2011/12, which is the same time Norway had a rise in their immigration rate. Its also a period in which Norway has gained a lot of it's Dutch inmates. With the provided example and statistics, it makes it easier to see how the U.S builds a huge diverse prison population because of certain flaws in different cultures in the U.S. It also makes it easier to understand why the U.S can't adapt the Norwegian system, especially when they have the highest inmate population in the world.

Since the Norwegian prison system is something the U.S never tried or experienced with before, and immigration and different cultures being a sensitive topic currently. Some people might argue that diverse populations and the behavior of different people isn't what determines if a certain system works or not. It's choosing the correct system and attempting it. Since raising prison violence in a country with a diverse culture is my main issue with the Norwegian system. And as I mentioned, it's something the U.S never experimented with. I'll have to refer briefly to another big topic in the U.S regarding violence and different cultures to respond to that argument. That topic would be laws regarding guns. We look at countries like Mexico and El Salvador where some of the strictest gun laws takes place, yet Mexico is ranked in the top 10 countries when it comes to homicide rate. And El Salvador is known as "The Homicide Capital of The World" due to the gang wars. Then we look at countries like Switzerland where they have one of the simplest gun laws and ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> when it comes to gun ownership according to CNN, yet they have a murder rate that is almost Zero. Going back to prisons in the U.S, where high percentage of inmates are associated with gang organizations

and drug traffickers, which is something Norway lacks. It would make adapting the Norwegian prison system nearly impossible. Because it would turn prisons in the U.S into open season for gangs and groups of the same nationalities to hunt each other attempting to take over. Looking at things from the perspective of the huge population of the U.S, the different cultures and the flaws of each makes it a bit easier to see or have a second thought on why adapting the Norwegian prison system isn't the best idea.

America without a doubt has its flaws and issues that needs to be fixed regarding the prison system in order to reduce the rate of recidivism and crime. but those are things that could be fixed by learning from some Europeans to use community service more as a punishment, decriminalize drugs, lower sentencing, not strip prisoners from their rights and accepting them as human beings when they get out. Not by applying a system that will create more flaws. Since applying the Norwegian prison system in the U.S would require a huge amount of Tax money to be spent on providing better lives for inmates. It would be much better investment to have that money go towards college students, kid's education, homeless people and providing better services to Americans so they wouldn't end up in prison at first. But when it comes to taking the Norwegian prison systems and applying it as it is, that would be more complicated than people actually think. Even some of the biggest advocates for applying the Norwegian prison system understand that America have an issue with the violent behavior of people, "Americans kill people" \_ Michael Moore.

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