

THE THREE IRONIES OF ED IVERSON'S REPORT FROM EASTERN JOHNBIRCHISTAN

By Nick Gier, Professor Emeritus, University of Idaho

In his column for the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News* (10-5-07), Ed Iverson, librarian at Moscow's New St. Andrews College, writes about a sinister "Democratic Blueprint for Your Future."

Instead of drawing on easily found economic statistics, as one would think a professional librarian would do, Iverson relies in a "contact" in an unnamed Eastern European country, "still emerging from the bad old days of Soviet-style socialism." I have carefully deduced, by a process of elimination, that this country must be Eastern Johnbirchistan.

Iverson's Eastern European country could not possibly be the Czech Republic with its 5.8 percent growth (vs. U.S.'s 2 percent) and its 4.3 percent poverty rate, tied with Denmark as the lowest in the industrial world. The U.S. rate of 17.1 percent is second worst behind Mexico.

It cannot be the Ukraine with the best performing stock market in Europe, and an economy that has been growing 7.9 percent for the first six months of 2007. Nor can it be Hungary, whose economy is at least is growing faster than ours. Nor can it be Russia, growing at 6.7 percent with a very respectable 5.7 percent unemployment rate.

Iverson should like the Polish government because of its anti-gay and anti-abortion policies, but that cannot be the reason why the economy is growing at 6.5 percent. Even though it is still recovering from war, Bosnia's growth is 6 percent, and *The Economist* reports that "the introduction of VAT has brought discipline to the economy and cash to the treasury" (6/30/07).

Iverson focuses his criticism on high taxes and especially the value added tax (VAT) that is used by all European countries, and one that is recommended by some leading Republicans. Iverson's implication is that the VAT and high income taxes have ruined European economies and will wreck ours if we elect that "socialist" Hillary Clinton as the next president.

If Iverson had consulted any website with comparative economic statistics, he would have found that the U.S. has now lost its lead in nearly every category. Working

far fewer hours and taking at least three weeks more vacation than Americans, the French have a productivity rate equal to ours. Making all those Freedom Fries was a real bust!

In a recent study on economic competitiveness by the World Economic Forum, seven European welfare states were ranked in the top ten. Sweden and Denmark were third and fourth and the U.S. had dropped to sixth.

The Economist magazine has also rated Denmark, with a VAT of 25 percent and average income tax of 50 percent, as the least corrupt and most business friendly country in the world. Denmark, with an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent, is currently running a budget surplus of .65 percent of GDP, while the U.S. is running a budget deficit of 4.5 percent of GDP. Nearby Sweden with similar taxation is growing at 3.5 percent with 4.8 percent unemployment.

In addition to the irony of conservatives liking the VAT that Iverson hates, there are at least two more ironies in Iverson's ideological fog. In one of his first columns, he praised Ireland as an economic success story, but he failed to mention that the Shamrock Tiger's income tax rates top out at 41 percent and the VAT ranges from 13-21 percent.

As a student of theology and Christian history, I relish yet another delicious irony. In his book *Evangelicals at an Impasse* evangelical Christian Robert Johnston discusses Biblical economics. He concludes that the Bible does not support "to each according to merit"; rather, it teaches "to each according to need" (p. 98), the most famous phrase in Marx's philosophy.

This economic communism is found in the Book of Acts: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (2:44-45; 4:32-37). When Ananias sold a piece of property and held back some of the money, he was struck down by a God who presumably did not believe in private property. This was not just a temporary or isolated phenomenon, because the Church Father Tertullian, living 200 years later, reported that "we hold everything in common except our wives."

How about some Biblical Bolshevism, Ed? Your pastor believes that one should follow the Bible in all respects and never be ashamed of what it says or teaches,

including defending the South's ownership of slaves and the execution or banishment of gays and lesbians.

Nick Gier taught religion and philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. Read or hear all of his columns at www.NickGier.com.