

"WHERE TO INVADE NEXT," Documentary by Michael Moore, A review and commentary with implications for public health, by David G. Schwartz, M.D., 25 February 2017, Part I

Do you remember when it was declared and believed that it was not physiologically possible for a human to run a mile in less than 4 minutes? After Roger Bannister did it, then one by one, other people began doing it also, in shorter and shorter times. They didn't do it previously because they believed they couldn't.

Before seeing this movie, I didn't know there were modern societies accomplishing things such as consistently successful, healthful school lunches throughout a country, successful rehabilitation of criminals, quality children's education without homework, jailing of bankers, un-greedy CEO's willingly sharing wealth with workers, decreasing drug related crimes after legalization of drugs, etc. This is important because it shows us that if they can do it, we and many other countries can do it also.

Some see this movie as having a political agenda. Maybe, in terms of ideology, yes, but it doesn't promote any specific political party, platform, or candidate, and what documentary doesn't have some particular point of view?

I present it because the public health repercussions are enormous. For one thing, most of the medical profession, the hospital, pharmaceutical, and medical equipment industries in this country are not highly interested in public health and primary prevention, but are more interested in using sickness and medical treatments as a commodity. The other important aspect of this is that socioeconomic factors may be stronger determinants of public health than the medical care system, the CDC, the NIH, and government health agencies combined. In my article in the archives, "Questioning the Benefits of Medical Care," I cite an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association, July 1, 2009, p. 89, where Kilo and Larson suggest that it would make sense to put more money into health education, jobs, environmental quality, and education than into medical care, because the former would likely produce overall better health for the population than the latter.

In this movie, be forewarned, it is rated "R," probably because there is one episode of semi-nudity, and a few swear words, and some graphic violence, by U.S. prison guards and police. Otherwise, it is pretty clean and serene, and if you were primarily looking for salacious material, you would get pretty bored. There are a few facetious comic interludes that are staged and obviously "tongue in cheek," but the bulk of the documentary has interviews of people in unrehearsed settings, with spontaneous responses by people in the street as well as people of high esteem in positions of leadership. The people being interviewed appear to be trying to give straightforward and honest responses, though sometimes requiring thoughtful reflection, but not appearing to be evasive or to put spin on their responses, or to "blow hot air," like most of our politicians, which behavior is pretty easy to detect. Of course, there may be some on the far right who will say it is fabricated, just because they may feel as if the evidence

threatens some of their points of view, and just because it is made by Michael Moore. Actually, surprisingly, Steve Bannon had complimentary things to say about Michael Moore's documentaries, as he appreciates the challenges in making a good documentary, as he has had experience in doing that. The context of the documentary is an entertaining, fictitious drama in which the Joint Chiefs of Staff, since they haven't been able to win any wars in recent history, sends Michael Moore in to invade several countries. His purpose is to "invade" them, plant the American flag there, confiscate their ideas and bring them home, and claim them as ours. Spoiler alert – In the end, Moore realizes that these ideas were basically American ideas in the first place.

My review attempts to glean many important facts and concepts from this documentary, but it in no way is a substitute for watching this very entertaining, dramatic, and well-directed movie yourself. Watching it with other people and discussing it afterward adds great value. I've already done that 3 times so far.

He starts his conquest by invading Italy. He interviews Johnny and Christina Fencelli, working class people, he a policeman, she a clothing purchaser in a department store. They each get 30 paid vacation days per year, transferable to the next year if unused, 10 paid national holidays, 15 days paid honeymoon, and an extra month pay for a 13th month every December. She can get 5 weeks paid maternity leave. They tell Moore that the Italians' dream is to live in America, but that "Maybe they don't know how it works." Their faces turn sad when Moore informs them that in the U.S, there is no mandatory paid vacation, and if you're lucky and have a good union, you may get 2 or 3 at the most, and no mandatory maternity leave. Moore says every country in the world has some form of maternity leave (not necessarily 5 weeks), except 2 countries too poor to afford it, Papua New Guinea, and the U. S.

He interviews the 3 owners of Lardini Clothing, 2 sisters and 1 brother, and asks, do they not resent all the benefits the employees get? They say, "No, it's our pleasure, it's fair, it's right. I get a good vacation, they should too." Moore tells them, if they did it the American way, they could get a bigger salary if they paid their employees less. One answered, "What's the point of being richer? It's important to work next to people who are smiling, where you have a human relationship." All 3 agreed. He interviewed Lardini's employees. ""Do you get sick very often?" They said, "No, we go on vacation to relieve our stress, we come back to work refreshed." Lunchtime at Lardini is 2 hours, and the whole plant closes down. Everyone goes home for a full home-cooked dinner. Public health alert – Italians live on average 4 yrs longer than Americans.

He talks to Claudio Demicali, CEO of Ducati Motorcycle Co. Claudio says, "There is no clash between the profit of the company and the well-being of the people." He described how the company is rewarded for all the benefits to the employees, because the workers are very committed, and the company still makes a healthy profit. He said welfare is not a dirty word, as it is in the U.S. "You pay taxes, but you get something back." (Just a note that the U.S. Constitution requires the government to "promote the general welfare.")

Back to the Lardini CEO's, Moore asks why, if Americans work many more hours and yet are not much more productive than Italians. One says, "Yeah, because you don't take enough vacations." Another says, "Because you do not make love enough." She says you are happier, and you do better work. Her sister says, "It's like the cows. If you play music, they make more milk."

Moore talks to Salvatie Bernaducci, a union leader. He said the worker benefits were the result of fierce battles years ago, with prosecution and imprisonment of workers until the benefits became law or part of the contract. "It's never just given to us. It's always a battle or a negotiation." This is another example of an idea that started in the U.S.A. May Day, symbolizing the labor movement and the rights of workers, celebrated throughout the world, started in Chicago in 1886.

Next, Moore traveled to France, rural Normandy, to one of the finest kitchens in the country, in his opinion, a 3 or 4 star kitchen, the best place to eat in town, the school cafeteria. He sat down with 6 kids around a table with breakable china and silverware, to a 4-course meal, including gourmet cheese and dessert. They drink lots of water. None of the kids had drunk Coca-cola. The chefs bring the food to the table, and the children serve each other. Lunch is considered a class, where they learn how to eat in a civilized manner. They have French Fries 2 times per year. The main chef said he never ate a hamburger in his life.

The deputy Mayor Valerie Rano and other town officials meet once a month with the school chef and dietician to plan the menu. She says the children over time learn what a balanced diet is and to pay attention to what they eat. Moore's team member's daughter back in Austin, TX, sent a picture of her school lunch. The children asked, "Seriously, what is that?" "That's a bizarre sauce." Moore asks, "Does that look good to you?" "Non, not at all." "That's not healthy!" The chef says, "Frankly, that's not food. The poor children." Moore states that the chef spends less money on each lunch than we do in the U.S. on average. He went to another school in one of the poorest sections of France, and they also had a 4-course meal, with variety, every day, with at least one cheese option each day. Public health alert – My subjective impression was that both the children and the adults I saw appeared rather thin in comparison to those I see in our society.

Sex education is an integral part of children's education. This has not gone very far in the U.S.A, where mostly abstinence is taught. The U.S. teen pregnancy rate is more than twice the French rate, more than 7 times that of Germany, and 7 times that of the Swiss. The French get free health care, prescription drugs, nursing home care, nearly free day care, free college, great schools, bullet trains, and huge funds for the arts. How do they afford it? The average worker pays only approx 10-15% more in taxes than in the U.S., yet they get all those benefits. The U.S paycheck stub lists 3 items to explain where the taxes go. The French paycheck's itemized list has 29 lines.

Finland ranks near the top in education in the world. In the 1960's Finland's children tested about the same as U.S. students, very near the bottom. Finland tried some new ideas, and by 2000, their students were #1, and the U.S. was still down at #29. Michael

Moore went to the Minister of Education, Krista Kiuru, and she gave away their top secret to him to take home – NO HOMEWORK. A high school principal, Dasi Majasaari said, "Homework is kind of obsolete, I think." Anna Hart, a first grade teacher said the children spend about 20 hrs in school per week, including lunch hour. School principal Leena Luisvarta says, "Your brain has to relax every now and then, or if you just stay working, you stop learning."

Students are treated more like adults. They don't need permission to go to the bathroom. Teaching is oriented to what the students want to learn and to what they see themselves doing as adults. The Education Policy Advisor Pasi Sahlberg said, "It's not that we have figured out something that nobody else has done...Many of the things that have made Finland perform well in education are initially American ideas." The principal, Leena Luisvarta said, "I want the children to play. They need time to socialize with friends and to grow as human beings."

At the faculty meeting the teachers said, "We try to teach them to think for themselves and be critical to what they're learning." Also, "We try to teach them to be a happy person, to be respectful of others, and respect yourself." The first thing the math teacher tells his students is that he wants them to be happy.

Finland has the shortest school day and the shortest school year in the Western World. Most of the kids he interviewed could speak from 2-5 languages. They have no multiple-choice exams. The kids say, "You have to know it." The advice he heard repeatedly from the faculty was that, "You in the U.S. should stop teaching to a standardized test." In the U.S., music, poetry, art, and civics are not on the standardized test, so they've stopped teaching them. Finn schools teach P.E, art woodworking, nature walks, cooking, etc.

Nobody in Finland has to shop for the best schools because they are all equally good. It is illegal to charge tuition. No private schools. The rich parents are committed to making all the schools great. The rich kids attend together with the poorer kids, and they grow up together as friends, and as adults they wouldn't want to cheat or disadvantage their friends. My comment – In our society, who you know is often more important than what you know that gets you jobs, promotions, and advancements. Lower income people seldom know personally anybody wealthy, so there goes the "equal opportunity" that exists on paper, and there goes the upward mobility that we think we have as part of "The American Dream."

Next he "invades" Slovenia. He searched for something very rare – college debt. He found one student, and American, Sean Nolimal, who had built up several thousand of \$'s of debt at the University of Colorado and moved here for free college. Another student from the U.S., Leanna Whirl, couldn't afford community college in the U.S., so she came to the University of Ljubljana and says the quality of education here is "miles better." She says high school here is more difficult than American college. The university offers 100 courses taught in English.

Moore cites several countries that have free college education, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Panama, Slovenia, Sweden, Tunisia, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

A few years back, the government of Slovenia decided it was time to begin charging tuition. The students came out in the streets. A 40-member student organization spent 9 months in meetings with the Minister of Education and the heads of the University long enough for the government to collapse and to call for new elections. The tuition was dropped.

I plan to continue part II of this report next month, covering health care, gender equality, banking and finance, confronting one's country's dark past, and my comments about, "Are these ideas really compatible with our society's populations values, and how likely is it that some of these ideas will be implemented, and why or why not?"