

Dorling, D. (2012) These five things that are connected – but by what? Compass Blog, 3rd April: <http://www.compassonline.org.uk/news/item.asp?n=14968>

These five things that are connected – but by what?

Tuesday, April 03 2012

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Here is a puzzle that, if made a little more obscure could perhaps be worthy of the plot of a Scandinavian crime novel.

Question – what links 1) Zoroastrianism, 2) Leonardo da Vinci, 3) the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, 4) recent US property price falls, and 5) Swiss bankers and Dutch industrialists?

A clue – it's not easy, but – remember you are reading this on the pages of Compass, an "umbrella grouping of the progressive left whose sum is greater than its parts", so that should help you a little.

Answer, they are all examples of events, movements or people whose behaviour was profoundly influenced by the pervading levels of equality or inequality in the world around them. Stories concerning each of these five can be used to illustrate the benefits of greater equality and the harm that rising inequality can bring. If you don't believe me here is some more detail on these five things. The page references are from the No-Nonsense Guide to Equality (NNGE) which brings all these five and more together

(<http://www.newint.org/books/no-nonsense-guides/equality/>)

1) Religions are very often tales of good triumphing over evil in times of great inequality. You probably know most of these tales but even one of the oldest recorded is Zoroaster's triumph over, amongst much else, obstacles imposed by the ruling class (see Worldmapper, 2012). Many world religions began in times and places of greater inequality, always advocating more equality in one way or another (NNGE pages 88-92).

2) There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that creativity is enhanced under conditions of greater equality. This ranges from work finding a strong correlation between high cultural activity in those European countries with higher equality (Szlendak and Karwacki, 2012) to reports that Leonardo da Vinci's artistry was encouraged by his working in an atmosphere of higher than usual equality fostered by his sponsors (NNGE pages 94-95).

3) Scientists today are at their most productive, publishing most academic papers, when they work in more equal countries such as in Sweden and Finland (NNGE page 124). Precisely why they are more creative is hard to judge, but it may well be linked to the same factors involved in recent suggestions that top football players are more successful in clubs that pay players more equally (Buccioli and Piovesan 2012), see <http://t.co/dphrqwNq>

4) Recently, in the USA, the average black family saw their assets fall in value to have recourse to as little as 19 times less wealth than the average white family. This is possibly the highest monetary inequality recorded in the United States at any time since slavery (NNGE page 111). There is evidence that the growth of housing bubble in the states

was partly fuelled by rising inequality there. Poorer people tried harder to move nearer richer people (Dorling, 2012).

5) Elsewhere there is great scope for hope. Some places have been becoming more equal over recent decades. In both the Netherlands and Switzerland the best-off 1% have never had a lower share of national income as most recently recorded (NNGE page 164). If British bankers were to move to Switzerland they would have to take pay cuts of 50% in many cases. The top 1% of income earners in Switzerland receives only half what top salaries are in the UK.

Greater equality is not just possible. For many people in many parts of the world, rich and poor, it is a reality.

The examples in this short article are taken from the New Internationalists' recently published "No Nonsense Guide to Equality" published in March 2012: <http://www.newint.org/books/no-nonsense-guides/equality/> A few other open access references are below.

References

Buccioli, A. and Piovesan, M. (2012) Pay Dispersion and Work Performance,

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http://www.worldmapper.org/display_religion.php?selected=579