

FP COMMENT

TRENDING | [BlackBerry](#) | [U.S. Debt Ceiling](#) | [Family Finance](#) | [Keystone](#) | [Apple iPhone](#) | [Housing market](#) | [Interest Rates](#) | [Mining](#)

Evidence for the prosecution of David Suzuki, part two: Inside David Suzuki's Shangri-La-La Land



PETER FOSTER | 14/10/13 | Last Updated: 14/10/13 2:02 PM ET
[More from Peter Foster](#)



Matthew Sherwood for National Post

*This is the second in an ongoing FP COMMENT series, Evidence for the Prosecution of David Suzuki, in the **mock trial** of Mr. Suzuki planned for Nov. 6 at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. In a column earlier this year, **Mr. Suzuki hailed Bhutan** as a model country because of its adherence to Gross National Happiness. We present this item as Exhibit 2 in evidence that Mr. Suzuki is guilty of gross economic ignorance. FP Comment columnist Peter Foster wrote about Bhutan's happiness claims 2009., under the headline: **Bhutan: Shangri-La La Land***

Anybody reading the blurb for Developing Happiness, a film about **Bhutan** that aired this week on Vision TV, is given fair warning that they are about to view a compendium of hackneyed anti-capitalism. "Here in North America," it begins, "we enjoy more wealth and material comfort than any other society in human history. But are we happy?"

What do you think the only acceptable answer might be?

Westerners have always concocted mythical kingdoms and "Noble Savages," sometimes just for fictional fun, but also as a means of criticizing their own societies. Ayn Rand's heroes head off from an ungrateful world for a capitalist mountain nirvana at the end of

Atlas Shrugged. Now the left has **Bhutan** as its Shangri-La. And they have a measure that enables them to ignore the Himalayan kingdom's poverty in an attempt to install the new green socialism there. It's called "Gross National Happiness (GNH)."

Developing Happiness was made by the Quebec mother and daughter film making team of Tanya Ballantyne Tree and Josephine Mackay. They suggest that the pursuit of happiness is a "pioneering concept." Perhaps they might try reading the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

The film — a sort of National Geographic meets Das Kapital — is based on the old technique of setting up a straw man version of capitalism, torching it, and then glorifying allegedly happy underdevelopment as an alternative. What gives this movie its supposed "fresh" angle is GNH.

GNH is apparently the brainchild of the country's fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who had to interrupt his education at British boarding schools to take over from his father. This feeds the suspicion that GNH was dreamed up not by Buddhist monks but more likely somebody like Prince Charles, after consulting with Maurice Strong (who was a big pal of the fourth king, and sometime honorary Bhutanese consul to Canada).

Related

[Mock trial of David Suzuki suffers setback as judge withdraws after questions of possible bias](#)

[Peter Foster: David Suzuki 's 'Carbon Manifesto' pitch hijacked by Sun TV's Ezra Levant](#)

The film makes gallingly clear that Canadian taxpayers have coughed up big time to pursue GNH. They even funded a conference on the issue, at which the star performer was Chairman Mo's sometime executive assistant — at Petro-Canada! — and prominent leftie noodler, John Ralston-Saul.



The notion that anybody considers economic growth "the ultimate good" is nonsense. GNP is a money measure of physical output. Nobody imagines that it equates directly with happiness. Nevertheless, it's what people, given a free choice, seem to want. And that includes the Bhutanese.

In any case, the main reason we have GNP is to facilitate government interference. Meanwhile, if economic growth wasn't generally considered a "good thing," why would the development community have been trying to pursue it -with astonishingly little success -for fifty years? But then perhaps it's their very failures that has prompted some of them to embrace GNH.

The film makers fail to grasp the sheer irony of bemoaning development as they fly into **Bhutan** and proceed to drive around the country in a gasoline-powered van, making a movie with high-tech equipment. Their film in fact suggests that the Bhutanese are enthusiastic users of Western products, from plastic injection molded chairs to computers. However, we are presumably meant to bemoan this fact rather than taking it as a fundamental refutation of the film's underlying thesis.

Young Bhutanese, we are told, want to escape the drudgery of farms. A young girl says she wants to be an engineer. Entrepreneurs in the film — a metal fabricator and the owner of a weaving business — want to expand and export. These are surely the real builders of **Bhutan's** future.

However, according to various talking heads, it is more happy-making to preserve blanket coverage of old growth forest than improve the material well-being of the 60% of **Bhutan's** population who live at subsistence level.

GNH contains enormous contradictions. Anybody who was truly concerned with happiness as the main objective of life almost certainly wouldn't be trying to do something as stupid as measuring it. Moreover, the notion that happiness might somehow be

summed at the national level bespeaks exactly the type of wonkish development thinking that GNH purports to reject. If you really think that GNP is such a dumb idea, why would you bother putting “Gross National” in front of anything?

In fact, the UN already has a similar measure in its Human Development Index, which goes heavy on the education and longevity, and light on the income, thus enabling such desirable places as Cuba to rank highly.

The fact that one of the four pillars of Bhutanese GNP is “sustainable development,” the subversive notion smuggled into popular discourse by the UN’s socialist-packed Brundtland Commission, is another dead giveaway. And while we’re discussing true sustainability, it’s worth noting that three-fifths of **Bhutan**’s budget apparently comes from India, which is keen to cultivate it since it lies between that country and China. India also takes all the country’s hydro power, which is in turn responsible for the bulk of **Bhutan**’s export earnings.

The other three pillars of GNH are environmental concern, cultural preservation and good governance, as if Western nations held these in contempt.

The film contains one shot of its producers’ home province. It is a desolate forest clear-cut with a voice over bemoaning “ignorance” and “greed.” Strange that Quebec and Canadian taxpayers put up so much money to produce this monument to bashing all those countries who pour money into **Bhutan** so that it can flirt with dumb ideas.

(This Peter Foster column first appeared in FP Comment on Sept. 9, 2009)



Find Financial Post on Facebook

Most Popular

- Evidence for the prosecution of David Suzuki, part three:...
- Peter Foster: David Suzuki's 'Carbon Manifesto' pitch...
- Evidence for the prosecution of David Suzuki, part two:...
- Biofuel blunder

Topics: [FP Comment](#), [David Suzuki](#), [ROM](#), [Trial Of David Suzuki](#)

Comments for this thread are now closed.

AROUND THE WEB

[The One Secret That Tells You When to Buy a Stock](#) ADVFN

[What the Bible Says About Money \(Shocking\)](#) Moneynews

[10 reasons we should be terrified of a government shutdown](#) Rare

[Heart Attack: How Your Body Warns You Days Before](#)

Newsmax Health

ALSO ON FINANCIAL POST

WHAT'S THIS?

[The sun is setting on the U.S. dollar's global supremacy](#)

176 comments

[Existing home sales edge up in September, surge 18% ...](#)

30 comments

[BlackBerry Ltd: Cerberus reviewing smartphone maker's ...](#)

8 comments

[Evidence for the prosecution of David Suzuki, part three: ...](#)

6 comments

5 comments



Best ▾ Community

Share

5