

Budget cuts strike Swedish radio

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Alas, budget cuts over at Sveriges Radio have reduced the staff of Klartext, the Swedish news program presented in easy Swedish, from three to two, so they won't be able to provide text summaries of the radio show. I had been using the summaries to help me fill in the gaps I had missed, but now I guess I'll just have to listen even more closely. I can make out perhaps a fifth of what's going on. If I really concentrate (and they speak slowly enough), it might reach half. But after the first two stories or so, my brain explodes and I have to take a rest. Embarrassingly, it took me weeks to figure out what they were saying to introduce each show! "Programmet som förklarar nyheterna på ett enklare sätt." I got stuck on the first word; even today it sounds like the guy is saying what seems to be the nonsense word "pörjammet". The two types of stories I like most on Swedish radio are (1) where they talk about the United States, since it's enlightening to learn how others see us, and (2) when they talk about slimy politicians. The Swedes seem all upset that their politicians are selfish money-grubbing sleazeballs. Hey, you idealistic Swedes, they're **politicians**. Being selfish money-grubbing sleazeballs is their job! Exhibit A: Politicians paid for sitting on committees, but don't actually show up for committee meetings. When confronted, one politician explained, "I didn't realize I was being paid." (Translation: "I don't do things unless I get paid to do them.") Another used the excuse, "I didn't know I was supposed to attend the meetings." (Translation: "Sure, go ahead, pay me extra money, I'll gladly take it, but if you expect me to do work, you have to tell me!") Exhibit B: Members of the Riksdag are permitted a free rail pass to travel between their constituency and Stockholm. Half of the MPs which avail themselves of this perk choose the most expensive railway ticket, the so-called "Årskort Guld" (Annual Gold Card), which gets you a complimentary three-course meal among other top-class amenities. All these Gold Cards cost the Swedish taxpayer over a million Kronor per year, compared to the cost of buying them all coach tickets. Meanwhile, here in the United States, we don't even bat an eye when one representative sneaks a US\$225,000 renovation of his home town's swimming pool into the federal budget, and another secures a US\$50 million grant to build an indoor rain forest in Iowa.

That buys a lot of train tickets.

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