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Estonia

Free public transport in a European capital!

- News from around the world -

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Since January 1, 2013 in Tallinn, capital of Estonia, a city of 419,830 inhabitants, residents can take the bus, trolleybus or tram for free. Non-residents must still pay for public transport; they just have to obtain, for the price of 2 euros, a special green card, which tourists must recharge when paying, or else buy a ticket from the driver.

The Mayor of Tallinn, Edgar Savisaar, leader of the Centre Party, an opposition party, needed to regain popularity. Revenue from the sale of tickets covered only a third of the operating costs of the network. And a survey conducted in the spring of 2012 indicated that 75 per cent of the inhabitants of the capital wanted free transport.

The success was immediate. The town hall was forced to procure additional buses from January 9 to deal with the increase in the number of users. Car traffic decreased, so therefore did traffic jams and pollution. To cover the equivalent of the revenue previously provided by the sale of tickets, 12.4 million euros per year, represents only 2.5 per cent additional expenses for the annual municipal budget!

Edgar Savisaar, Prime Minister at the time of independence who turned Estonia towards capitalism, has ensured his popularity in the city he administers. He hopes that Tallinn will get the title of "green capital of Europe" and that his political career will benefit from it. He is neither an anticapitalist nor an ecosocialist. All the same, he has opened a breach in the dominant ideology. It is up to us to make use of it. It will be easier to demand free transport everywhere else.