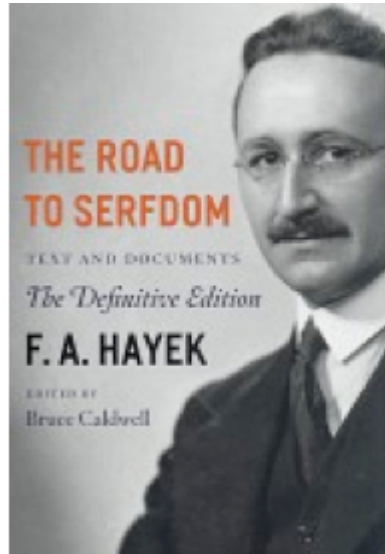




Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on June 10, 2010

More Than 50-year-old Book Is Bestseller on Amazon

When Glenn Beck urged his listeners, "Please, pick it up. *The Road to Serfdom*. Make it part of your essential library," sales of Austrian Economist Frederick von Hayek's book at Amazon.com pushed it to Number 1 the next day. Prior to the election of President Obama, "The book sold respectably at a clip of about 600 copies a month," according to Bruce Caldwell, editor at the University of Chicago Press. "But then, in November 2008, sales more than quadrupled, and they haven't slowed down since."



When John Stossel, host of [Fox Business](#), featured the book on his show on February 21, sales jumped again.

Opinions as to the remarkable interest in a book published in 1944 by an obscure economist vary, but most center on the book's uncanny prediction that is now being fulfilled in the United States: centralized and expanding government and its increasingly obvious tyranny impacting citizens' lives on a daily basis.

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Caldwell said the book provides "arguments about the dangers of the unbridled growth of government ... including the characterization of the health care debate as being about socialized medicine.... [The book] taps into a profound dissatisfaction in the public mind with the machinations of its government. Furthermore," he says, "a recurrent theme in the news is that, in contrast to the millions who are suffering, the politically connected are doing just fine."

Professor Thomas Woods, senior fellow at the Ludwig von Mises Institute, who was Beck's guest, said that Hayek was "warning about ... people [who] think that there is a way to centrally-plan an economy, or run a society ... that doesn't involve methods that we would find utterly distasteful and barbaric."

When Beck introduced his other guest, professor of economics at Carthage College, Yuri Baltsev, he told his listeners that while Baltsev lived in Russia, "If he was caught reading *The Road to Serfdom* — if anybody was caught reading *The Road to Serfdom* — he could go to jail." Baltsev concurred, saying that he took "a pledge that I would never tell anybody about the book, which I'm breaking right now." Baltsev strongly recommended the book because of his personal experience living in Russia and in Cuba under the communists. The people living there at the time "saw the devil in the eye ... if you go to Cuba, [it's] the best inoculation against ... socialism that you could ever have."

Richard Ebeling, professor at Northwood University, writing in his [blog](#) at Defense of Capitalism, explained his reasons for the continuing and increasing interest in Hayek's book:

As Hayek also warned many years ago, as the government takes over control of more and more aspects of our life the more we are confined within and made to conform to the hierarchy of values and goals that the political authorities are determined to impose on each and every one of



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us. By taxing away our income and wealth, and by dictating what may be produced and to whom it will be supplied, the government reduces the members of society to a homogeneous mass made to fit the mold that the political elite thinks is best for us.

And Charles Scaliger [adds](#), "*The Road to Serfdom* remains one of the most devastating attacks yet written on collectivism and its consequences.... *Serfdom* argued that collectivism always leads to tyranny.... The early indicators of our likely destination abound: a declining standard of living, rising levels of debt ... and, most ominously, mushrooming government, including ever-more intrusive police powers over American citizens."

The reason total government becomes tyrannical, [Hayek says](#), is that "advancement within a totalitarian group or party depends largely upon a willingness to do immoral things. The principle that the end justifies the means ... becomes necessarily the supreme rule. There is nothing which the consistent collectivist must not be prepared to do if it serves 'the good of the whole' ... to be a useful assistant in the running of a totalitarian state, therefore, a man must be prepared to break every moral rule he has ever known."

A blogger at [the Amazon.com website offering Hayek's book for sale](#) puts the matter succinctly: "Hayek argues that the pursuit of socialist ideals tends to totalitarianism. While socialist ideals seem noble to many, those who persist in realizing these ideals will find it necessary to adopt coercive methods that are incompatible with freedom."

Beck's strong recommendation to his readers to "pick it up" and to "make it a part of your essential library" is good as far as it goes. The other parts of that "essential library," however, must include, at a minimum, *The Federalist Papers*, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, and that most hallowed of all founding documents, the Declaration of Independence. With these tools, understanding, and effort, the rush down the "road to serfdom" can be stalled and reversed.



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