

Dankesrede von Johan Norberg

Ladies and gentlemen,

When F A Hayek in 1936 got a strange new book from one of his colleagues, he was contemplating writing a detailed criticism, but in the end decided not to. He thought the theories in that book were flawed and incoherent, and no one would probably take them seriously. And surely the author himself would soon again change his mind, as he did once before when Hayek criticised his work. Why waste time on him when Hayek could use it develop his own thoughts instead?

The colleague was John Maynard Keynes, and the book was the *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. When Keynes' thoughts conquered the world's economic ministries one by one, Hayek regretted his decision – for the rest of his life.

But Hayek learned from his mistake. He understood that it was necessary to win the public debates as well, and he started Mont Pèlerin Society partly to give liberal scholars the confidence to participate in the intellectual battles. And he risked his academic reputation by writing the polemical and controversial *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944, a popular defence of the liberal ideals of individual liberty and economic liberty against totalitarianism, and the growth of the welfare state.

Even though I feel the deepest respect, and have learned tremendously from for example Hayek's development of the theory of spontaneous order in *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, I think that *The Road to Serfdom* in many ways is Hayek's most important work, because here, he took the popular debate and influenced millions. Within 15 months it was reprinted five times in England, despite wartime priorities and shortages. And perhaps even more important was the fact that he got a condensed version published in *Reader's Digest*.

A former fighter pilot named Antony Fisher read the *Reader's Digest* selection and sought out Hayek to get advice on how to promote ideas like that. With the fortune he made on industrial chicken farming, Fisher hired Britain's "last two economists who believed in free markets" as someone joked, and started the country's first think-tank, The Institute of Economic Affairs. They focused on changing the intellectual climate of today, to change the politics of tomorrow, just as Hayek had advised them. And they succeeded. When Margaret Thatcher became Britain's prime minister in 1979 she wrote to Antony Fisher that "You created the atmosphere which made our victory possible".

In 1994, MP Oliver Letwin wrote, in *The Times of London* with only a mild exaggeration:

“Without Fisher, no IEA; without the IEA and its clones, no Thatcher and quite possibly no Reagan; without Reagan, no Star Wars; without Star Wars, no economic collapse of the Soviet Union. Quite a chain of consequences for a chicken farmer.”

And of course, without Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, no Fisher. Such is the power of ideas that Hayek wrote and talked about. The intellectuals' power to influence the course of society is profound. For good and for bad.

That's the spirit in which I try to work. In my book *In Defence of Global Capitalism*, I am not in any way trying to re-invent the wheel – the wheel that John Locke, Adam Smith and F A Hayek invented is perfectly sufficient for mankind. Instead I am trying to explain to people why this wheel is a fantastic invention, and to convince the anti-globalisation movement not to try to destroy it, and the EU-bureaucrats not to stop it with regulations and harmonisation.

Some economists think that we need not care about the anti-capitalist movement. They are confused and ignorant of economics, and since they are guided by ideology and not facts, they won't change their minds anyway. Why waste our time confronting them?

One reason to do it is that exactly those confused views will guide public policy, if they are not challenged in public debate. Hayek did not write his reply, so people only read Keynes' point of view. Today we have to confront those scholars, groups and movements who attack the open society and the free market, because otherwise, the media, the politicians and the public will only hear their point of view, and act accordingly.

My personal experience from meetings and debates with anti-globalists is that if you can stand sometimes being booed at, it's worth it. If you keep pointing to the facts, most people are willing to listen. You can't be disappointed that your opponent do not change his mind, you're not there for him, but for the big part of the audience that is intellectually open and has a sincere interest in the issues. If you are not there, they will have to listen to the anti-capitalist. The fact is that they have never rejected the pro-capitalist arguments, the problem is that they have never heard them before. It's not self evident how the economy works, someone has to tell them. Hayek is not precisely required reading in their curricula.

We must not be ashamed of our ideas, confine them to the ivory towers, or back away from our principles. We are the advocates of human creativity, for freedom and tolerance. Our ideas are more accurate, more convincing, more humane, than our opponents'. They deserve a strong and passionate defence in front of any audience. That is something I learned from a 1949 essay of Hayek, *The Intellectuals and socialism*. Many of you will recognize this quote. But it's worth repeating:

“We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage. What we lack is a liberal Utopia, a programme which seems neither a mere defence of things as they are nor a diluted kind of socialism, but a truly liberal radicalism which does spare the susceptibilities of the mighty (including the trade unions), which is not too severely practical and which does not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible. We need intellectual leaders who are prepared to resist the blandishments of power and influence and who are willing to work for an ideal, however small may be

the prospects of its early realization. They must be men who are willing to stick to principles and to fight for their full realization, however remote. The practical compromises they must leave to politicians. Free trade and freedom of opportunity are ideals which still may rouse the imaginations of large numbers, but a mere 'reasonable freedom of trade' or a mere 'relaxation of controls' is neither intellectually respectable nor likely to inspire any enthusiasm. [...] if we can regain that belief in power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost."

Personally I can't think of a better encouragement in this intellectual battle than receiving the Publizistik-Preis of the Friedrich-August-von-Hayek-Stiftung. I am deeply honoured by this recognition, and by the company in which I receive it. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Hayek only received the Nobel Prize, I receive the Hayek Preis. Thank you.