

Naomi Loftsgard

August 10, 2018

The Road to Serfdom

Wisdom transcends time. The beauty in this idea is that we can learn from those before us. History is riddled with patterns and the key to seizing these opportunities simply lies in our ability to notice them. F.A. Hayek in his book *The Road to Serfdom* lays hold of the truths of Europe's political foreground and strives to warn future generations to not repeat the mistakes of the past. Though critics argue that Hayek's work, originally written nearly 80 years ago, has lost its relevance, I believe his arguments are still of paramount relevance to the current atmospheres as experienced in Nicaragua and across the globe.

The path to socialism is a long and windy road, and by the time socialism is fully embraced, few stop to consider the true costs incurred. Hayek points out that "there can be no doubt that most socialists here still believe profoundly in the liberal ideal of freedom, and that they would recoil if they became convinced that the realisation of their programme would mean the destruction of freedom" (Hayek, 31). This ignorance is what has caused many great nations to succumb to the illusory future promised by socialism. Hayek points out that the true definition of freedom is often hijacked and distorted by socialist advocates, who boldly redefine it under the promised ideals of socialism and equality (27). In this way, many have been coerced through the ages into adhering to a system they would not otherwise support. Hitler rose to prominence under the banner of freedom, however, soon after his rise, it became evident how fictitious these professed ideals truly were. However, it is also a self-perpetuating process. As societies become increasingly socialist, these societies expose themselves to an ever-growing centralized source of truth, which is then able to consistently feed its citizens the socialist agenda and over time warp

individual's thinking. Hayek notes that "the skillful propagandist then has power to mold their minds in any direction he chooses, and even the most intelligent and independent people cannot entirely escape that influence if they are long isolated from all other sources of information" (46).

Growing up in Nicaragua, I have seen the dire implications of socialism's misleading truths. Over the past three months, Nicaragua's political tensions have reached a boiling point and have manifested themselves into violence and oppression. Hundreds of Nicaraguans have lost their lives and their freedoms under the rule of a tyrannical socialist dictatorship. Nicaragua, however, did not arrive to this point overnight but has been barrelling towards this inevitable end over the past several decades. In 1980, the Nicaraguan people overcame a harsh right-winged-dictator. Worn out and hard pressed for options, Nicaragua turned to the opposite side of the spectrum, hopeful for change. Since the 80's, Nicaragua's leader, Ortega, has strategically captured the disillusioned public's approval and projected his ideals across the country. However, throughout his time in power, Ortega has slowly altered the meaning of freedom, nationalism, and even Christianity, allowing him to bend Nicaragua to his will. For many years, Nicaraguans continued to trust blindly in Ortega, although they seldom realized how far they had strayed from their original dreams of freedom.

Another aspect of Hayek's argument that is important to recognize in light of the Nicaraguan context is how Rule of Law relates to the free market economy. Were you to have told even the brightest Nicaraguan in the early 80s about the perils of socialism, they would've simply responded with choosing the lesser of two evils. Through the harsh and tyrannical rule of Nicaragua's right-wing dynasty, Nicaraguans became convinced of the evils of "capitalism" and were eager to accept any alternatives. However, Hayek would respond to this by saying that it

never was a truly a free market society to begin with, since it lacked the Rule of Law that characterizes one. In fact, right-wing dictators resemble socialist leaders more so than the law-abiding capitalist. Hayek points out that the purpose of Rule of Law is to balance power and direct it away from a single body. This ensures that “the coercive power of the state can be used only in cases defined in advance by the law and in such a way that it can be foreseen how it will be used” (62). Having an objective basis, such as Rule of Law, keeps all members of society accountable to a set of predetermined values, and helps avoid arbitrary abuse of power by a single individual. A capitalist society without Rule of Law inevitably leads to another form of central planning and thus resembles the socialist agenda closely.

The total evaporation of Rule of Law in Nicaragua is the biggest factor that has led to this oppressive state. Over the decades, Nicaraguan leaders have slowly chipped away at the Constitution and at the laws established, allowing only them “the freedom” to govern at their own will. Over the past weeks, I have seen the striking consequences of the absence of law. Amidst the turmoil that haunts the country, Nicaraguan people have begun to freely take possession of the land of others, known as “Toma de Tierras.” It comes as no surprise that this is the final outcome of decades of the socialist agenda freely acted upon.

Hayek explains that this relationship between socialism and the eventual undermining of freedom and justice stems from the core of man’s heart. In light of this, the most successful societies in history were designed to balance power and prevent a consolidation of power. All men have sinful hearts, therefore, when given power and entrusted with the well-being of an entire nation, it is all too easy to spiral into wickedness. Both right and left winged systems are susceptible to the greed and snares of man’s hearts, the key difference is that free markets acknowledge this and try to plan against it, while socialist societies are designed to run straight

towards it. Hayek phrases this succinctly in noting that socialism “puts governments in a position where to support themselves they are obliged to be oppressive and tyrannical” (35).

In recognition of these ideas, it is understandable how Nicaragua has found itself in such a dire situation. Nicaragua has had a turbulent history riddled with wars and devastations, however, many of these instances can be attributed to the sinful heart of man. The breakdown of the country’s legal and economic structures that these men have driven has led to the decay of a promising society.

Throughout my life, I have seen Hayek’s arguments played out through the experiences of the Nicaraguan people. Nicaragua’s tragic history has only solidified my belief in the benefits of a true, law-abiding, free market economy. Countries like Nicaragua should serve as a poignant wakeup call to countries across the globe still caught in the daze of socialist ideas. Socialism may seem to be the most ethical and ideal future at face value, but in taking a closer look, it is easy to see that socialism only leads to brokenness and destruction. If the world continues to ignore these patterns of history, then all too soon, they too will find themselves on the road to serfdom.

Works Cited

Hayek, Friedrich A. *The Road to Serfdom*. Edited by Bruce Caldwell, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007.