“Introduction”
by Milton Friedman


It is hard today to reconstruct the intellectual atmosphere in 1945, when Antony Fisher, the subject of this book, was completing his wartime service as a fighter pilot and gunnery instructor. It was taken for granted that socialism, government control of the means of production, was the way of the future – a view supported by all decent, progressive individuals. Those of us who were deeply concerned about the danger to freedom and prosperity from the growth of government, from the triumph of the welfare state and Keynesian ideas, were a small, beleaguered minority regarded as reactionaries by the great majority of our fellow intellectuals.

F. A. Hayek’s famous tract, The Road to Serfdom, published in March 1944, was dedicated to ‘the socialists of all parties’. An eloquent and passionate statement of the dangers to freedom from state control of the means to production, it is now regarded as one of the most important books of the twentieth century. Yet it was turned down for publication in the United States by three publishers, in one case because it was considered ‘unfit for publication by a reputable house’, before it was submitted to the University of Chicago Press, which accepted it on the urging of a leading faculty member. Hayek himself believed that the negative reception of this book destroyed his reputation as an economist.

Antony Fisher came across The Road to Serfdom through a Reader’s Digest condensation. For him, as for many other young men and women who had been in the armed forces, Hayek’s predictions about the consequences of collectivism were not simply hypothetical possibilities but visible realities that they had themselves experienced in the military. His first reaction was to enter elective politics to fight for freedom. He was dissuaded from this course when he visited Hayek at the London School of Economics in 1945. Hayek told him that the ideas of the intellectuals would ultimately determine the ideas of politicians and the course of events. The real task was to change those ideas.

Ten years later, in 1955, Antony was able to act on Hayek’s advice thanks to the commercial success of a venture in breeding chickens. With some of his first profits from that venture he set up the Institute of Economic Affairs, and shortly thereafter persuaded Ralph Harris to serve as its director. When Arthur Seldon joined, completing the critical trio essential to its success, the Institute was off and running and played a major role in changing the climate of opinion in Britain.

If Antony had done no more in the think-tank world, it would have been enough to put all believers in freedom in his debt. But after a digression to breeding green turtles, scientifically successful but commercially disastrous, he returned to breeding think tanks, at first on a retail basis, and then, with the establishment of the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, on a wholesale basis.
I first met Antony in the fall of 1957 at a meeting in St Moritz of the Mont Pelerin Society – an international society of free-market intellectuals that had been founded a decade earlier by Hayek. I saw him thereafter at the IEA on my occasional trips to Britain. I got to know Antony better and to appreciate his strengths after 1977, when my wife and I moved into the apartment house in which he and his second wife, Dorian, were living. It was from here that he set up the Atlas Foundation and achieved a degree of success that passed my – and perhaps even his – fondest expectations. His death in 1988 was a great loss to us personally as it was to the world.

His remarkable story is well told in the pages that follow.

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