

Best Books on the Folly of Socialism

*What everyone should know about the practical
and moral failures of the socialist project*

Compiled by Williamson M. Evers, Ph.D.*

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“Less than seventy-five years after it officially began, the contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won.”

—Robert L. Heilbroner, “The Triumph of Capitalism” (*The New Yorker*, January 16, 1989)

Professor Heilbroner’s pronouncement of socialism’s death is greatly exaggerated. Socialism has risen from its own ashes perhaps more often than has any other political ideology on earth. Now, more than 30 years after Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev implemented reforms that helped burn the ideal of a planned economy to the ground, socialist doctrines are once again gaining in popularity, especially among young people.

Much has been written about socialism, yet too little has been read (too little *serious* writing, that is). This annotated list of recommended reading, compiled by Independent Institute Senior Fellow Dr. Williamson M. Evers, tries to remedy this deficiency by highlighting some of the most insightful critiques of socialism ever written. It’s not an exaggeration to say that anyone who carefully studies even a handful of these books will gain a stronger understanding of socialism than is possessed by the vast majority of socialists.

“This is the best list of what to read about socialism that’s out there,” says Dr. Evers.

David J. Theroux, President of the Independent Institute, concurs. “This critical bibliography can provide badly needed balance. By setting the record straight, these authors show readers that any skepticism about socialism they harbor is warranted. As they explain, the problem with socialism goes far beyond its practical ineffectiveness: its theoretical basis is morally deformed and leads inevitably to massive injustice and abuse.”

A Critical Bibliography on Socialism

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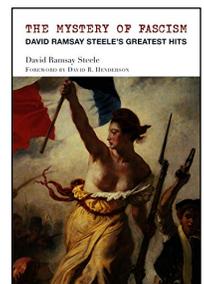
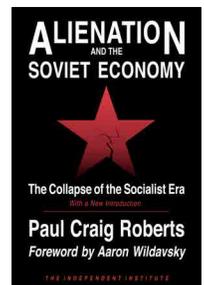
If you can read just one book on this list, then make it *Red Plenty*, by Francis Spufford. If you can read only two, make your second pick *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*, by Ludwig von Mises.

Alienation and the Soviet Economy: The Collapse of the Socialist Era, by Paul Craig Roberts, foreword by Aaron B. Wildavsky. Independent Institute, 1990.

Paul Craig Roberts gives a valuable explanation of Marx’s theory of alienation. Roberts then discusses Soviet “war communism” (1918-1922) as a failed attempt to faithfully put into effect the socialist utopia described by Marx. Roberts also provides an account of how the post-1922 Soviet economy actually worked, although extremely poorly.

The Anti-Semitic Tradition in Modern Socialism, by Edmund Silberner. Inaugural Lecture delivered at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 1953.

Examines anti-Semitism in socialist theory and political movements in England, France, Germany, and other nations. Most socialist theorists identified capitalism with Jews. Discusses, among others, Charles Fourier, Ferdinand Lasalle, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Jean Jaurès.



“Between Immorality and Unfeasibility: The Market Socialist Predicament,” by David Ramsay Steele, *Critical Review*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1996): 307–331. Reprinted in his book *The Mystery of Fascism*. St. Augustine’s Press, 1999.

“Market socialism,” if it works at all, cannot live up to the utopian dreams of its proponents.

The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression, by Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, and Jean-Louis Margolin. Translated by Jonathan Murphy, edited by Mark Kramer. Harvard University Press, 1999.

An international best-seller documenting Communism’s repression and genocidal body count.

Cambodia: Year Zero, by François Ponchaud. Holt Rinehart Winston, 1977.

Daniel Dennis writes, “[Ponchaud] gets the personnel right, the utopianism of the leading [Khmer Rouge] players, and their influences—Maoist in economics, Stalinist in rejecting any possibility of ‘re-education’ in creating the new society.” William Shawcross said that the book is “the best account of Khmer Rouge rule.”

The Case Against Socialism, by Rand Paul with Kelley Ashby Paul. Broadside Books, 2019.

Rand Paul writes: “One of the greatest ironies of modern political history is that as socialists around the world rose to overthrow authoritarian regimes, they ultimately replaced them (despite their promises to establish free democracies) with authoritarian regimes of their own.”

Collectivist Economic Planning, edited by F. A. Hayek. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2015.

This volume contains Ludwig von Mises’s essay “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth,” along with a foreword and afterword by Nobel Laureate in Economics F.A. Hayek. It also contains related essays by N.G. Pierson, George Halm, and Enrico Barone.

Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero, by Catriona Kelly. Granta Books, 2005.

Publishers Weekly writes, “Pavel Morozov was found murdered in Siberia at age 13 with his younger brother. The case was turned into an opportunity by the Soviet authorities, who said Pavlik had denounced his father for being in league with the despised kulaks [well-to-do peasants]. Kelly, a professor of Russian at Oxford, [traces] how the Soviet [propaganda] machine turned Pavel into a model for millions of Soviet children. . . .”

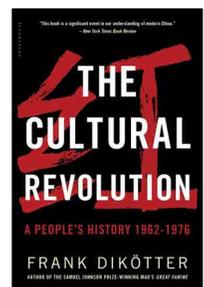
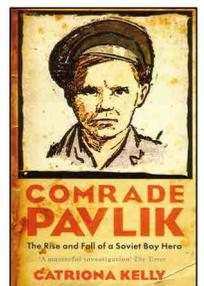
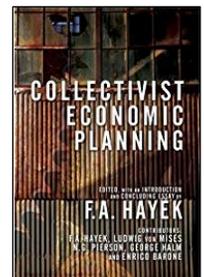
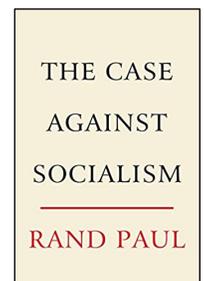
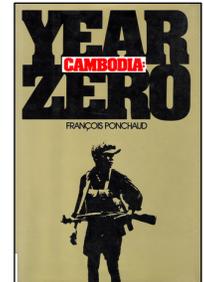
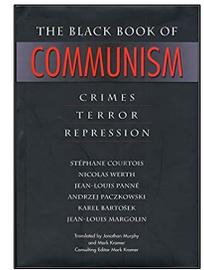
Courage of Genius: The Pasternak Affair, by Robert Conquest. J. B. Lippincott, 1962.

How really-existing socialism endeavors to crush artistic freedom. A chronological account of the efforts of the Soviet authorities to suppress the novel *Dr. Zhivago*. Includes documents that show socialist bureaucrats in action.

Critics of Marxism, by David Gordon. Transaction Publishers for the Social Philosophy & Policy Center, 1986.

A valuable bibliographic essay. Discusses, with brief analysis, the criticisms of Marxism by Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Ludwig von Mises, Karl R. Popper, Isaiah Berlin, H.B. Acton, John Plamenatz, Eric Voegelin, Leszek Kolakowski, and J.L. Talmon.

The Cultural Revolution: A People’s History, 1962-1976, by Frank D. Dikötter, Bloomsbury Press, 2016.



Frank D. Dikötter compiles previously secret documents from the Chinese Communist Party and presents them to readers within a clear historical narrative of the Cultural Revolution.

Darkness at Noon, by Arthur Koestler, translated by Philip Boehm from the original manuscript. Vintage, 2019.

A novel about the Soviet purge trials of the 1930s, in which an Old Bolshevik prisoner confesses for the good of the Communist Party to crimes he did not commit.

“Did Horvat Answer Hayek? The Crisis of Yugoslav Self-Management,” by David Prychitko. Foundation for Economic Education, February 1, 1991.

Economist David Prychitko, writes, “Without question, [Communist] Yugoslav reality . . . failed, terribly, to live up to the theoretical blueprint of self-managed socialism [as present in its most plausible form by economist Branko Horvat]. . . . Horvat did not answer Hayek. He responded to criticisms with bad theory, with an abstract model that had no potential for being realized through the actions of living men and women.”

Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth, by Ludwig von Mises. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008.

Mises’s original argument (first published in 1920) that economic calculation under socialism is impossible. Murray N. Rothbard said that the essay “demonstrated that, since the socialist planning board would be shorn of a genuine price system for the means of production, the planners would be unable to rationally calculate the costs, the profitability, or the productivity of these resources, and hence would be unable to allocate resources rationally in a modern complex economy.”

Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society, by Trygve Hoff. Liberty Fund, 1981.

In 1988, the economist Murray N. Rothbard wrote that this work is “the best and most comprehensive work on the socialist calculation debate.”

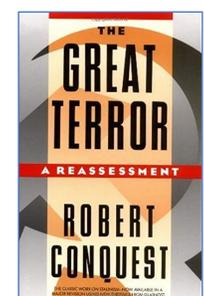
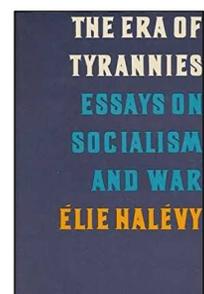
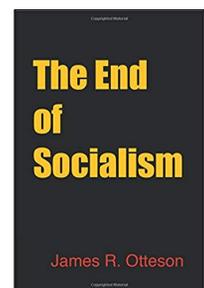
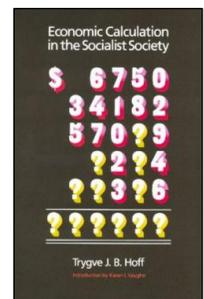
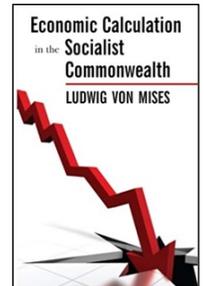
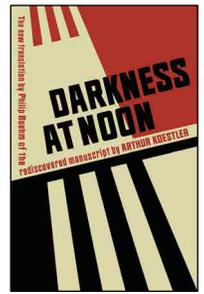
“The End of Socialism and the Calculation Debate Revisited,” by Murray N. Rothbard. *The Review of Austrian Economics*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1991): 51–76.

Economist Rothbard’s accessible and thoroughgoing takedown of the Lange-Lerner answer to Mises’s thesis on the impossibility of economic calculation under socialism.

The Era of Tyrannies: Essays on Socialism and War, by Élie Halévy, translated by R. K. Webb. New York University Press, 1966.

The 1907 essay on “The Economic Doctrine of Saint-Simon” contains insights on the split in the Saint-Simonian school in the early 19th century. On one side were Charles Comte, Charles Dunoyer, and Augustin Thierry who became thorough-going classical liberals and analyzed class conflict as between the productive class and parasitic leftovers of feudal aristocracy. On the other side were Count Henri de Saint-Simon himself and Auguste Comte who proposed technocratic socialism.

Élie Halévy writes in the title essay, “The age of tyrannies dates from the month of August, 1914, that is to say from the time when the belligerent nations first adopted a form of social organization which may be defined as follows: (1) In the economic sphere, the nationalization, on a vast scale, of all the means of production, distribution and exchange; and at the same time an appeal by the



Governments to the leaders of the trade unions for support in carrying out this policy. State Socialism, therefore, is combined with syndicalist and “corporatism” elements. (2) In the intellectual sphere, the ‘nationalization of ideas’ in two different forms, one negative, that is to say the suppression of all expressions of opinion which were thought to be opposed to the national interest, and the other positive. I shall call the positive aspect ‘the organization of enthusiasm.’ The whole of [post-World War I] Socialism is derived from this war-time organization far more than from Marxism.”

The Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties, by Robert Conquest. Oxford University Press, 1990.

Stalin’s murderous purge of his fellow Communists and wide swaths of the rest of the population.

The Gulag Archipelago, by Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, foreword by Jordan B. Peterson. Vintage Pub., 2019.

The classic account of the Soviet Union’s forced labor camps.

The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-famine, by Robert Conquest. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Stalin’s deliberate policy of massive famine in the Ukraine.

A History of the Münster Anabaptists: Inner Emigration and the Third Reich: A Critical Edition of Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen’s Bockelson: A Tale of Mass Insanity, by George von der Lippe. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

An Amazon reviewer writes, “[T]his volume offers an extensively (and helpfully) annotated edition of [Friedrich] Reck-Malleczewen’s *Bockelson: A Tale of Mass Insanity*, a purported history of the cruelties and absurdities of the ultra-Protestant [and socialist] reign of terror mounted by Jan Bockelson (or Jan van Leiden) as Munster’s ‘King of the Anabaptists’ 1534-36. ‘Purported’ because clearly Reck-Malleczewen had another purpose in mind than resurrecting a strange but long-past episode of cruelty: As the editors show, Reck-Malleczewen was also mounting a scathing satirical attack on Hitler and his cronies, published under the noses of [National-Socialist] censorship. . . . How did he get away with it? . . . Partly, it seems, . . . because the satire is back-handed and can often be read as an indictment of Soviet Bolshevism—of which [Reck-Malleczewen] was certainly no fan. But also partly the events were sufficiently far away that the parallels may simply have escaped many 1937 readers.”

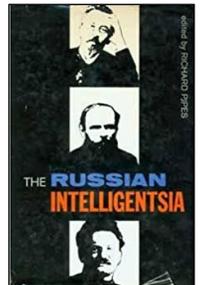
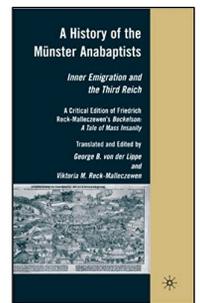
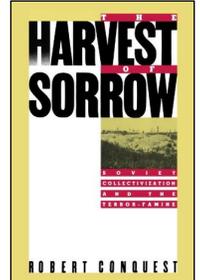
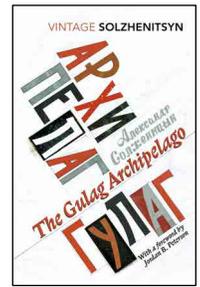
“How Soviet Planning Works,” by G. Warren Nutter. *New Individualist Review*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Summer 1965): 20–25.

In really-existing socialist countries, what is called centrally planning is hopelessly disorderly and chaotic. Warren Nutter writes, “Is it even possible to visualize Soviet planning as a process with dominant order, purposes, and continuity? I think not. . . . There is no command headquarters in the Soviet economy where brilliant scholar-leaders are solving a horde of simultaneous equations, pausing intermittently to issue the orders that mathematical solutions say will optimize something or other.”

“Ideology and Science in the Soviet Union: Recent Developments,” by Gustav A. Wetter. *Daedalus*, vol. 89, no. 3 (Summer 1960): 581–603. Reprinted in *The Russian Intelligentsia*, edited by Richard Pipes. Columbia University Press, 1961.

Wetter was the West’s most prominent scholar who studied philosophical developments in the Soviet Union. Here he shows in detail how the Soviet regime and Communist Party enforced their ideological demands on scientists and how honest scientists tried to fight back. This ideological distortion was particularly detrimental in the field of genetics, where the Communist Party imposed the unscientific doctrine called “Lysenkoism.”

The Illusion of the Epoch: Marxism-Leninism as a Philosophical Creed, by H. B. Acton. Liberty Fund, 2003.



A detailed but accessible, critical presentation of the philosophical foundation of Marxism (dialectical materialism) and of Marxian political theory and ethics.

“Information and Efficiency: Another Viewpoint,” by Harold Demsetz. *The Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 12, no. 1 (April 1969): 1–21.

D. W. MacKenzie writes, “economists Kenneth Arrow and Harold Demsetz had an exchange ... that deserves some attention. Arrow contended that free-enterprise economies underinvest in research and invention because of risk. Arrow also asserted that an ‘ideal socialist economy’ would supply such information free of charge, thus separating the use of and the reward for producing such information. Demsetz penned a devastating critique of Arrow’s arguments on information, and of the ‘market failure’ literature in general. . . . To point to market imperfections as proof of the need for government intervention, he said, is to indulge in the ‘Nirvana Fallacy,’ whereby we compare allegedly imperfect real markets to imaginary governmental institutions that lack even the smallest imperfection.”

Karl Marx and the Close of His System, A Criticism, by Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, translated by Alice M. Macdonald. T. Fisher Unwin, 1898.

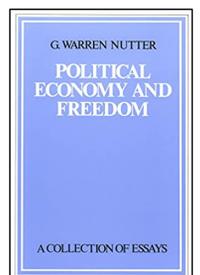
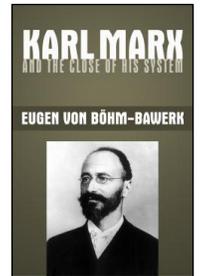
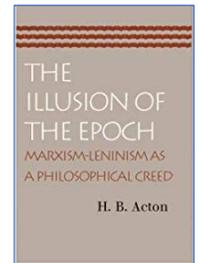
Intellectual historian David Hart writes, “The Austrian economist Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk (1851-1914) wrote a devastating critique of Marx’s economic theory shortly after the publication of the posthumous third volume of *Das Kapital* in 1894. [Böhm-Bawerk] begins by carefully and methodically showing how Marx contradicts himself over the course of the three volumes. He also shows how Marx’s views about the theory of value (based upon the amount of labor expended to produce something) were flawed, . . . how he ignored crucial aspects of the economic process which influence the price of goods (such as competition between producers, changes in the supply and demand of raw materials and labor), how he neglected both empirical studies which showed how the market system actually worked as well as the recently developed Austrian approach, . . . and how the same amount of labor time had to be rewarded differently depending upon where along the structure of production it took place. Economist Murray N. Rothbard said, ‘Böhm-Bawerk patiently, point by point, shows that Marx implicitly gave up the labor theory of value [in volume three of *Das Kapital*]. Obviously, [Marx] had to admit that profits tend to be equalized on the market, and therefore the labor theory of value is shot.’”

The Labour Theory of Value in Karl Marx, by Horace William Brindley Joseph. Oxford University Press, 1923.

Oxford philosopher H. W. B. Joseph holds that Marx’s theory is “definitely false.” James Bonar writes, “[T]he theory that value comes wholly from labour, and profits from unpaid labour, is a hard one to defend. . . . Mr. Joseph shows very fully how the 3rd volume of *Capital*, with its recourse to competition and averages and prices as distinguished from values, has failed to reconcile the theory of Marx with the obtrusive facts of everyday trade and industry.” Joseph writes, “[L]abour itself is only a source of value in things because the things are wanted. The exchange-relations of things do not and never did accord with the relative amounts of labour that have gone to their production. Marx’s law of value is then at variance with the facts. . . .”

“Liberty of the Press under Socialism,” by Williamson M. Evers. *Social Philosophy & Policy*, vol. 2, no. 6 (Spring 1989): 211–34. Reprinted in *Socialism*, edited by Ellen Frankel Paul. Basil Blackwell for the Social Philosophy and Policy Center, Bowling Green State University, 1989.

Socialist theorists make extravagant claims about retaining liberty of the press under actual socialism, but without private property rights such liberty has not survived and cannot survive.



“Markets Without Property: A Grand Illusion,” by G. Warren Nutter. Reprinted in his *Political Economy and Freedom: A Collection of Essays*, Liberty Fund, 1983; and in *The Economics of Property Rights*, edited Eirik G. Furubotn and Svetozar Pejovich, Ballinger, 1974.

A critique of Oskar Lange’s proposal to use simulated markets to solve socialism’s economic-calculation problem—a problem that was laid out by Ludwig von Mises. Warren Nutter writes, “[W]e can see how empty [Lange’s] theoretical apparatus is. Markets without divisible and transferable property rights are a sheer illusion. There can be no competitive behavior, real or simulated, without dispersed power and responsibility. If all property is to be literally collectivized and all pricing literally centralized, there is no scope left for a mechanism that can reproduce in any significant respect the functioning of competitive private enterprise.”

“Marxism,” by David Prychitko. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Liberty Fund, 2010.

David Prychitko critically summarizes the core pillars of classical Marxism (labor theory of value, alienation, immiseration). Points to the importance of Hayek’s and Mises’s critique of socialist planning as incoherent and unworkable.

“Marxist Dreams and Soviet Realities,” by Ralph Raico. Reprinted in *Great Wars and Great Leaders: A Libertarian Rebuttal*. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010.

Raico writes: “[I]f something like Stalinism had not occurred, it would have been close to a miracle. Scorning what Marx and Engels had derided as mere ‘bourgeois’ freedom and ‘bourgeois’ jurisprudence, Lenin destroyed freedom of the press, abolished all protections against the police power, and rejected any hint of division of powers and checks ideology,’ obsolete and of no relevance to the future socialist society. Any trace of decentralization or division of power, the slightest suggestion of a countervailing force to the central authority of the ‘associated producers,’ ran directly contrary to the vision of the unitary planning of the whole of social life.”

The Moral Collapse of Communism: Poland as a Cautionary Tale, by John Clark and Aaron B. Wildavsky. Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1991.

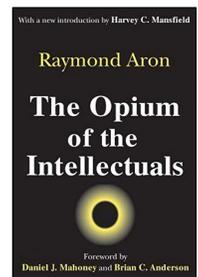
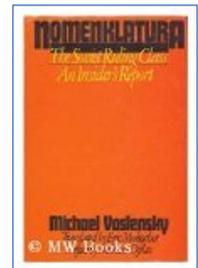
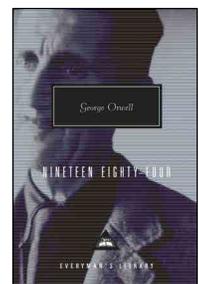
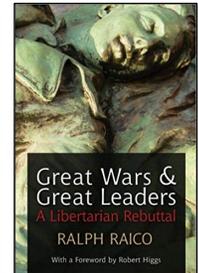
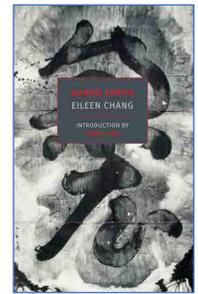
A detailed case study of Poland as an actually-existing socialist society. People at all levels had to rely on connections and networking to obtain goods and services. Benign use of such connections easily shaded over into corrupt uses and moral degradation. The country’s economic disorganization and shortages provided the basis of the ruling elite’s privileges. The authors write: “It was in communist Poland ... that the state repressed the masses, sought to impose the ideological hegemony of the ruling class, and pursued policies that seem to have no purpose other than to protect the political power and economic well-being of the fortunate few.”

Naked Earth, by Eileen Chang. New York Review of Books, 2015.

Perry Link writes: “In *Naked Earth*, Chang shows how the linguistic grid of a Communist land-reform campaign [1949-1953] descends on a [Chinese] village like a giant cookie cutter. ... [S]he seems, like George Orwell, to have almost a sixth sense for immediate comprehension of what an authoritarian political system will do to human beings in daily life. She looks past the grand political system itself and focuses instead on the lives of people—how they fell and behave as they adapt to what the system forces upon them.”

Nineteen Eighty-Four, by George Orwell, with an Introduction by Julian Symonds, Everyman’s Library, 1993.

Orwell depicts a dystopian future that largely extends the features of Communist Russia in a further nightmarish direction that he calls oligarchical collectivism. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* explores such themes as perpetual warfare, propaganda, speech controls, cults of personality, and government surveillance. David Ramsay Steele writes: “The



severest socialist critics of Orwell, like [Raymond] Williams, [Isaac] Deutscher, and E.P. Thompson, were generally people who generated an immense quantity of verbiage about socialism, which they believed ought to be democratic, without ever grappling with the arguments indicating that socialism can never be democratic.”

Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class, by Michael Voslensky. Doubleday, 1984.

The sociology of the ruling class in the actually existing socialism of the Soviet Union.

Opium of the Intellectuals, by Raymond Aron. Routledge, 2001.

Raymond Aron, the most important French classical liberal of the post-World War II era, describes life among French intellectuals and the resulting high fashion of being anti-capitalist.

Pictures of the Socialistic Future, by Eugen Richter, with a preface by Bryan Caplan. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010.

Dystopian novel written by the late 19th-century leader of Germany’s classical liberal political party. Bryan Caplan writes: “Decades before the socialists gained power, Eugen Richter saw the writing on the wall. The great tragedy of the 20th century is that the world had to learn about totalitarian socialism from bitter experience, instead of Richter’s inspired novel. Many failed to see the truth until the Berlin Wall went up. By then, alas, it was too late.”

Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare, by Philip Short. Henry Holt and Company, 2005

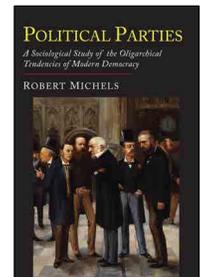
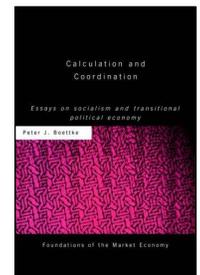
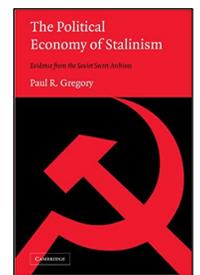
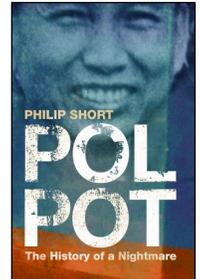
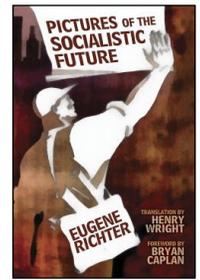
Antonio Jutronic writes, “Very revealing about . . . the early (and fateful) influence of French revolutionaries like Robespierre and Saint-Just on the radical thought of the young leading cadres of the future Democratic Kampuchea. And very accurate about the dark and final influence of Stalin. . . .”

The Political Economy of Stalinism: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives, by Paul R. Gregory. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Analytic study, drawing on the “rational choice” approach to political science, of how and why really-existing socialism operated the way it did, based on evidence from official Soviet state and Communist Party archives. Paul Gregory writes: “[T]here was no solution to principal-agent problem between the ‘dictators’ [the Politburo at the top and subordinate dictators like Gosplan just below] and the ‘agents’ [those who either produced the output or were held responsible for that production]. ‘Producer-agents could rightly argue that they were inundated with arbitrary and destructive orders. . . . [T]he dictators, on the other hand, could point out that the agents were opportunistic and they lied, cheated, and operated their enterprises in in their own interests. Both were correct.”

“The Political Economy of Utopia: Communism in Soviet Russia, 1918-21,” by Peter J. Boettke. *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1990): 91–138. Reprinted in his *Calculation and Coordination: Essays on Socialism and Transitional Political Economy*. Routledge, 2001; and in his *Political Economy of Soviet Socialism: The Formative Years, 1918-1928*, with a foreword by Yuri Maltsev. Kluwer Academic, 1990.

Boettke shows that the Soviet economy from 1918 to 1921 was an effort by the Bolsheviks to put into place Marx’s vision of a moneyless, nonmarket economy. It failed catastrophically. Boettke quotes Soviet political scientist Alexander Tsipko, who asked (in 1988-89) the question that all proponents of democratic socialism have failed to answer: “Why is it that in all cases and without exception and all countries . . . efforts to combat the market and



commodity-money relations have always led to authoritarianism, to encroachments on the rights and dignity of the individual, and to an all-powerful administration and bureaucratic apparatus?”

Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, by Robert Michels, with an introduction by Seymour Martin Lipset. The Free Press, 1966.

Sociologist Michels sets forth “the iron law of oligarchy.” Shows that socialist parties, labor unions, and other groups will be run by an elite group and will not be egalitarian in practice. Michels writes: “It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy.”

The Poverty of Historicism, by Karl R. Popper. Harper & Row, 1964.

A counter to “the fascist and communist belief in the Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny.”

The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements, 3rd Edition, by Norman Cohn. Oxford University Press, 1970.

For our purposes the relevant part is chapter 13 of the 3rd edition (chapter 12 of the 1st and 2nd editions), “The Egalitarian Millennium (iii),” on the 1534-35 socialist city-state of Münster (today part of Germany). Cohn writes, “[I]t is certainly mistaken to suggest—as has sometimes been done—that ‘communism’ at Münster amounted to no more than requisitioning to meet the needs of war. The abolition of private ownership of money, the restriction of private ownership of food and shelter were seen as first steps toward a state in which . . . everything would belong to everybody and the distinction between Mine and Thine would disappear. . . . A strict direction of labour was introduced. Artisans who were not conscripted for military service became public employees, working for the community without monetary reward. . . .”

Red Plenty, by Francis Spufford. Graywolf Press, 2012.

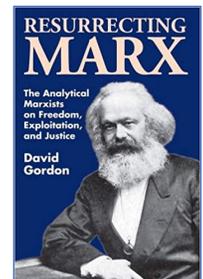
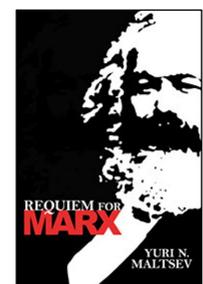
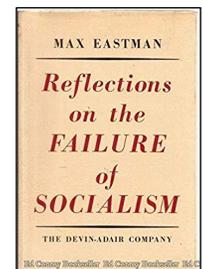
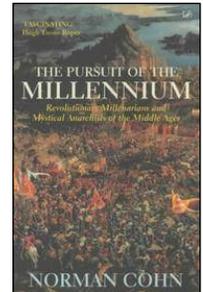
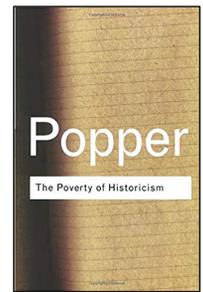
A historical novel. Tom Palmer writes, “Spufford ... describes the period [under Nikita Khrushchev] when many believed that the USSR would surpass the ‘capitalist west’ in the production of consumer goods ... Spufford does an admirable job of explaining the real function of the economic system that existed in the USSR, with a focus on the role of blat (the exchange of favors) and the *tolkach* (the “pushers” or “fixers” who organized complex chains of indirect exchange to supply what was missing).”

Reflections on the Failure of Socialism, by Max Eastman, Devin-Adair, 1955.

Henry Hazlitt writes, “Mr. Eastman argues that socialism has failed over the last century in every nation and in every form in which it has been tried. He explains why political liberty depends upon a ... competitive market and the price system. His arguments are all the more persuasive because of his personal history. He began as an extreme left-wing Socialist. As editor of the *Masses* and alter of the *Liberator*, he ‘fought for the Bolsheviks on the battlefield of American opinion with all the influence my voice and magazine possessed.’”

Requiem for Marx, edited with an introduction by Yuri N. Maltsev. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1993.

Includes “The Marxist Case for Socialism,” by David Gordon; “Classical Liberal Roots of the Marxist Doctrine of Classes,” by Ralph Raico; and “Karl Marx: Communist as Religious Eschatologist,” by Murray N. Rothbard.



Resurrecting Marx: The Analytical Marxists on Freedom, Exploitation, and Justice, by David Gordon, Transaction Publishers, 1991.

Philosopher David Gordon takes apart the “analytical Marxists” (John Roemer, Jon Elster, and G.A Cohen), who have dropped the labor theory of value and the concept of “alienation” that stems from Hegel, but still want to hang onto much of the rest of Marx.

Rivalry and Central Planning: The Socialist Calculation Debate Reconsidered, by Don Lavoie. Cambridge University Press, 1985.

In this discussion of Mises’s argument that economic calculation under socialism is impossible, Lavoie turns away from the static equilibrium model of neoclassical economics. Instead he contrasts socialism with the dynamic market process in which rivalry among entrepreneurs leads to decentralized and efficient economic coordination.

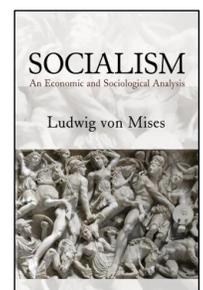
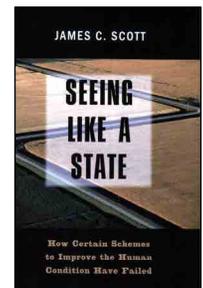
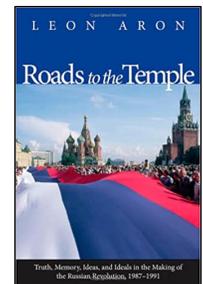
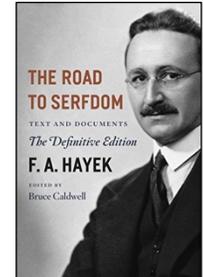
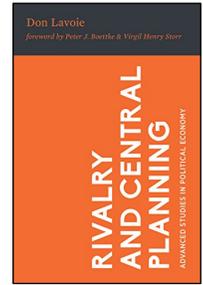
The Road to Serfdom, by F. A. Hayek. University of Chicago Press, 2007. <https://bit.ly/2PgYvP3>. Also, Condensed Version, *Reader’s Digest*, February 1945. <https://bit.ly/2LM6t0h>. Also “*The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons*,” *Look Magazine*, February 1945. <https://bit.ly/2rVtMhB>

Hayek’s book is about the inevitable corruption of free institutions and sacrifice of human values if socialist practices are put into effect. Peter Boettke writes: “[Classical] liberalism, Hayek argues, had imparted a ‘healthy suspicion’ of any argument that demanded restrictions on market competition. With its critique of the competitive system, socialist theory had unfortunately swept away the [classical] liberal constraints against special pleading, and opened the door for a flood of interest groups to demand government protection from competition under the flag of socialist planning. . . . Hayek provides one of the most articulate statements of the [classical] liberal proposition that economic freedom and political freedom are linked. . . . He argued that economic control does not control merely ‘a sector of human life which can be separated from the rest; it is the control of the means for all our ends. And whoever has sole control of the means must also determine which ends are to be served, which values are to be rated higher and which lower—in short, what men should believe and strive for. Central planning means that the economic problem is to be solved by the community instead of by the individual; but this involves that it must also be the community, or rather its representatives, who must decide the relative importance of the different needs.’”

Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas, and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution, 1987-1991, by Leon Aron. Yale University Press, 2012.

We’ve all heard that economic stagnation or the pressure of the arms race caused the fall of socialism in the Soviet Union. This book argues instead that moral revulsion caused the fall of socialism. First, much of Communist ruling elite at the top, and then—as things opened up—the rest of society, voiced their revulsion at the moral degradation and assaults on human dignity inherent in actually-existing socialism. Aron writes, “Non-freedom remained as [Vassily] Grossman put it, in the foundation of building started by Lenin, erected by Stalin, and extended by his successors. Its mortifying weight bore down not just on the intelligentsia—the intellectual, the writer, the scholar. Freedom, concludes the hero of Grossman’s [*Forever Flowing*], is not just freedom of speech, of press, of religion. Freedom was the peasant’s right to sow what he wanted, or any tradesman’s right to make shoes and boots, to bake bread, and to sell to whomever he wanted or not to sell at all. Freedom was the same for the turner or the steelmaker as it was for the artist: live and work as you wish, not as you are ordered.”

Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, by James C. Scott. Yale University Press, 1999.



James C. Scott analyzes the hubris of officials at the center and warns readers about the authoritarian mindset of technocrats.

Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis, by Ludwig von Mises. Yale University Press, 1951.

A thorough examination of socialism in its many aspects. Includes Mises's classic argument that economic calculation under socialism is impossible. Henry Hazlitt: "The most devastating analysis of socialism ever penned."

Socialism: The Failed Idea That Never Dies, by Kristian Niemietz. Institute of Economic Affairs, 2019.

They all began as democratic socialism—before turning into coercive, stratified, hierarchical societies run incompetently by a technocratic elite. When today's proponents of democratic socialism say "this time it will be different," they are only saying what was promised in every preceding effort to put socialism into practice. Chapters on Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, Cuba, North Korea, Khmer Rouge's Cambodia, Albania, East Germany, and Venezuela.

Socialism: A Study Guide and Reader, edited by David M. Hart. Online Library of Liberty, Liberty Fund, 2018. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/socialism>.

Includes extracts from critiques of socialism by Frédéric Bastiat, Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Eugen Richter, Yves Guyot, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, H.B. Acton, Alexander Gray, and others.

Socialism, Economic Calculation, and Entrepreneurship, by Jesús Huerta de Soto. Edward Elgar with the Institute of Economic Affairs, 2010.

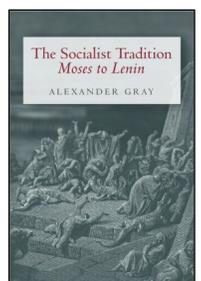
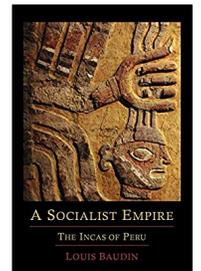
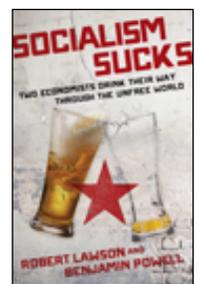
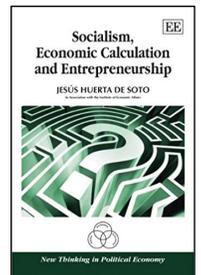
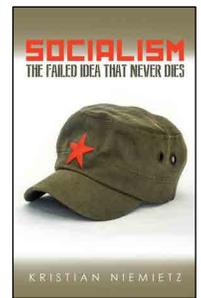
In this discussion of Mises's argument that economic calculation under socialism is impossible, de Soto focuses on entrepreneurship. De Soto points out that only entrepreneurs, because of their role in the economy, can estimate "the value in terms of market prices of the outcome of different courses of action." But socialism suppresses the free exercise of entrepreneurship, especially with respect to productive assets. Without the practical information that arises from entrepreneurship, no one can make rational decisions among economic alternatives. The most chilling section of the book is the four pages about views of British socialist theorist Maurice Dobb. Dobb acknowledges that Mises is right that economic calculation is impossible under socialism. But Dobb says that socialism (and the complete suppression of consumer choice, job choice, markets, and market-like institutions) is more important than efficiency and rational decision-making.

Socialism Sucks: Two Economists Drink Their Way Through the Unfree World, by Robert Lawson and Benjamin Powell. Regnery Publishing, 2019.

P.J. O'Rourke's review of the book reads, "What is 'socialism'? And do countries that overindulge in its wake up with bad hangovers? You bet they do. Robert Lawson and Benjamin Powell give you the hair-of-the-dog cure [with] a dose of political economy."

A Socialist Empire: The Incas of Peru, by Louis Baudin. D. Van Nostrand, 1961.

Ludwig von Mises writes in the preface, "From the pages of his treatise there emerge the shadowy outlines of life under a collectivist regime, the spectre of a human animal deprived of his essentially human quality, the power to choose and to act. These wards of the Inca were only in a zoological sense human beings. Actually they were kept like cattle in a pen. Like cattle they had nothing to worry about because their personal fate did not depend on their own behavior, but was determined by the apparatus of the system." Baudin writes, "Among no other peoples in the New



World do we find, as we do in the realm of the Incas, a slow and gradual absorption of the individual by the state. . . . Man was made for the state, and not the state for man. This is indeed socialism in the full sense of the word. . . .”

The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin, by Alexander Gray. Longmans, Green & Company, 1945.

Murray N. Rothbard wrote, “Alexander Gray is my favorite historian of economic thought. Gray's demolition of socialist writers was apt and devastating.” The book concentrates on the principal socialist figures. It sets forth and evaluates their thinking. It includes a valuable discussion of ancient Sparta, a society constantly mobilized on military lines to suppress its state slaves, the helots.

“The Soft Budget Constraint,” by János Kornai. *Acta Oeconomica*, vol. 64 (2014): 25–79.

The soft budget constraint appears when the need to “balance the books” between the spending and the earnings of an economic firm has become habitually relaxed over time, because overspending will be covered by the State. Firms have come to expect this because it is public policy. The softness weakens the firm’s responsiveness to price signals and generates inefficiencies. When socialist countries attempt “market socialist” reforms, they typically let firms distribute profits to workers and managers, but continue subsidies, loans to firms that are not creditworthy, and absorption by the State of financial losses – all of which incentivize recklessness. This is a topic where the author was a pioneer, writing on it (carefully) even when his country Hungary was under Communist rule. In this article, Kornai sums up his life’s research on the topic.

“Soviet Venality: A Rent-Seeking Model of the Communist State,” by Gary M. Anderson and Peter J. Boettke. *Public Choice*, vol. 93, nos. 1 & 2 (1997): 37–53. Reprinted in Boettke’s *Calculation and Coordination: Essays on Socialism and Transitional Political Economy*. Routledge, 2001.

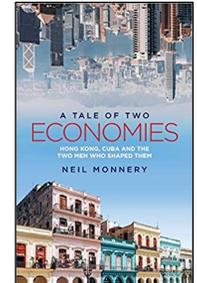
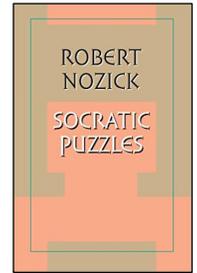
Anderson and Boettke liken the Soviet economy after 1921 to the 16th and 17th century mercantilist states of Europe (such as France under Louis XIV). The Communist rulers handed out monopolies to loyalists. The ruling elite reaped rewards in the form of status, power, and privilege. Soviet central planners (who didn’t exist in classical mercantilism) couldn’t really plan the future and didn’t; they helped sort out friction amongst the monopolists.

“Sweden’s Lessons for America,” by Johan Norberg. *Policy Report*, Cato Institute, February 11, 2020.

Norberg writes, “Sweden is not socialist. If [Bernie] Sanders and [Alexandra] Ocasio-Cortez really want to turn America into Sweden, what would that look like? For the United States, it would mean, for example, more free trade and a more deregulated product market, no Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and the abolition of occupational licensing even after the recent tax cut, America would still have to slightly reduce its corporate tax. Americans would need to reform Social Security from defined benefits to defined contributions and introduce private accounts. They would also need to adopt a comprehensive school-voucher system where private schools get the same per-pupil funding as public ones. Sweden is not socialist. If this is socialism, call me comrade.”

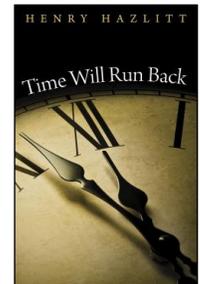
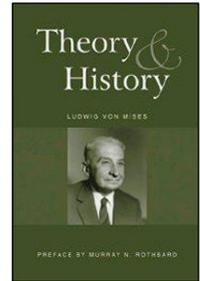
A Tale of Two Economies: Hong Kong, Cuba and the Two Men Who Shaped Them, by Neil Monnery. Gulielmus Occamus & Company Ltd., 2019.

Comparing the results of the laissez-faire policies of Hong Kong to the socialist policies of Cuba, Monnery tells the tale of these two economies through the stories of John Cowperthwaite, Hong Kong’s Financial Secretary, and Che Guevara. Neil Monnery writes, “Cuba had a clear aspiration, from the time of Guevara onwards, to create a modern economy, less dependent on sugar. But it was Hong Kong, which had no central view as to how the economy should evolve, that actually delivered progress and change.”



“Them”: *Stalin’s Polish Puppets*, by Teresa Torañska, translated by Agnieszka Kolakowska. Harper & Row, 1987.

Economist Frank Knight once wrote, “The probability of the people in power being individuals who would dislike the possession and exercise of power is on a level with the probability that an extremely tender-hearted person would get the job of whipping-master in a slave plantation.” Nobel Laureate F.A. Hayek wrote a chapter in his book, *The Road to Serfdom*, on why in an actually-existing socialist system it is inevitable that “the worst get to the top.” “Them”—in which a Solidarity-friendly journalist interviews such people as the former head of Poland’s secret police and former head of its Communist party—gives concrete meaning to these insights. John C. Campbell wrote, “This book, which could not be published [in Communist-ruled Poland at the time it was published in the U.K. and the United States] contains interviews conducted in 1981-1984 with five formerly prominent Polish Communists who had leading roles in the Stalinist system in Poland in the years 1944-1956. Their frank statements and recollections, under the sharp questioning of a talented journalist, are remarkably revealing both of their mentality . . . and of the political issues and struggles of that time. . . .”



Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution, by Ludwig von Mises. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007.

Most important for our purposes is chapter 7 which contains a criticism of Marxian dialectical materialism. Mises destroys Marx’s concepts of the material productive forces, class struggle, and ideology. Mises writes, “As [Marx and Engels] saw it, their adversaries could only be bourgeois idiots or proletarian traitors. . . . Marx employed the term ‘ideology’ [to mean] a distortion of the truth serving the class interests of the bourgeoisie. . . . Marx and all his disciples concentrated their efforts upon the justification and exemplification of [the makeshift concept of ideology]. They did not shrink from any absurdity. They interpreted all philosophical systems, physical and biological systems, all literature, music, and art from the ‘ideological’ point of view. But, of course, they were not consistent enough to assign to their own doctrines merely ideological character.”

Time Will Run Back, Revised Edition, by Henry Hazlitt. Arlington House, 1966.

A novel (relying on the insights of Ludwig von Mises) in which a communist dictator’s son and political heir de-socializes a society.

“Who Are the Radicals: Libertarians or Socialists?,” by David S. D’Amato. Libertarianism.org, 2019.

D’Amato writes, “Socialists throughout the history of ideas have [embraced] what boils down to economic militarism—economic relationships and organizational models predicated on a near obsession with military discipline. Indeed, some of the earliest and most interesting (if terrifying) socialist blueprints are decidedly militaristic in orientation. To better understand this view, we might begin with an examination of the French socialist Charles Fourier, whose utopia exalted a military ideal, at the center of which was the idea of the Greek phalanx. We will also consider socialist economic militarism as presented in the work of the American socialist Edward Bellamy, whose famous novel *Looking Backward* was influenced in part by Fourier.”

“Who Would Choose Socialism? The Israeli Kibbutzim Provide the Acid Test for Voluntary Socialism,” by Robert Nozick. *Reason*, May 1978. Reprinted in his book *Socratic Puzzles*, Harvard University Press, 1999.

Famed Harvard philosophy professor Robert Nozick uses the example of Israeli collective communities to illustrate how many people would voluntarily choose to live under socialism, “under highly conducive conditions.” It turns out, precious few.

About the Author

Williamson M. Evers is a Senior Fellow and the Director of the Center on Educational Excellence (COEE) at the Independent Institute. Dr. Evers has served as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education for Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development from 2007 to 2009, Senior Adviser to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings during 2007, and Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution. In addition, he was a member of the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education from its beginning in 1999 until it wrapped up in 2014. From July to December 2003, he also served in Iraq as Senior Adviser for Education to Administrator L. Paul Bremer of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and in 2015-2016 he was a leader of the Trump-Pence Transition Team on Education.



Dr. Evers has also served as a member of the California State Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards (1996-1998) and the Santa Clara County Board of Education (2004-2007), and he is past President of the Board of Directors of the East Palo Alto Charter School, a board on which he had served from 1997 until 2004.

Dr. Evers headed the Trump-Pence transition's agency review for the U.S. Department of Education. The review focused on policy, legal, organizational, and budgetary matters that would face the then-incoming administration.

He has contributed chapters to numerous scholarly volumes and the books he has edited include *Testing Student Learning*, *Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness*, *Teacher Quality*, *School Accountability*, *School Reform: The Critical Issues*, and *What's Gone Wrong in America's Classrooms*.

His articles have appeared in *Education Week*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Christian Science Monitor*, and he is a past member of the editorial board of *Education Next*.

Dr. Evers received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in political science from Stanford University.



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