

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

September 2007, Volume 18, Number 9



Dr. Mart Laar

former prime minister of Estonia

“Connecting good intentions with sound economics”

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President's Message

Dear Friends,

... there is no faster way to drive an economy into a primitive state than to require local production only.

I often hear religious people regretting the expansion of the global economy. They say it alienates us from our neighbors and drags the unwilling into the cash nexus, spreading a virus of greed. This strikes me as a conclusion that can only be dreamed up through an ideological lens of bad economic thinking. In truth, the expansion of the division of labor—locally, nationally, or globally increases opportunities for human cooperation to the betterment of all.

What about this idea of making things locally? Professor Kelly Cobb at Drexel University had the idea of having her students make a suit of clothes from materials and labor found within a 100-mile radius. In the end, they couldn't do it without having the project linger on for a year and a half. The 92 percent they were able to complete took three months working full time. The time costs alone came to \$11,500 dollars.

They began with three local sheep to provide the wool. A team of weavers turned it into fabric for pants. A local shoemaker made the shoes, but only after a long search to find local leather. All dyes had to be done by hand. The tie, too, had to be made from wool, since local silk was not to be found. The shoes smelled like wood smoke, and the dyes produced an aesthetically unappealing result.

If all the clothes in the world had to come from a 100-mile radius, it's very likely that we would be back in animal skins rather quickly.

This is only a small illustration of how we all need each other to create a thriving economic life for ourselves. The larger the sphere of the division of labor, the more we can specialize and everyone's talents can be put to good use. Likewise, there is no faster way to drive an economy into a primitive state than to require local production only.

Religious leaders need to think more carefully before making economic policy recommendations. This is what the Acton Institute hopes to inspire with the work you so generously support.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Robert A. Sirico". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Robert A. Sirico, President

The mission of the Acton Institute is to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles.

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Laar To Keynote Acton Institute's Annual Dinner

Dr. Mart Laar, a two term prime minister of Estonia (92-95, 99-02), will give the keynote address at Acton's annual dinner on October 24 at the JW Marriot International Ballroom in Grand Rapids. Before becoming prime minister, Estonia was in a state of economic ruin.

Inflation hovered around 1,000 percent; there was a drop in the economy of more than 30 percent. Estonia was also completely tied to the then disastrous Russian economy. While not considering himself an economist, Laar fostered a climate where private property and free markets flourished.

In fact, Laar had little economic training, but had read the book *Free to Choose* by Milton Friedman. The title of the book attracted him to Friedman, "because there were two words: free and choose; this was two things the communists hated, freedom and choice. The name was so excellent and I was interested in reading the book." He claimed it was the only publication on economics he had read at that time. He also noted, "I was so ignorant at the time that I thought that what Friedman wrote about the benefits of

privatization, the flat tax, and the abolition of all customs rights, were the result of economic reforms that had been put into practice in the West. It seemed

"...there were two words:
free and choose..."

common sense to me and, as I thought it had already been done everywhere." Laar introduced a flat tax in 1994, which simplified

the tax code and did away with economic penalties for hard work. In the past, Laar has referred to the role played by his Christian faith in providing him with a moral compass and giving him the courage to make hard, but necessary economic decisions.

Estonia is now ranked twelfth out of 165 countries in the Economic Freedom of the World index, published by the Heritage Foundation. The Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom also named Estonia as one of the top nations for religious freedom. Laar also speaks with enormous credibility on proclaiming the horrors of Marxist tyranny. Laar notes, "One reason we see these kinds of dictatorships coming from Latin America is we have not yet declared the communist to be such an evil ideology as the Nazis or other evil ideologies."



Dr. Mart Laar



From Our Conference Participants

Thank you for the conference scholarship I received for Acton University. The week fed my soul and challenged my mind.

—Jennifer Ellison
Western Seminary
Portland, Oregon

It gave me great pleasure to engage in conversation, debate and even argument as to how we may further glorify our God through economic endeavors.

—Jorge Smith
Knox Theological Seminary
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Dr. Yuri N. Maltsev to deliver next Acton Lecture Series

Dr. Yuri N. Maltsev will deliver a lecture titled, "The Crimes of Communism" on September 27 for the Acton Lecture Series. Before Maltsev came to the United States in 1989, he was a member of a senior team of Soviet economists that worked on President Mikhail Gorbachev's famed perestroika reforms. In Moscow, he also held various prestigious teaching and research positions. Currently he is a professor of economics at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Maltsev will discuss the reversal of liberalized reforms in Vladimir Putin's Russia. In addition, Maltsev will talk about the variety of ways in which communism oppresses people, especially religion. Another issue the lecture delves into is Russia's own war with radical Islam, coupled with Putin and Russia's dealings with rogue Islamic states.

Maltsev was also a Senator William Jennings Peace Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., a research institution sponsored

Jay Richards Talks Environmental Issues on Radio Programs

Acton's media director, Jay Richards, has been hitting the airwaves to help educate the public on environmental issues in a responsible manner. Richards has been weighing in on the global warming debate as well as discussing former Vice President Al Gore's summer Live Earth concert, which attempted to raise concerns and awareness over climate change issues. He also noted the similarities in language and method that has caused the environmental movement to morph into a religious movement of sorts. Richards noted on a Tampa Bay station, "Al Gore said this was the single most important issue of our time. The language is more and more heated and [activists] essentially say we have ten years to deal with this or all is lost." Richards urged caution adding, "Christian organizations believe we should be stewards of our environment and all Christians believe that. The question is whether global warming is being caused and whether it's catastrophic. Before we develop

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Dr. Yuri Maltsev



Dr. Jay Richards

by the United States Congress. There he analyzed problems of the post-communist transition to a market economy, with special emphasis on issues related to privatization and deregulation. In addition to contributing to ten books and publishing over a hundred articles, he has given lectures at leading universities in the United States, corporations, banks, colleges, churches, schools, and community centers. Likewise, he has appeared on various television and radio programs, including PBS NewsHour, C-Span, CNN, Financial Network News, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, National Public Radio, and Wisconsin Public Radio.

this into a deep religious significance we need to examine the science more closely." Richards also pointed out the economic devastation the United States would suffer if we implemented the Kyoto treaty saying, "It would cost a trillion dollars a year to implement." Richards also expressed frustration with the difficulty of meaningful dialogue on this issue with some parties noting, "If we are really destroying the planet and destroying its habitability that would be a significant moral concern. What's troubling is this taking on such an intense moral pitch it's difficult to have a rational conversation, such as trade offs in the Kyoto protocol, where the debate ought to be taking place."

Acton interns provide stellar summer service

The summer interns contributed forcefully to the mission, programs, and goals of the Acton Institute. Whether it was working on the Samaritan Awards, writing commentary, or assisting with office duties, this group embodied professionalism and a hard work ethic. Michael Wagner, a student at American University in Washington, D.C., declared, “The Acton experience, as an intern, allowed me to look closely at what is being done today to promote liberty and freedom not just here in America, but around the world. There is a real sense that Acton has a universal appeal.” Wagner also added, “I think that people of all faiths can find something to like in Acton’s unique blend of economics and faith. The work is very ecumenical, and I think appeals to a universal desire for freedom.”

Kelly Hogan, a student at Marquette University, added one of her favorite aspects of the summer was “working amongst individuals who strive diligently to improve mankind each day.” Specifically she also noted, “The value of acquiring additional knowledge of pertinent issues in our world today

such as poverty and disease, and how to help improve upon those problems.” Intern Brooke Levitske, a student at Calvin College, noted her favorite part of the summer was “the chance to write, and spending time and getting to know the other interns.” Brooke wrote a notable piece titled “Illegal Immigration and the Church: Philanthropic Lawlessness.” Fortunately, some of the interns will continue in active roles assisting Acton Institute this fall.

Also included in this class of summer interns were two Blackstone legal fellows, Sean Martin and Paul Southwick. Blackstone legal fellowship is a rigorous program for exceptionally capable and highly motivated Christian law students from law schools across the country. The stated goal is to “train a new generation of lawyers who will rise to positions of influence and leadership as legal scholars, litigators, judges, and perhaps even Supreme Court justices, and who will work to ensure that justice is carried out in America’s courtrooms.”



ACTON in the News

Outside the United States, the unintended consequences of ill-considered policies promoting ethanol and other biofuel crops are already in full view. The poor, of course, are hit hardest.

—Excerpted from Ray Nothstine’s article in *The Christian Science Monitor*

Ray Nothstine

Title: The unintended consequences of the ethanol quick fix
Publisher: *The Christian Science Monitor*
Date: 7.27.2007

Dr. Samuel Gregg

Title: Business flight will hurt Arabs
Publisher: *The Australian*
Date: 7.27.2007

Dr. Jay Richards

Title: A Balanced Perspective on Global Warming
Program: *The Steve Deace Show*
Air Date: 8.1.2007

Reminder

Help Acton Promote Freedom and Virtue!

The Acton Institute depends on the generosity of supporters like you. If you have not donated to Acton, but enjoy *Acton Notes*, please consider helping us meet our goals! Your help makes possible our continuing mission to promote a free and virtuous society. You may choose to donate using the envelope provided, or you may visit <https://secure.lexi.net/acton> to make a secure donation online. We send our heartfelt thanks to those who have been so generous in the past with your strategic support as well as your prayers. You have a broad vision and a generous heart.



Michael Miller lectures the audience at ALS



A packed ALS audience on July 11

Acton and You Acton Lecture Series

Michael Miller gave a lecture on July 11 for the Acton Lecture Series titled "Truth, Relativism, and the Free Society." It was a passionate discussion of the power of freedom, and the truth and righteousness that free people and liberty embody. Miller contrasted the relativist thinking of totalitarian regimes with the value of truth in a free society. The central theme of Miller's argument was that "freedom and tolerance can only be sustained in a society where a robust commitment to truth exists." Miller noted how totalitarianism sees "men and women as blank slates that can

be shaped in their image." Miller also highlighted the spiritual struggles of people against totalitarian dictatorships as well as pointing out how religious freedom checks the power of the state. Miller also quoted Benedict XVI who declared "the church by definition limits the state." He also noted "if you are under God's authority the state is automatically limited." Alexis de Tocqueville argued that it was America's religious commitment that creates and fosters liberty, community, and common purposes, that helps sustain the civil society.



Acton Institute's Seventeenth Annual Dinner

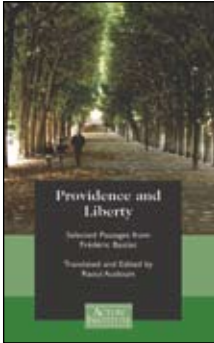
Oct 24

JW Marriott, Grand Rapids, Michigan
For more information please call 800.345.2286

Featuring Dr. Mart Laar
Former Prime Minister of Estonia

"Laar belongs high in Europe's pantheon
of post-communist heroes..." -*The Economist*

ACTON Book Shoppe

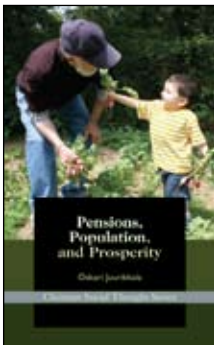


Providence and Liberty

by Frederic Bastiat

This little book will introduce the reader to a rare and wonderful human being who has brilliant insights into the necessary connection between Christianity and liberty. Those who are already fans of Bastiat will find that this book adds another dimension to their appreciation, those who read and reread *The Law* will find this a perfect companion volume.

Paperback 48 pages Price \$4.00



Pensions, Population, and Prosperity

by Oskari Juurikkala

In both developed and developing nations, old age security is a concern of the utmost importance. Wealthy nations face ailing government pension systems, while less developed nations struggle to construct viable mechanisms for assisting the needy elderly. In this unique and provocative monograph, Oskari Juurikkala, fully cognizant of these differences and drawing on the wisdom of the Christian social tradition, argues that the solution for both groups of nations lies in the same direction—away from reliance on the state and toward strong familial and other private networks.

Paperback 85 pages Price \$5.00

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
Sept 5	The Call of the Entrepreneur Film Premiere Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art	Chicago, Illinois
Sept 13-15	Toward a Free and Virtuous City Conference	Atlanta, Georgia
Sept 19	The Call of the Entrepreneur Film Premiere Angelika Film Center	Houston, Texas
Sept 20-23	Toward a Free and Virtuous Society Conference Mr. Michael Miller and Dr. Sam Gregg to lecture	Sonntagberg, Austria
Sept 26	The Call of the Entrepreneur Film Premiere American Film Renaissance Festival	Washington, D.C.
Sept 28	Health, Technology and the Common Good Pontifical Gregorian University, Centro Matteo Ricci	Rome, Italy
Oct 24	Acton Institute Seventeenth Annual Dinner Featuring keynote speaker Dr. Mart Laar	Grand Rapids, Michigan

DEADLINES

Date	Event
Oct 31	Calihan Fellowships Academic Deadline
Oct 31	Centesimus Annus Academic Fellowship Deadline

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