

The Sweet Taste of Liberty

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Witold Falkowski holds up translated copies of *Human Action*.

Of all the changes that occurred with the collapse of communism in 1989, the thing that I'll always remember is the impact on pastries. For the first time, the price of pastries at my local bakery was determined by the market!

But of course, that is a relatively trivial memory. More importantly, I remember the excitement I felt as I explored and pursued the many new opportunities that liberalization offered. For people who exhibited initiative and determination, the possibilities seemed endless.

I strongly believed that Poland was heading in the right direction. The plan for Poland's transition to a market economy was gaining momentum; foreign investors were coming to Poland, companies were being privatized, and the government began eliminating subsidies. Eager to put my newfound freedoms to practice, I started a franchise of a rapidly growing English-language private school in Warsaw. After a few years I started my own small school and a shipping company.

However, as Poland opened up, I discovered that the beacon of liberty we aspired to was no longer so free. The West had become more socialist than we had imagined when we were sitting behind the Iron Curtain. Even those reforms which had been introduced in Poland were becoming heavily restricted and even rolled back. We experienced more and more taxation, regulation and government intervention. I realized that the pinnacle of our freedom was in 1989, or even 1988, and that liberty in Poland had been dissolving ever since.

This inspired me to analyze the recent developments in the social and economic environment of our country. I discovered the works of Murray Rothbard, Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek and other free-market thinkers. I became more and more involved in independent research and decided to leave my shipping firm and start a career as a freelance translator of free-market books and articles. In 2005, after having translated a few works (among others, Rothbard's *For a New Liberty*, the Tannehills' *The Market for Liberty*), I began translating Mises' *Human Action*. In the meantime, I joined a team of students and young scholars who called themselves Instytut Misesa, and I became the president of the organization in 2006.

We announced the translation of Mises' book on our website as, "The Human Action Project", asking people to donate or subscribe to the book. By the time I completed the translation we had roughly \$20,000 in donations and 200 orders from subscribers. We published it as the first paper volume by Instytut Misesa. Around 1,500 copies have been sold since, assuring a modest but constant stream of funds for our current activities and indicating a growing love for liberty in Poland.

In October of 2007, with the release of *Ludzkie dzialanie* (the Polish title of *Human Action*) we held a conference in Warsaw, drawing over 120 people. "Mises: The Defender of Civilization and Economics" attracted both Polish and foreign scholars and generated top-rate intellectual discussion. Many people

approached me and expressed their appreciation for translating the seminal work and engaging the public in classical liberal ideas.

Mateusz Machaj, the founder of the Institute, came to me and said, “We are opening a new chapter, Witold.”

At this time I learned about the Atlas Economic Research Foundation and filled out an application for a Fisher Award. Although we did not win, I was invited to the Atlas Liberty Forum in Philadelphia, the birthplace of America’s revolt against tyranny. As a novice in the free-market think tank world I felt immediate relief when I came across Atlas. The awareness that somewhere there existed people who cared for what we were doing, people who were willing to help us spread the message of freedom, inspired me to charge forward. Atlas offered a lighthouse to aid my navigation.

I felt that despite our academic developments (publications, conferences, seminars) we needed to attract more attention from students, businesspeople and average citizens. To do this, we launched a new project called “Clubs of the Austrian School of Economics,” encouraging small groups of people interested in economics to gather twice monthly to study the Austrian School. With materials and guidance from Instytut Misesa, twelve clubs were established in different parts of the country, gathering over 60 participants.

These Clubs of Austrian Economics (ACE) motivate people and inspire them to become active in raising awareness of fundamental economic issues. This inspiration can be seen in a new website, www.austriacy.pl, which was developed voluntarily by one of the activists. The project has gained widespread appreciation, especially among students. A few scholars became involved in the movement as well. In order to further encourage these groups, we held a Summer Seminar for the Clubs participants and other young people interested in free-market ideas. Forty people participated in the Seminar which was held in a small resort this past September. The gathering provided an opportunity to both learn more about the free market and exchange ideas on the Clubs’ movement, in order to give it new momentum.



Mateusz Machaj, founder of Instytut Misesa

“This is something we have been waiting for”, said Olgierd Sroczyński, an ACE movement activist from Cracow. “We wanted to start a free-market educational program in schools in our city but we lacked institutional support. Since we became affiliated with Instytut Misesa we are recognized by state school directors and teachers.” Olgierd has since run a series of classes at high schools teaching principles of market-liberal economics and the benefits of a free society.

Several private companies have commissioned us to organize seminars for their management on the topics of economics with special emphasis on *Human Action*. In addition, Instytut Misesa now has a series of weekly radio broadcasts reaching over 2 million people in northeastern Poland and Warsaw.

In spring of 2008, we opened a small office and a library in the center of Warsaw on the historic Vistula River, where we recently hosted Professor David Friedman. I ordered some first-quality pastries from the bakery around the corner. Anti-socialist gatherings should always be associated with sweetness and quality, I think.