

Freedom and Property

Seminar Overview

For liberals private property is a defining characteristic of a free society. Self ownership and the right to own the things we need to ensure a livelihood for ourselves belong together. If we don't own ourselves we are slaves and we are not free. If we don't own the things that are essential for securing our basic needs and well-being, we are more dependent –less free – than we would otherwise be. Indeed, private property is the most important factor that distinguishes a liberal society from the socialist or a communist ideal.

Unfortunately, however, policy makers throughout the world rarely realize how important vigorous protection and the strengthening of property rights are not only for the freedom and quality of life citizens enjoy but also for the political, economic and social development of their countries. Liberal thinkers all too often took private property and its advantages for granted. It was given and did not need to be explained. This was part of the reason why socialists were so successful in slandering and undermining the institution of private property. Only recently – and, in particular, after the velvet revolution – have policy makers rediscovered the importance of private property. The liberal economist Hernando de Soto even goes as far as to claim that unprecedented development would occur if informal property in so-called third world countries could be formalised.

Participants of this seminar should have a good grasp of modern liberalism and be involved in policy development or in the assessment of policy (from political parties, think tanks and the media). The seminar aims to cover the subject of private property from four major perspectives:

Politics – property promotes stability and constrains the power of government.

Ethics – property is legitimate because everyone is entitled to the fruits of his/her labour.

Psychology – property enhances the individual's sense of identity and self-esteem.

Economics – property is the most efficient means of producing wealth.

It is important to remember, however, that the arguments for private property are not purely utilitarian in character but go to the core of what liberalism represents.

The seminar discusses important current political issues in terms of enhancing property rights: empowerment of disadvantaged sections of society, development, social policy, restitution of confiscated property, expropriation “in the public interest”, taxation, piracy in the field of

copyright, conflicts surrounding life-saving patents, environmental protection. This is an extended version of the original IAF seminar on property rights. The online phase will be devoted to a study and discussion of property rights as they are treated in liberal literature on the subject. Participants will also be asked to discuss whether or not private property is a concept relevant only to Western cultures but not to others. Furthermore, candidates will be asked to present a short case study - using a medium of their choice (illustrated text, slide show, YouTube, podcast, blog, flow chart) - highlighting problems that exist with respect to property rights in their own respective countries - from a liberal perspective. Each case study will be made available online.

The following phase of the seminar in Gummersbach, Germany, will be devoted to discussing important current policy issues relating to private property that are a common concern for liberals throughout the world.

Selection Process

To secure an international and regional mix of participants the Foundation will invite the two best performers from Africa, South Asia and Southeast and East Asia, Eastern Europe, from the Mediterranean Countries and from Latin America - presuming a good performance. This will result in 12 participants. The remaining 12 invitees will be chosen according to performance regardless of the region of residence.

Title	Closing Date	Languages	Online Phase I	Online Phase II	Gummersbach, Germany
Freedom and Property	18.01.2010	English Spanish	01.02. – 21.02.2010	08.03. – 10.04.2010	11.04. – 18.04.2010

Selected participants
of Online Phase I

