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**PART 3 OF 3**

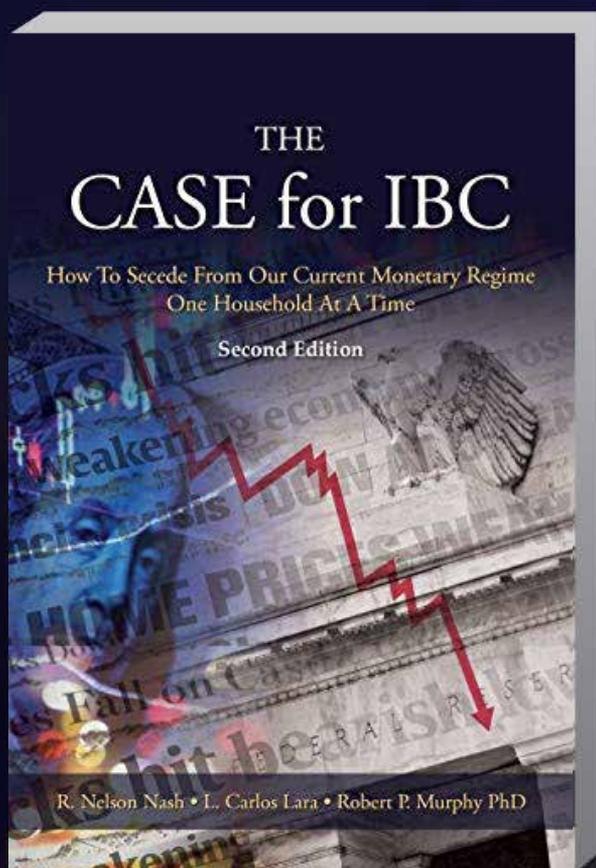
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# WE CAN WIN

## Interview with Federico Fernández



Federico N. Fernández is Executive Director at Somos Innovación (a Latin American pro innovation alliance), Senior Fellow with the Austrian Economics Center (Vienna, Austria), and Founder and President of Fundación Internacional Bases (Rosario, Argentina). He is also the Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the International Conference “The Austrian School of Economics in the 21st Century,” held in Vienna. He has been actively engaged in work within the Liberty movement for more than a decade.

Federico’s writings and advocacy campaigns have been featured at The Economist (UK), El País (Spain), El Comercio (Perú), Newsweek (USA), Asahi Shimbun (Japan), and La Nación (Argentina), among others.

He has delivered speeches and lectures in three continents, is author of scholarly articles, and is the co-editor of the books *La escuela austríaca de economía en el siglo XXI* and *An Austrian in Argentina: Essays in honor of Alberto Benegas Lynch (Jr)*.

**Lara-Murphy Report:** How did you discover Austrian economics?

**Federico Fernández:** I am originally from Argentina. My country has many issues, unfortunately. However, it has a few strengths as well. One of them is that there is a strong Austrian tradition.

Just to give you an idea, Ludwig von Mises himself visited Argentina. Indeed, he came in 1959 to the country invited by Alberto Benegas Lynch, Sr. He gave a series of six lectures which were later published under the title “Economic policy: Thoughts for today and tomorrow.”

Although the Austrians have not been very effective in influencing government



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policies, they have been quite active both as scholars and as public intellectuals. If you happen to be interested in classical liberal ideas, it is very likely that you will soon encounter the Austrian School of economics given that many of the top economists in the country are Austrians.

In my case, I first read about the Austrian school thanks to Alberto Benegas Lynch, Jr. By chance I watched him on TV presenting his latest book. I watched the whole interview and thought he was completely wrong. Nonetheless, he kept me thinking. The next day I decided that I would buy his book. I read it cover to cover and could not stop after that.

**LMR:** One of us (Murphy) presented last year at the Austrian economics con-

ference held in Vienna. As one of the organizers, can you give our readers a little background? And how did it work out to hold it in Vienna this time?

**FF:** The Austrian conference was born in Rosario (Argentina) in 2006. It has always been organized by Fundación Internacional Bases and different partners. Our conference has become a milestone in Latin America. It is an event where people come to discuss the latest developments in Austrian and libertarian theory, and also an opportunity to meet some of the brightest Austrian economists from all over the world.

In that regard, we are extremely proud that we have been able to bring amazing



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scholars such as Bob Murphy, Richard Ebeling, Ben Powell, Guido Hülsmann, Mark Skousen, and Larry White (just to name a few) to our country. And these internationals are always joined by most of the best local ones, such as Adrián Ravier, Nicolás Cachanosky (currently teaching in the US), Horacio Arana, Martín Krause, Gabriel Zanotti, and Juan Sebastián Landoni, among others. Moreover, Austrian scholars from the rest of Latin America regularly take part at the conference. People like Daniel Lahoud (Venezuela), Marco Plaza Vidaurre (Perú), Arturo Damm (Mexico), Ubiratan Iorio (Brasil), Eduardo Mayora (Guatemala), and Silvia Alemán (Bolivia).

Having the conference in Vienna (Austria) was a major achievement for us and a strong sign of how much the conference has grown since its humble beginnings.

I must say that the Vienna edition would not have been possible without the invaluable support of the Austrian Economics Center and the Hayek Institut. Dr. Barbara Kolm, Ms. Britt Schier, and Ms. Victoria Schmid were key for the organization of the conference and bear most of the responsibility of its great success.

The conference itself was an extraordinary event. We had speakers and attendees from all over the world—which incidentally shows how Austrian economics spans the globe. In fact, we planned for two breakout sessions but we had to go three due to the amount and quality of the submissions we received.

All the lectures and panels of the conference are available online and can be



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watched online.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, we plan to organize the 10th Austrian conference in Vienna in September 2021. For more information, people can visit [www.austrianconference.org](http://www.austrianconference.org)

**LMR:** We know you have warned European audiences about the dangers of populist political campaigns, based on the South American experiences. Can you define what you mean by the term, and what concerns you about recent political developments?

**FF:** The Italian political philosophers Norberto Bobbio and Nicola Matteucci have defined populism as a “syndrome.” What they mean is that populism oper-

ates as a disease. It infects institutions and undermines them from within. Populism is not necessarily totalitarian but it may very well end up being totalitarian. This is what we are witnessing in Venezuela nowadays. Namely, the dual destruction of all checks and balances and of the economy that leads to brutal repression when it reaches its logical consequences.

In many countries of the Western World what we are seeing is a crisis of political representation. That is not necessarily a bad thing. The problem of Europe has to do with idiocy. Umberto Eco defined idiocy as reaching the right conclusion following the wrong chain of arguments. It is absolutely true that the centralization efforts of the European Union (EU) must be fought back. It is also true that the



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euro as a common currency is questionable. The problem lies in the fact that the most vociferous critics of Brussels supranational centralization want to become centralizers themselves on the national level. Most of the critics of the euro want an even more “active” monetary policy (i.e. more printing).

With the exception of Spain, maybe, there is a total lack of center-right parties that espouse classical liberal economic policies. Virtually the whole European political spectrum has social democracy, public spending, and centralization as statements of faith. This, of course, includes the so-called “conservative” parties, which have not been able to conserve anything at all.

Nevertheless, the old political and economic order seems to be crumbling and this might bring a huge opportunity for reforms in the direction of personal freedom, individual rights, and markets.

**LMR:** We know you have just launched a new network in Latin America. Can you explain?

**FF:** A year ago, in cooperation with more than 25 think tanks, we launched the Latin American Network “Somos Innovación” (We Are Innovation). Somos Innovación was started because all the members were under the impression that



“However, there is a lot to be optimistic for. Thanks to capitalism, humanity is about to eradicate poverty.”

there is a huge gap between the trends we see in society and the actions politicians take. Knowing that this was just a mere opinion we conducted the largest opinion poll ever in Latin America to analyze what are the views of citizens regarding innovation, its relationship with regulation, etc. The results are extremely encouraging. Not only do people want more innovation, they also consider it crucial for the economic growth of their countries and the creation of jobs. Moreover, there is a clear demand for regulatory prudence. Latin Americans do not want the government regulating new products and new business models out of existence. They neither want the state picking winners and losers.

What we pursue with Somos Innovación is to bring visibility to these majorities across the region. This, in turn, we expect will ignite the *alertness* of politicians

who will see that they do not have to be the supporters of prohibitions, over regulations, etc. Furthermore, we want to use the network and its members in each country as a force for real pro-innovation reforms. I invite your readers to take a look at our survey in English at the link in the endnotes.<sup>2</sup>

**LMR:** Finally, as a benefit to most of our readers who are primarily getting news heavily centered on the U.S. and Canada, can you give us your views about the prospects for economic liberty on a global scale? Are you optimistic or pessimistic in the medium-term?

**FF:** There is a lot of doom and gloom these days. We are in the midst of a pandemic and something definitely more dangerous—government policies trying to “protect” us. I am not that naive and I know the present is very difficult and we will have to face problems due to Covid-19, the lockdowns, the money printing, and so on.

However, there is a lot to be optimistic for. Thanks to capitalism, humanity is about to eradicate poverty. In many sectors, innovation and technology are growing at exponential levels. The works of authors like Ludwig von Mises or Friedrich von Hayek reach more and more people everyday.

Thanks to technology, education—particularly in the universities—is going to be totally transformed for the better. I am convinced that we are about to witness the collapse of the monopoly that the Left has had over culture via the official education system. Social media, podcasts, and Youtube channels have helped us level the playfield and reach more people than ever. There are a lot of trends going in our favor, too. There is a lot of work to do. But we can win.



*Note: The economists and financial professionals interviewed in the LMR are given the freedom to express their views, without necessarily implying endorsement from the editors.*

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#### References

1. See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGGm7dJ61AQ&list=PLbDCAD5feMHmg\\_0tvLukeYUy9TVuyAG9P](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGGm7dJ61AQ&list=PLbDCAD5feMHmg_0tvLukeYUy9TVuyAG9P)
2. See: <https://www.somosinnovacion.lat/people-want-more-innovation-in-latin-america-survey/>



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