

August 20, 2008

Dr Robert J. Zimmer, President  
University of Chicago  
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Dear Dr. Zimmer

I am writing to register my opposition to the establishment of a Milton Friedman Institute and to make a suggestion.

Simply put the ideological commitments of a *Friedman* institute would contribute to perpetuating the problems for economies and societies of the same sort that so many mainstream economists, including Milton Friedman, have foisted on the unsuspecting at home and abroad.

As I see it. John Dewey made the essential point. Dewey said “The transition from an ordinary to a scientific attitude of mind coincides with ceasing to take certain things for granted and assuming a critical or inquiring and testing attitude.”<sup>1</sup>

The economic and social system to which Friedman adheres is fabricated by him and those associated with him – by assumption - to be of a free-market minimalist government sort. What is assumed **is not just taken as given** by him and others of his stripe, but as **appropriate for all times and places and peoples**. This renders Friedmanist and mainstream projects inconsistent with both the concept of University and with that of science. In reality there is no free market,<sup>2</sup> institutional power dictates and race, culture and history matter.

The way out is to make the economic and social systems that exist in reality the subject of interdisciplinary investigation that is open ended, inquiring and critical.<sup>3</sup> Such investigations will inevitably require a proper intellectual base in human values that are acceptable at home and abroad. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the construction of which Eleanor Roosevelt was prominent, would seem to have such acceptance.

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey. John, "Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality", *Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago*, First Series, Vol. 3, (1903): 115-139. [http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey\\_1903.html](http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey_1903.html)

<sup>2</sup> See: Reich, Charles A. *Opposing the System* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995).

<sup>3</sup> See further: Needham W. Robert, *Reforming Economics-Ten Quick Steps towards Reality Economics*: <http://economics.uwaterloo.ca/fac-needham.html>. Published in *COMER*, July 2008.

While I am sure that some of what is suggested here is already taking place. I nevertheless recommend that the University of Chicago formally turn its attention and resources to this wider university humanitarian perspective and away from the establishment of a Friedman Institute.

I attach two documents you might find of relevance.

Yours sincerely

W. Robert Needham  
Professor Emeritus  
Department of Economics  
University of Waterloo  
Chicago letter, final

Attachments:

Reforming Economics-Ten Quick Steps towards Reality Economics:  
<http://economics.uwaterloo.ca/needhdata/Reforming%20EconomicsSteps%20to%20Futher%20Reality%20Economics2.pdf>

Gatekeeper Economics and the Reality of Economy and Society (Draft)  
<http://economics.uwaterloo.ca/needhdata/EconSociety.pdf>