

## Why Economic Prizes Are So Important

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By Konstatin Sonin

The academic discipline of economics as a science reappeared in Russia only in the last decade, after an absence of six decades. Individual scholars and even entire research facilities existed prior to that, but only in the 2000s did it become possible to speak of a scientific community in Russia with scholars publishing in international scientific journals. The country also did not host any high-level conferences or seminars by speakers from the world's leading universities.

Yet with each passing year, an increasing number of Russia's economics departments hire prominent faculty members from the international market. Various forms of public recognition appear over time: titles, presidiums and awards. There is a good reason for that. A top award is more than just a chance to honor someone. With universities vying for the best instructors, those holding awards for distinguished achievements can land positions with leading institutions or demand higher salaries from their own. More important, awards focus the attention of the entire scientific community and provide an example of successful scientific research, a positive work ethic and the strong moral qualities of the recipient.

Creating a worthy prize is no small task. Swedish innovator and businessman Alfred Nobel has earned a place in history for the financial sacrifice he made to establish his award for excellence in the sciences, but the prize gained pre-eminence largely because of the 100 years of effort by the Nobel Foundation, the contributions of numerous experts and the fact that recipients know that dozens of extraordinarily accomplished individuals received the honor before them.

Incidentally, the money is not the main draw of the award. For example, the Fields Medal in mathematics is extremely prestigious but offers a very modest amount of money. The same principles apply to all awards. For example, Yury Milner, the founder of Mail.ru Group, established the Fundamental Physics Prize, which awards \$3 million to each winner. Milner had the pleasure of selecting the first round of winners himself. But for the prize to earn the status of a true scientific award, recipients must be chosen by a group of qualified, honest and intelligent people over the course of at least 10 to 15 years.

Russia lacks this type of prize for economics. Some prizes carry the names of outstanding Russian economists, such as Nikolai Kondratyev and Leonid Kantorovich, while others make large cash awards. But who remembers the recipients of those prizes, what their scientific accomplishments were and what worthy example they set for young Russian economists?

This year, the Yegor Gaidar Foundation gave its eponymous award to such distinguished recipients that it has a chance of gaining the status of a serious prize. Rostislav Kapelyushnikov and Vladimir Gimpelson, of the Higher School of Economics, are among the most authoritative Russian specialists on labor economics. It is largely thanks to their efforts that labor economics is the only fully developed field of economic science in this country, and it is the only field that can be considered a "scientific school" in the classical sense. No less important, they are both wonderful examples of humility and dignity — the very traits that would be good to see in every scientist.

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