FEE: The Growth of an Idea

Most of mankind during most of its history has endured in slavery. By one device or another, a few men have made servants of the many. This servitude has paralyzed the spirit of freedom in all those peoples, and they have known little but how to follow orders. They have not known their own creative powers as free men. Yes, there have been a few outstanding instances of exception, but they are so rare as to be notable historic landmarks.

Then came the United States, dedicated to the ideal of faith in the individual, and with the conviction that government should be restricted to the protection of the life, liberty, and private property of citizens as individuals. On this ideal, a great nation was founded and grew to be the wonder of the world and the envy of all.

But in recent decades this ideal has been ignored or rejected to an alarming degree. No longer is it generally known just why this nation was able to generate so much progress and personal accomplishment in America. This lack of understanding is causing us to trade our heritage for a most subtle and deceptive form of bondage. It is not surprising that when some people in midwest United States were recently asked to sign an extract from the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, which had been designed in the form of a petition, nearly all of them refused to sign it; a common view was that it was either anarchy or a communist trick.

Victor Hugo once said that nothing in this world is so powerful as an idea whose time has come. Perhaps the time has come for the ideal of freedom to again be reaffirmed. The seeds of concern, long dormant, seem now to be stirring. Grass-roots America seems to sense the rotting away of the heart of 18th Century American idealism. The citizens know that all is not well; that no nation can stand a parasitism where one-third or more of the productive efforts of a people are being drained into governmental processes of special privilege, into attempts to buy favors both here and abroad, and into foreign wars.

Perhaps the time has come for a revival of the old but ever-refreshing idea of personal freedom in America and the world in general. At any rate, it is this faith which has drawn together a small group of persons with headquarters at Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, and their 27,000 widely scattered cooperators. The organization is The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., a nonprofit research and educational institution dedicated to the search for truth in matters of economics, political science, government, and other relationships of man in society.

Housed in a rambling old country mansion, members of the staff carry on their research. The organization was started in 1946 by Leonard E. Read, then with the National Industrial Conference Board. Dr. F. A. Harper of Cornell