



THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.

IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK 10533

The Poor Should Look to Liberty

A LAWYER from another country enrolled as a student in our FEE School of Political Economy. But, once the classroom lectures were under way, he announced that the philosophy we taught — free market, private property, limited government — was not for him. He frankly admitted his preference for socialism.

Since ours is not a reform school, we would normally, under these circumstances, return the tuition and bid the socialist a fond adieu — as was done with two of his fellow students. We made an exception in his case because (1) he expressed a desire to remain throughout the course and listen; (2) he did not intrude his socialistic views into the discussions; and (3) he was of a most pleasant and gracious personality, attractive in his manners and behavior. So, he remained as an auditor.

Several weeks later, following a routine explanation of the free market in action by a FEE professor, our foreign friend interrupted his own silent curiosity by exclaiming, "*Why, you folks are for the poor people, too!*" FEE's professor replied, "Of course we are; that has seemed so obvious to me that I hadn't thought the fact worth mentioning; I have taken for granted that you understood it."

What a mental block this well-intentioned socialist suffered! Like millions of Americans, he labored under the misapprehension that the philosophy of individual liberty is little more than an intellectual apology for entrenched wealth, a rationale for persons who have no concern for those below their own dollar stations. Like a few others, however, he was curious enough at least to listen and to see how

much of "this free enterprise stuff" he could stomach. After all, the capitalists seem to succeed where socialists fail; there must be something to it. But become an ardent devotee? Never!

I must hasten to add that the moment our socialist friend "saw the light" he executed a complete ideological flip-flop; he became one of the best students of the freedom philosophy we have had at the FEE School. He returned to his country as a confirmed believer and an excellent exponent of free market principles. Furthermore, he has become a key figure in his native land.

MOST of us who stand for liberty are as guilty, as was FEE's professor, of a tactical error. So firmly embedded in our own minds is the fact that liberty is the poor man's best ally that we mistakenly assume a like awareness on the part of everyone else. Failing to identify the free market and related institutions with kindly sentiments and noble objectives — such as a better life for the poor — we fumble the ball, so to speak, allowing the opposition to run with it — and play to the grandstand!

The era of free and willing exchange extends, roughly, over the past one hundred and seventy-five years. In no other period of history have so many raised themselves out of poverty. Why, then, are those of us who champion free and willing exchange — the only anti-poverty device in man's possession — so seldom credited with relieving the poor man of his burden? Quite frankly, it is because such relief is not the major end we have in view. *Freedom and wide open opportunity for all is the prime ob-*

Announcing a Seminar at Fee — October 23-25. See page 4.