

# The Century of the Common Man

“A FEATURE of our century is the general acceptance of popular governments,” said Glenn E. Hoover, speaking before a joint meeting of the Bay Area Mortgage Association and the Northern California Mortgage Bankers Association in San Francisco in December. In his address, published in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, the Common Man was delineated as “the Demos, the Multitude, the man whose mental endowment does not exceed the average,” and it was made clear that nature has set limits to our intellectual powers.

Prerequisites for the successful operation of a democracy were, said the speaker, a general willingness to accept the decisions of the majority, and a reasonably well informed electorate.

Professor Hoover, now a member of the Oakland City Council, and trustee of the East Bay extension of the Henry George School, restated his conclusions briefly at the close of his address as follows:

1. In the matured democracies the Common Man is in the driver's seat, and is there to stay. His political supremacy may annoy those who would prefer to be governed by Plato's “philosopher-kings” or some other kind of Uncommon Man. However, it appears that the Common Man has come to power as the result of certain developments in human history that cannot be reversed.

2. With his abundant good will, our future is secure if only he will learn his limitations. His ultimate aims are never evil, but he frequently employs means that are futile or that defeat his own purposes. He will succeed if he learns to rely on

the counsel of Uncommon Men, when common sense is an inadequate guide.

3. With his ambition to raise our living standards he may seriously disrupt the free enterprise system that has made our present standards possible. He has a distrust of the unknown peoples of other lands—frequently bordering on xenophobia—and a juvenile pride in his country's power, rather than its wisdom and its virtues. His tribal patterns of thought and his ethnocentrism are traits that must be modified before we can attain world peace under world law, enforced by a world government.

4. As you might expect from an educator, I predict that unless we make sweeping changes in our educational system our troubles will increase. If schools are compelled to serve as custodial and correctional institutions, they can never accomplish their main purpose. High school attendance should not be required of those who cannot, or will not, profit from it. To make such attendance a privilege rather than a duty would do much to improve education at the secondary level, now the weakest link in our educational system.

5. And, finally, let us insist that not all of our best minds be used to perfect more horrible devices for the destruction of our species. If our generation is to be cured of its present suicidal mania, we must concentrate on wisdom rather than technology. No wisdom, nor any other good thing, was ever produced in an arsenal. In the era of the Common Man it is as true as it was in the era of the prophets, that without wisdom the people perish.