

The Intellectual Ferment

[From an address by Glenn E. Hoover, Professor of Economics at Mills College, before the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, entitled, "Europe — 1952."]

AN INTELLECTUAL ferment is developing in Europe, particularly in the minds of the young. As a teacher I have always attached great importance to what Youth is thinking, and particularly when Youth is thinking of such things as freedom and justice. I am happy to be able to report that in both Britain and Denmark, a growing number of young men and women are attacking the evils and follies of our time with an evangelical zeal that should light fires in the hearts of even the most cynical and tired of liberals.

For instance there was held in Denmark this summer an international conference on free trade and land value taxation. There was a surprising percentage of young people at this conference, and they made it evident that they had been thinking profoundly about liberty and justice, and had reached a large measure of agreement.

They are convinced that no just distribution of this world's goods can ever result from the "class struggle" or the use of monopoly power by labor unions, by employers or by any pres-

sure group whatsoever. No system of distribution can meet their standards of justice unless it is based on a recognition of the fact that produced goods are the product of labor and capital, and that the earth is a free gift of nature or of nature's God. They see a significant difference between what man has made and what God has made, and they draw the inevitable conclusions. They insist that the earth, its land, air and water belong to the people, and that the annual value of the earth should be taken by the government for public purposes, thus reducing the tax burden now imposed on both labor and capital.

Secondly, these young people demand complete freedom for both domestic and foreign trade, and they will accept no compromise. They have little patience with those who advocate "low tariffs" for they know that any argument which would justify the reduction of an import duty by 50 per cent will justify its reduction by 100 per cent. They know that if the protectionists were logical, they would not rest until they had a maximum of "protection," i.e., until all competitive imports were excluded, and that those who believe in freeing international trade must demand not "low tariffs" but "no tariffs."

These new radicals as I prefer to call them, may know little of practical politics, but in demanding complete freedom of trade they are magnificently right. As an old radical myself—and I hope a not too tired one—I have enjoyed both their relentless logic and their boundless enthusiasm. I have hopes that in the fight for economic freedom in Europe they will take the leadership away from the fuzzy minded and the mealy mouthed.

The old radicals of nineteenth-century Britain who did so much to free all slaves throughout the empire, to free Britain's imports from all protectionists' duties, and whose political reforms made of the British government a model for the democratic world, were men of whom it is said they had "fire in their bellies." The new radicals have that fire too, and even if they fail in their fight for economic freedom, as an old lover of lost causes I shall love them even more. They are offering to the British people—and to the world—an alternative to both toryism and socialism, and on their side they have both time and the angels. They merit the good wishes of all who know what economic freedom means and the hope it offers to mankind.