

Letters

UNQUESTIONABLY, one of the most effective forms of communication is a thoughtful letter written to a person in answer to his own question.

The staff members of the Foundation for Economic Education write thousands of such letters each year. Some of these are, in effect, short articles on "general interest" subjects not fully covered in previous FEE publications.

A selection of these letters — slightly edited to eliminate extraneous references — will be published in this section from time to time.

Competition

Dear L:

You aren't alone in your fears of the supposed dangers of competition. The majority of the American people seem to prefer some sort of protection or subsidy rather than open competition. And the government obliges them by adding new laws to the old ones in an attempt to defeat the purpose of a free market. I am convinced that this trend away from competition and toward more controls is bad. To help my own thinking in this area, I sometimes ask myself and answer these three questions.

Question: In what country are the greatest number of little businesses started each year.

Answer: In the U.S.A.

Question: In what country are the greatest number of little businesses becoming big businesses?

Answer: In the U.S.A.

Question: In what country is this little-to-bigness growth faced with the greatest competition?

Answer: In the U.S.A. where exists the greatest industrial system ever known on earth.

In short, I believe that if we were to remove the challenges and the demands for efficiency and excellence that competition presents to all of us, our industry would become flaccid and eventually would wither and die. LEONARD E. READ

Mr. Read is president of the Foundation for Economic Education.

What Can I Do?

Dear Mr. E:

"What can I as an individual do to stop this mad rush toward compulsory collectivism in America today?" Few questions are as challenging as yours, and here's my attempt at an answer.

Fortunately for the cause of freedom, it is only as an individual that you or I can do anything at all. This is true because every good idea — as well as every bad idea — begins with one person. He in turn convinces another person. Soon there are several persons who have accepted this idea as advanced by one individual person. This is the voluntary way of accomplishing a desired objective. This is the only method that is in accord with freedom. Unfortunately, it quite frequently happens that individual persons who have voluntarily accepted an idea then band themselves together to force — by vote or otherwise — their idea upon other persons. This, of course, is directly opposed to freedom. It is force and compulsion. This is the method used by those who desire to make other persons do as they think "best for them" or "for their own good." This concept is contained in the much used phrases, "There ought to be a law to make people do this" and "Every American should be forced to read this."

Force cannot be used in the interests of freedom — except for self-defense and rebellion against slavery. This holds true whether the force is applied by a majority or a minority. It holds true whether the force is applied by a robber with a pistol or by a representative of the majority of the people who have voted to force other persons to do what the majority considers "best for them." The theory now held in this country that the votes of the majority automatically insure freedom is incorrect. It is now leading us to our own destruction. *Might has never made right.* It never will.

THIS IS not to deny that a republic or representative democracy is the most desirable form of government we have yet discovered. It is not to deny that freedom is safer in the hands of the many than in the hands of the few. But it is to deny that freedom is automatically safe just because the franchise has become widespread in America; just because we call ourselves "a democracy." It requires more than a vote to preserve liberty; it requires *understanding* on the part of the voters; it requires the knowledge that all governmental decrees and actions must be grounded on moral and natural law if they are to benefit the people.

And that is where *you as an in-*