

Leonard Read dead at 84

By D. Scott Faubel
Staff Writer

Leonard E. Read, the free market proponent who ran the Foundation of Economic Education in Irvington since its founding in 1946, died Saturday at his Irvington home after a short illness. He was 84.

Mr. Read, whose institute was based on the philosophy of freedom — in economics



Leonard E. Read

and all other areas of life — began his career as a businessman following World War I, but soon left his wholesale produce business to become involved with the nation's chambers of commerce.

Born on a Hubbardstown, Mich., farm Aug. 26, 1898, he rose to the executive vice-presidency of the National Industrial Conference Board in 1945 only to leave the post a year later to organize FEE. He was its first and only president.

The foundation, located on five acres of a former estate at 30 S. Broadway, sponsors seminars in Irvington for followers of its "freedom philosophy" and also sends lecturers across the United States and abroad. While it has existed for more than 35 years, its adherents have never initiated a mass movement — a fact that didn't seem to bother Mr. Read.

He said, in 1980, "Every good movement in the world has been led by an

infinitesimal minority. Go back 2,000 years. Jesus had only 12 followers — and one of them was a burn."

The freedom philosophy, according to its followers, encompasses one's intellectual, political, economical and ethical beliefs. Those are combined with a conservative moral base.

Limited government, without such social programs as welfare and unemployment insurance, is central to the FEE philosophy. Government sponsored social programs destroy individual initiative, proponents believe.

Mr. Read subscribed to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, and Kant's principle of universalism. He summed up the premise in a 1980 interview with Gannett Westchester Newspapers. "Leonard Read has a right to his life, his liberty, his livelihood. You can only call (that) a good premise if you can concede that right to every person on the face of the Earth. Can you? I can. Ergo, it is good."

His formal education at the Ferris Institute, Big Rapids, Mich., was interrupted in 1917 when Mr. Read enlisted in the aviation section of the Army Signal Corps. He served in England, France and Germany during World War I.

He returned from Europe to start his Ann Arbor produce business and, in 1927, began his chamber of commerce career when he became the secretary of a small business organization. He then served for 10 years as the manager of the National Chamber of Commerce's Western Division, becoming in 1939 the general manager of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the largest in the nation.

Mr. Read was the author of 29 books and numerous articles. The latest, published last year, is "The Path of Duty." He was a member of St. Andrews Golf and Curling Club and the Canadian Club of New York. He was one of the founders of the Mont Pelerin Society.

His parents were Orville Baker and Ada Sturgis Read. Survivors include his son, James Read, of Ridgefield, N.J.; a sister, Ruby Sanford of Caldwell, N.J.; seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Mr. Read's wife, the former Gladys Cobb, died in 1974.

READ/From page one

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Please see **READ**
on page A4