

*Printed and Published
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THE BIRTH
AND GROWTH
OF AN IDEA



THE FOUNDATION FOR
ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.
IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

November 26, 1951

Mr. L. L. Smith, Vice President
Kohler Company
Kohler, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thanks for your letter of the 21st and your expression of commendation. It is much appreciated.

With reference to your concern about the distribution of our publications, may I relate a sequence of events, fairly typical of our operation.

A few weeks ago I was having luncheon with a business executive, a get-together not unlike the one you and I had in Madison several years ago. This was the first time the two of us had met. He was unacquainted with the Foundation. After hearing my explanation of our work, he asked: "But how do you distribute your studies? How do you get them into the hands of the *right* people?"

I then told him about one of our Clippings of Note which, like all our releases, had been sent to the 22,000 persons then on our mailing list; how these folks had purchased some 235,000 copies for their own distribution; how the *Saturday Evening Post* (4,000,000) had carried it as a lead editorial; how *Reader's Digest* (more than 13,000,000) had reprinted the piece in full, as had many hundreds of newspapers, magazines, house organs, and employee journals. And, I added, the greatest and most important distribution was one we have no way of measuring precisely—the ideas picked up and used in personal conversation and writing as though they were one's own.

My guest, somewhat intrigued with this account, asked as to the nature of the Clipping. I then told him about Clipping No. 36—the one about the school teacher explaining the meaning of socialism to his class. He replied: "Why I heard that last week by a speaker at Rotary." My guest had never heard about FEE before, yet he had gained an idea which we had helped start on its rounds.

The most interesting part of this story remains: Where did the school teacher (Mr. Thomas Shelly) get the idea? He obtained it from a foreword I had written to one of our

publications, *Liberty and Taxes*, and gave the idea his own adaptation. Where did I get the idea? From Bradford Smith one evening at dinner, just prior to our publication of his piece on taxation and its relationship to liberty. On a 3 x 5 card, he drew designs while explaining an idea I had never thoroughly grasped before.

Any person observing us that evening would have concluded that Brad Smith's audience was too small to result in any effective dissemination of an idea. Yet, he "sparked" me, I "sparked" Shelly, and Shelly "sparked" millions.

Liberty has to be approached qualitatively in order to be solved quantitatively. If ideas are unsound or fuzzy, all the distribution in the world will be of no value. But if correct concepts can be brought into being and expressed with clarity, the quantity or mass dissemination of the ideas will follow. The convictions they create will attend to that.

Sincerely,



LEONARD E. READ

President

The Foundation's approach to research in the field of human relationships, while not flashy or conventional, nonetheless is simple in design:

1. *Search for a deeper understanding of man and his potentialities when freed from the dictates of others;*
2. *Try to develop ever-improving explanations of what such moral and economic research reveals;*
3. *Pass on the results of this research to all interested persons;*
4. *Encourage an ever-expanding desire for such information;*
5. *Try to draw as many individuals as possible into this search for truth.*

This unobtrusive, qualitative approach—vastly at odds with popular propaganda techniques—finds clergymen and teachers in high schools and universities leading all other callings in their manifestations of interest. During the past 30 days all requests to be placed on our mailing list number 1,075. Of these, teachers total 323 and clergymen 317. The total mailing list at the end of 1951 was 27,321.

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IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

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