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July 20, 1970

Mr. Leonard E. Read
Foundation for Economic Education
30 South Broadway
Irvington-on-Hudson, New York 10533

Dear Mr. Read:

Someone, I know not whom, has committed an awful slander against your name. He has done it in the most cowardly and dastardly manner possible. He has endeavored to undercut your integrity in the minds of libertarians across America. He has endeavored to undo all that you have been working for for the last twenty-five years. He has made a mockery of your integrity by attacking all that you have upheld as truth by invoking its name in justification of lies, misrepresentations and cowardly advice to those seeking moral guidance in this time of moral relativism and crisis. I hope that you will join me in the resolution which I am about to make: he shall not get away with it!

He has written something cruelly opposed to liberty. He has had the dishonest gall to publish it under the imprint of the FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION. He has signed your name to it. I cannot believe that such a thing could be so. Yet it is. It sits upon my desk. It is called "Civil Obedience." Not content, apparently, to slander you directly, he has endeavored to slander you indirectly as well. He has published a magazine which looks very much like THE FREEMAN. But in that magazine he allows to be defended, implicitly in his name, doctrines so vile as would have brought you to a beautifully flaming rage a quarter of a century ago. You cannot let him get away with it!!!

Leonard, it was five years ago - perhaps not very long to you, but it has been a quarter of a lifetime for me - when I was introduced to libertarianism by two people whom I have always respected and loved - you and Ayn Rand. Leonard, the things I read by you then were inspiring enough to help me dedicate my life to learning and communicating the ideas of liberty in every way I could. I am to be a philosopher, a writer, a communicator now, and you had a great deal to do with that. I was young, and was looking for a beacon, a symbol, a man or men of integrity who would let nothing come between he and his ideals. A man who could show me what was possible for one of ideals to achieve and become in this world.

I found two such people. Ayn Rand was one. You were the other. Now someone has come forth in your name to disillusion me. I don't know why he is doing it - perhaps simply to demoralize the libertarian movement by ripping down its heroes from within. He has certainly affected me deeply. I am hurt, and sad.

He cannot get away with it. Leonard, I urge you to defend yourself against his slander, to publish the truth of your position for the libertarian world to see. I urge you to stand up and act like the man you have encouraged and helped me to become.

Leonard, if by strange circumstances it was not he who wrote this thing and published that issue of THE FREEMAN, if it was in reality you, then I am shattered. I have on my desk before me a book - ANYTHING THAT'S PEACEFUL - inscribed to me by you in 1965. It reads "With esteem and best wishes to R. A. Childs, Jr., who favors the things that make for peace." That book was my first introduction to liberty. If I took "Civil Obedience" seriously, then that would be the end of my commitment to liberty.

So I must urge you to either repudiate this monstrous essay, in which the author urges us to obey every dictate of that very institution which you have always held up to such sharp and rational criticism, whether it urges us to submit to being robbed, beaten, enslaved and the like or not, or to write me and tell me that this is in fact the position which you - the father of the modern libertarian movement - now hold.

If this last is true, then please take me off the mailing list of the FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION effective yesterday, or at least effective tomorrow, if that is not possible. If that is true, then please let me know. I want on that account and in that event to rededicate myself to my own integrity, to double the intensity of my own commitment to the ideals which are mine - and once were yours. The hole left by your leaving the libertarian philosophy shall not remain unfilled. The only difference is that when I am your age, in more than half a century, I can guarantee you that I will hold onto my ideals for dear life, fearing that the strange mental attitude which has apparently overtaken you will ruin me as well. ✓ ✓

I swear, by my life and my love of it, Mr. Read, not to betray anything I may come to symbolize to any young men as I grow older. I swear never to give in. I swear to uphold my ideals until my death. And if I ever feel myself slipping in the way you have, I swear that my death shall then come by my own hand, in the name of the best within me - and the best which was once within you.

Yours for reason, liberty & integrity,

Roy A. Childs, Jr.
R. A. Childs, Jr.