A LESSON IN SOCIALISM

1. As background for the study of this essay read the foreword to Liberty and Taxes by Bradford B. Smith. This 20 page booklet was published by the Foundation for Economic Education in June, 1947. I was so fascinated by this foreword that I used to write it out on the blackboard in my classroom in Yonkers High School several times during each school year. My students and I would then analyze it carefully and apply its principles to the federal income tax. We would then proceed to apply those principles to students' grades -- in theory. I shall not soon forget the looks of dismay on the countenances of some of my ablest students as they heard me outline my "new plan for grading." How could they acquire long-coveted scholarships under such a plan? Here was a plan for social leveling. They did not like it because they could see that it would have harmful effects, not only upon themselves but also upon the beneficiaries, and upon the authority -- "that's me" -- himself.

2. Now read The Birth and Growth of an Idea by Leonard E. Read. This Foundation for Economic Education leaflet gives more of the story behind A Lesson in Socialism.

3. You will find still more of the A Lesson in Socialism story in Victims of Social Leveling by Leonard E. Read. This is an "In Brief." On page 3 you will find stated the source of the quotation "from each according to his ability to each according to his need." Also, you will find on page 13 an explanation of what happens to the one who administers the compulsion -- the "authority" -- in the social leveling process.

4. See exercise 13 under Survival of the Species. This has to do with the federal income tax. Show how the income tax idea and A Lesson in Socialism are related. Read pages 381-385 of Understanding Our Free Economy for an analysis of the "ability to pay" theory of taxation.

5. A 15 minute movie has been made which is based on this A Lesson in Socialism. Students of this essay will find this movie a help to their understanding, as it portrays the unfolding of the "lesson" in still another classroom. This movie is called Backfire, and may be obtained from The American Economic Foundation, 295 Madison Avenue, New York.