

Freedom, at Last, From the Burden of Taxation

By B. F. Skinner

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — New Hampshire was first to have a lottery, perhaps because it enjoys a unique opportunity to induce visitors to support its government.

But other states soon found that their own citizens preferred voluntary support to taxation, and lotteries quickly spread.

One can only applaud the zeal and ingenuity with which they have been managed. Madison Avenue has done its best. Lotteries are advertised in airports and buses, in newspapers and magazines, on television and the radio. Newspapers cooperate in publicizing the thrills of winning.

When it was discovered that some people could not wait for a deferred drawing, instant lotteries were invented. All this is admirable, and we are grateful for the resulting reduction in taxes, but I wish to point out that an important resource has been overlooked: our schools.

People are not born gamblers. They become gamblers when exposed to certain sequences of lucky hits. Why should our schools not be used to expose everyone to such sequences? The necessary behavioral technology is at hand. All that is needed is a system of lotteries extending from kindergarten through high school in which the odds are at first highly favorable but grow steadily worse until, upon graduation, the student will find the standard lottery with its meager odds irresistible.

I propose something like the following.

In kindergarten, the tickets will cost a penny and prizes will be of the order of a dollar, with a grand prize now and then of \$5. The odds will be extremely favorable; at this stage, the state will lose money, but of course the amounts involved will be trivial.

In the first three grades, tickets will cost a nickel, prizes will be in the \$5 range, except for a grand prize of, say, \$50 dollars, and almost all the money collected will be returned in prizes.

The grand prizes will be rewarded in ceremonies in the several schools.

In the next three grades, tickets will cost a dime, the prizes will range from \$10 to \$15 with a grand prize of the order of \$100 or \$200. The state will return approximately 85 percent of the money collected, and the grand prizes will be awarded in citywide ceremonies.

In junior high school, tickets will cost a quarter, prizes will be on the order of \$25, with a grand prize of perhaps \$500. The state will return about 60 percent of the money it col-

lects and winners will be announced on local television.

Finally, in high school, tickets will cost 50 cents, prizes will be of the order of \$50, with a grand prize of \$1,000, and at this point the state will pay back about 50 percent of what it takes. The grand prize will be awarded in a ceremony on statewide television with an admired figure participating. Since practically all the expenses of administration will be borne by the schools, the entire operation will be much more profitable than the regular lottery. The result will be a yearly crop of high school graduates who will continue to buy lottery tickets for the rest of their lives, even though the lotteries continue to pay back no more than 40 percent or 45 percent of the amount wagered.

Now that we can see the indisputable wisdom of creating a society of gamblers, beginning in kindergarten, what—we ask, what?—choice lies ahead but a new form of lottery?

taxes on real estate.

When programs of this sort have been set up in all the states, the full potential of our schools will be realized. The entire population above the age of six will know the joy and excitement of weekly (or daily!) drawings. A huge national lottery will be inevitable and Federal income taxes abolished. My guess is that the Pentagon will run its own lottery and thus escape forever from the annoyance of those appeals to Congress. I do not think I am being unduly sanguine in looking forward to the day when the support of our Government—in city, state and nation — will be entirely voluntary.

Economists will point out that money

spent for lottery tickets will not be spent for goods and services and that business will suffer. But the loss will be more than offset by the absence of taxes and by the money won. The only important economic change will be a very considerable increase in the consumption of luxury goods and services. The rich, released from the burden of taxation, will be able to spend much more on luxuries and so will the big winners—only one further proof of the virtue of voluntary action in the support of a society of free and happy people.

B. F. Skinner, professor emeritus of psychology and social relations at Harvard, is author of "Beyond Freedom and Dignity." As a gambler, he says, he once "hit the jackpot" with a quarter in Nevada.