

Forces of Historical Progress

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In chapter three, we talked about the societal forces of change and transformation: the sociocultural process, the political process, the economic process, and the infomedia process. We explained their nature, their historical development, their roles in society, and how they relate to each other and interact with one another and effect societal change. These forces represent the mechanism through which change is introduced and implemented in society; no change can be initiated without the involvement of at least one societal process, and no change can be made without affecting all other processes. As a consequence, every change, regardless of its nature and magnitude, causes the balance of power in society to change, producing winners and losers. However, these important societal processes are not the forces that provoke change; they do not represent, what Hegel called, the spirit of history.

Hegel saw freedom as being the spirit of history; the agent that motivates people to seek and demand change and cause progress to be made over time. Hegel was right, but freedom does not explain societal change by itself and thus human progress. Karl Marx, on the other hand, saw class conflict and the ownership of the means of production as the agent of historical change and thus societal progress. Contradictions within the capitalistic system precipitate conflict between the capitalist class and the proletariat, the resolution of which creates new syntheses that reduce the intensity of conflict and thus progress is made. Since the movement that Marx predicted and described is supposed to continue until a classless society free of exploitation is reached, one can say that the search for justice represents the spirit of history for Karl Marx. Marx was right that the way class conflict is conducted and resolved can cause progress, limiting exploitation and promoting equity, but class conflict cannot by itself explain change and human progress over time. Max Weber saw ethics and work ethics in particular as being the major force that motivates people to work hard, make and save money and invest in their economies, and thus cause progress to be made. Weber was also right, but ethics cannot by themselves move history.

Paul Kennedy gets much closer than the other philosophers to explaining the forces of historical progress; he suggests that technological developments and social transformations are the forces responsible for human progress. In fact, these forces tend to implicitly include most of what the other philosophers had suggested. Technological developments improve productivity and advance industry, while industrial production changes the relations of production, causing social transformations that influence social relations, ethics, and people's attitudes toward freedom. Despite the importance of Kennedy's argument, he, just like the other philosophers of history, misses other important forces that have contributed and continue to contribute to causing change and making societal progress. Jared Diamond suggests that geography has had a decisive impact on people's lives and fortunes. He argues that humans in earlier times lived as hunter-gatherers. But with the domestication of certain animals and the farming of wild crops man was able to take the first step towards civilization. Agricultural production, he argues, leads to food surpluses, which supports sedentary societies, rapid population growth, and division of labor, which in turn lead to societal change and human progress.

We believe that how societies are organized and the main characteristics of the stage of development in which they live and function, and the nature of the environment that surrounds them give certain forces more opportunities to influence societal life in general. Thus, the forces that move history and cause progress differ from one place to another and from one societal stage of development to another. There is no doubt that geography and freedom and technology and ethics and conflict have played and continue to play important roles in societal life, but the role of each force was eclipsed at one time or another by the roles played by one or more of the other forces. Therefore, we believe that there are several forces representing the engine of history; the major ones that are responsible for initiating change and causing progress over time are the following:

1. The development of private property;
2. The accumulation of capital;
3. Technological developments and scientific discoveries, particularly in areas related to the making of tools, modes of production, manufacturing, management systems, and the means of transportation and communications;

4. The accumulation of knowledge, particularly in areas related to the laws of nature, life and diseases, and the universe;
5. Man's continuous struggle and longing for freedom, particularly individual freedom, political freedom, and freedom of speech and worship; and
6. Sociocultural transformation, particularly in regard to human relations, cultural traditions, and attitudes toward work and time and the other.

The concept of private property appeared very early in human life; long before agriculture was developed as a way of life that enabled man to take his first solid step towards civilization. However, private property emerged as an institution only during the agricultural age, causing society to be divided into two distinct social classes; the landlords who owned most of the fertile land and were generally rich, and the peasants who owned little or no land and were generally poor. Since land ownership enables the rich to create more wealth, and poverty denies the poor an equal opportunity to create as much wealth, a socioeconomic gap developed, causing a sociopolitical gap to emerge slowly. The poor, as a consequence, were forced to work for the rich in order to survive, while the rich were able to accumulate wealth by dominating and exploiting the poor. As the socioeconomic gap persisted and widened, the poor lost much of their freedom, and the rich gained more freedom. Since freedom and wealth usually translate into power; people who are free and wealthy are able to have more power and use it to influence events and change their fortunes; people who lack freedom and have little or no wealth lack the power to make a difference. So, wealth facilitates the acquisition of more power; and power facilitates the acquisition of more freedom, making it very hard for the poor to gain either freedom or power. On the other hand, people with power are usually able to use their influence to gain more wealth and thus more freedom.

Due to the sociopolitical and socioeconomic role wealth plays in individual and societal life, enabling the wealthy to acquire more power and gain more freedom, while denying the poor the opportunity to do so, private property became a force motivating people to work hard, accumulate wealth, and use it to improve the quality of their lives and enhance their social statuses. Meanwhile, the inequality and injustice private property often creates and sustains caused conflict to become a major characteristic of social relations, forcing the poor and powerless to seek justice and struggle for freedom. Since the tribal man lived his entire

life free of oppression, exploitation and injustice, the concepts of freedom and justice were born and activated in the agricultural age.

As tools and means of transportation and sea navigation technologies were developed in the late centuries of the agricultural age, trade expanded and capital began to play an increasingly important role in individual and societal life. It caused the productivity of land and labor to increase; and thus it helped create more wealth for its owners, while making work for the peasants and workers less stressful than before. Slowly, capital emerged as a major factor of production, enabling its owners to gain more wealth and power and freedom. However, as capitalists were accumulating wealth and power and freedom, the poor and weak were losing their power, and freedom and thus their ability to create and accumulate wealth. But since capitalists cannot make more money and accumulate more wealth unless they sell whatever they produce, they were obligated by self-interest to pay their poor workers more money to enable them to become potential consumers. Therefore, capital became a force contributing to social change and making progress when its owners realized that to make more money and accumulate more wealth and power required sharing some of the economic gains with the less fortunate poor and powerless. However, as their lots improved, the poor became more aware of their status in society, and thus began to seek justice and freedom. But no matter how much the poor get, they always feel worse off compared to the rich. Awareness of the nature and size of the socioeconomic and sociopolitical gaps in society always lead to conflict and change.

Nevertheless, by raising the productivity of land and labor, capital enabled society as a whole to produce more and have more free time. People, as a result, began to allocate some of their free time to creative thinking and creative doing. Nevertheless, the accumulation of capital in the hands of the few had caused the socioeconomic and sociopolitical gaps to widen and deepen further. No laws were enacted at the time to limit the reach of the rich and powerful and empower the poor and powerless. As a consequence of these developments and lack of scientific knowledge, organized religion emerged slowly as a social institution calling for justice, comforting the poor, and asking the rich and powerful to be compassionate.

New archeological discoveries seem to indicate that tools were used before the human race evolved and began to dominate nature. They were used in hunting and fighting, which enabled man to feel more secure physically and get more of the food he needed to survive. Tools, or technology in general enables man to produce more of what he needs using the same amounts of whatever resources are available to him, or produce the same as before with less time and energy and resources. In both cases, however, progress is made because man gets more of what he needs and likes to have, or gets more time to use in activities that enrich his life and the lives of people influenced by his work. Meanwhile, as man uses his tools he learns how to make them better and more productive and develop new, more efficient ones. As a consequence, technological knowledge advances and accumulates enabling man to produce more, change more and make more progress.

As economies expanded and states were built and empires emerged, trade began to expand, roads were built, and more efficient means of transportation were developed. Larger ships had to be built and navigation systems were developed to enable merchants to travel long distances without much risk or fear. However, navigations systems could not be developed to the point of making it possible for sailors to travel deep and far and come home safe without new scientific discoveries in areas related to the seas and geography and the solar system. So scientific discoveries served to facilitate more technological developments; and tools and machines conceived by technological developments facilitated new scientific discoveries. However, the more material progress was made, the more the socioeconomic and sociopolitical gaps widened, causing the rich and powerful to become greedier and ruthless.

The poor and powerless, feeling the enormity of social injustice and denial of freedom and other human rights, began to fight to equality. Revolts were launched in older time by slaves against their masters; but such revolts did not lead to ending slavery; slaves were weak and societies were not disposed to helping slaves and support their demands for freedom and, therefore, slaves were unable to win. As a consequence, slavery continued for thousands of years before it was officially abolished in the twentieth century. People, since the dawn of civilization, have continued to struggle to free themselves from whatever they thought is enslaving them or limiting their capacity to feel and act as free people. History seems to indicate that no people could see an end to their struggle for freedom because

they seem to view freedom as an open, limitless space; the more you have, the more you feel a need to have more. Nevertheless, the tribal society was the only society in history that had all the freedom it needed to live its nomadic life; and, therefore, it did not struggle for freedom or justice.

With the dawn of civilization some ten thousand years ago, the space of freedom began to shrink and appear limited; causing some people to get less as others got more. As a consequence, conflict began to arise in society; and, with the creation of empires, it expanded to characterize relations among nations. People struggle today peacefully and otherwise to free themselves from political oppression, from suppression, from poverty and need, from capital exploitation, from ignorance, from prejudice and discrimination, from intimidation and fear, and from foreign occupation. No society is entirely free, and no social system is flawless; every society has more than one reason to feel that it must continue the struggle for freedom, either to protect what they have, or to get what they do not have, or to regain what they have lost. As societal systems evolve and production relations change they produce winners and losers, they encourage the first to fight to preserve what they have, while making the second feel cheated and thus willing to struggle to regain what they have lost. Therefore, the struggle for freedom and against freedom will never end.

Throughout history, every society has had certain social, economic and political problems that manifest themselves in one or more of these issues; political corruption, economic exploitation, religious intimidation, denial of human rights, and media manipulation. Since each problem affects the fortunes of people differently, it distributes freedom and wealth and power in society unfairly, allowing some to have more than others. Under dictatorships, for example, the leader of the nation monopolizes all attribute and privileges of freedom and power, forcing ordinary citizens to have almost no freedom and no power whatsoever. When large corporations are allowed to create oligopolies and monopolies, they confiscate great portions of the wealth of nations where they operate and create huge obstacles that prevent other business-minded people from entering the market, denying them an equal opportunity to participate in the economic life of society. When the mass media resorts to manipulating the news and substituting opinions for facts, they deny people the right to be informed and know the truth. Therefore, when a group of people manages to control an aspect of societal life, it confiscates some of the rights of others, and

thus causes them to become less free. Everyone who does not enjoy his or her full rights is not free; everyone who is not free, is unable to utilize his talents and be as productive as he could be. And since no state distributes freedom equally among its citizens, no society is entirely free, and thus the struggle for freedom will continue to play an important role in making history, provoking change, and causing progress to be made.

The hunter-gatherer was the first man to discover private property; he tried to have as much of it as he could carry. Since his ability to carry things across deserts and forests was limited, private property did not play an important role in his life. Private property was limited by the circumstances and culture to some clothes and few primitive tools to hunt animals and defend himself and his family against the other. And because technology was almost non-existent at the time, the hunter-gatherer as well as the tribal man experienced no change or progress for tens of thousands of years.

The development of agriculture and the building of hamlets and villages expanded the role of private property in the individual as well as the societal life. Man expanded the concept of private ownership to include land and tools and houses and domesticated animals and personal things and much more. And since land and tools and animals are an important part of the factors of production, they enabled all agricultural societies to produce more and gain more security. But since some people had more land and tools and animals than others, the rich were able to enjoy relatively higher standards of living than those who did not have as much. Meanwhile, the slow accumulation of capital was helping the agricultural society to produce a surplus, causing the idea of progress to be born and civilization to emerge. Individuals, as a consequence, never stopped seeking more property and societies never stopped experiencing change and making more progress.

As man works, develops his tools, watch nature, thinks, and experiments with things around him, he gains more knowledge and transfers his knowledge to others through his siblings and relatives and neighbors, causing knowledge to spread and accumulate. Since knowledge cannot be reversed, and what is learnt cannot be unlearnt, knowledge increases man's ability to produce more, think and contemplate more, make new discoveries, and thus make more progress in all endeavors of human life. In fact, material progress or economic change has always moved in tandem with cultural and social change; sometimes,

material progress moves first forcing social and cultural change to follow its lead; at other times, social and cultural transformation preceded economic change. For example, when man developed land cultivation he produced a surplus and the surplus enabled him to have more time to think and build better tools and irrigation systems and farming techniques which enabled agriculture to become more productive. And as man became more productive and more thoughtful, he became more secure, allowing the new technologies he had developed, to influence his social life and relations to both man and nature.

Social and cultural transformations come as a result of either a great idea that influences how people think, or a cluster of small ideas challenging the status quo that cause attitudes to change; or due to technological innovations that transform the economic base in society. Though ideas play only a minor role in causing societal transformations in stable, largely traditional societies, they play a major role during transitional stages that move societies from one civilization to another. Nevertheless, ideas can and often do change people's attitudes leading them to change the way they behave and view the world differently. Religion in general and monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity and Islam in particular, came as a result of human need to understand the world and foster group unity and cohesion; they gave the lives of their adherents a new meaning that made them feel more content and at peace. However, no religion has been able to change life condition, invoke scientific inquiry, encourage technological innovations or make material progress. In contrast, technological innovations that transform the economic base and existing modes of production change production relations and cause deep social and cultural transformations in society; and, thus, they contribute to making material and cultural and political change a reality.

As explained above, each agent of historical change had played and continues to play an important role in societal life. Nevertheless, the dynamic relationships that tie these forces together and the way they interact with one another are much more important to causing change and making progress. In fact, no single factor is able to cause tangible change by itself because change affects the balance of power in society causing one or more of the other agents to be activated, fostering change or hindering transformation. If the political and cultural environments are not hospitable to change, for example, it would be very difficult for society to make meaningful scientific and technological advances. On the other

hand, no scientific or technological developments are meaningful if they do not affect the economic and cultural and social aspects of life in society. When new scientific theories are developed, scientists use them to develop new technological tools and build new machines that make man and society more productive and work more rewarding and life more interesting. Yet, for this to happen, society has to be ready for change.

Since each agent of change has its own role to play, it can take the lead and initiate change in society. For example, ideas that challenged the teachings of the Church during the renaissance; and others which motivated people to seek change and give priority to interests were the leading force that paved the way for scientific inquiry and the industrial revolution that followed. Nevertheless, culture tends to be stable and resistant to change; it, therefore, has to be challenged by one or more of the other agents to become more open and conducive to change. The transformation of cultures proceed through a process characterized by change and substitution that transforms some old traditions and social relations, while substituting largely outdated attitudes and ways of thinking by introducing new ones. But since cultural values and traditions and belief systems do not accumulate, any change they may experience could be easily reversed. Therefore, no progress is possible without making sociocultural transformations an integral part of societal transformations that include the economic aspects of life. In other words, economic restructuring, to succeed, it has to be preceded or accompanied by sociocultural restructuring. Scientific knowledge, meanwhile, advances and accumulates due to the work of millions of people throughout the world in response to peoples' needs and life challenges. And since scientific knowledge advances through a process characterized by accumulation, specialization and slow diffusion, it is hard to reverse.

Since industrial technology and systems of management are tied to scientific knowledge, they tend to change as new scientific facts are discovered and accepted, and adapt as social and environmental settings change. Such technologies and systems are characterized by substitution, accumulation and fast diffusion, which make them very effective in causing change; it also makes almost it impossible to reverse whatever the change they may cause. The neutrality of most technologies and systems of management and their ability to adapt to different cultural and environmental settings allows them to serve most societies without difficulty. On the other hand, the ability of the ever changing and increasing technological

devices to make life easier and more enjoyable have enabled them to influence people's cultures in many ways; and, as a consequence, they have forced most peoples to change many of their traditions and attitudes and ways of thinking and living.

In fact, it is rather impossible to make good use of advanced technological devices and modern systems of management, particularly in areas related to industrial production and scientific research and education, without adopting new traditions and attitudes compatible with the requirements of the new machines and systems and the nature of the tasks at hand. Cultures, as a result, are forced to abandon some of the old ways of doing things and adopt new ones in their instead, causing social relations to change and sociocultural transformations to take place. New production relations as a result are developed and adopted, and new values related to science and technology and economic efficiency are conceived and implemented, making time a precious commodity to be used wisely, not wasted unconsciously.

History seems to indicate that freedom is not a grant that rulers give away willingly to the people they rule; it is rather a right that people have to claim and sometimes fight to obtain. However, until few centuries ago, almost all peoples were unable to appreciate the meaning of freedom and role it could play in their lives; they were totally unaware that they were missing something of value. As a result, most people could not claim what they did not know they had a right to obtain. Since neither rulers nor the ruled thought they were doing something wrong, the rulers were able to rule without challenge and enslave the ruled without feeling guilty. The ruled, meanwhile, were happy to be ruled, accepting their lot in life and societal role as a normal obligation of being members of a larger community.

Old cultural traditions, environmental settings, religious teachings, and family and tribal relations caused people to miss freedom without missing it. Since the tribal and agricultural ways of life tend to emphasize collective rather than individual responsibility, individual freedom and individual rights had to wait the industrial revolution before they could be conceived and articulated. In fact, most eastern cultures such as the Arabic and Chinese cultures still give collective responsibility and communal rights priority over individual responsibility and rights. As a consequence, rulers in general were able to ignore the needs

and rights of the masses without fear of retaliation, while the despotic ones were able to oppress and enslave them with impunity.

Whoever does not miss freedom is usually unaware of the meaning and importance of it and, therefore, is unable to make others aware of its existence and meaning. In societies where the woman is controlled and often oppressed by the man, she is unable to explain the importance of freedom to her children and help them live and thinks as free people. As a consequence, children in such societies are brought up as members of a group led by a man who represents either a higher traditional authority or political or religious one, and to accept being dependent on them. In such societies, individuals as well as group are often denied their social and political and sometimes economic rights, giving the higher authority the opportunity to confiscate and monopolize all the freedoms available. People are treated as slaves responsible for whatever authority ask of them, while they have no right to hold authority accountable for whatever in does and does not do.

Cultures that have a religious core and others based on ideological philosophies such as nationalism and communism are usually less aware of the importance of freedom and the role it can play in initiating change and facilitating individual and societal progress. Freedom encourages people to discover their talents and enables them to employ such talents to advance their careers, while contributing to the advancement of science and technology and economic progress. Regardless of its many aspects, freedom remains a human right, a moral value, and a basic requirement of economic change and human progress. Freedom is not the spirit of history only; it is the spirit of humanity, without which no human being is complete. Therefore, freedom must be treated as the most important agent of sociocultural transformation and human progress.

Nonetheless, man's longing for freedom and his struggle to attain it does not happen except when he feels that his freedom is compromised or confiscated by a higher authority. Such a feeling, however, happens only when people are aware of the role freedom normally plays in sustaining their humanity, helping shape their future, and enhancing the meaning of their lives. Therefore, freedom and the longing for it remain a cultural issue, dictating that traditional cultures be transformed first to enable people to feel free and commit themselves to stay free. However, for such a transformation to be effective and positive and

sustainable it must change the traditional relationships that tie the ruler to the ruled, and recognize that people have rights and obligations that are equal; and as it holds people responsible for fulfilling their obligations; it must hold rulers accountable for their deeds.

On the other hand, private property has been most important in encouraging people to work hard and accumulate wealth, which led them to scientific research and technological development as a way to make new things that enrich their lives and enhance their incomes. Meanwhile, the accumulation of wealth and scientific and technological knowledge has caused societies to be divided into classes separated from each other by socioeconomic gaps and sociocultural divides, which created the right conditions for competition and conflict. For example, the tribal society, which preceded the development of private property, was a classless, largely homogeneous society that knew little competition and no societal conflict. In contrast, the agricultural age, which witnessed the full development of the private property concept and little technological advancement, was less homogeneous society made up of two distinct classes; as a consequence, it experienced some competition and conflict. People who owned more land were able to enslave and exploit others who did not, and use their wealth to produce more and enhance their prestige and power at the expense of the less fortunate ones. Social classes, meanwhile, were responsible for causing conflict and planting the seeds of freedom. However, the agricultural society experienced little progress because it was unable to advance either scientific research or technological development, causing the accumulation of knowledge to lag behind; it had to wait the industrial revolution to activate it.

During the age of industry, the pace of scientific discoveries and technological innovations accelerated, causing all aspects of life to be affected, particularly the economic ones. The industrial state and its large corporations were the first to realize that science and technology have a great capacity to help them advance their economic interests and achieve their political goals. As a result, scientific research and technological development activities were institutionalized, facilitating the accumulation of knowledge. While industry employed the new technologies to raise productivity and enhance profitability, the state used industry to build well-equipped armies with guns, cannons, and ships to invade other regions of the world, colonize their peoples and exploit their resources. However, as economic activities multiplied and diversified and banking and trade expanded to serve the

fast growing economies and investment ventures, a new society emerged having three classes. While the rich and poor classes had existed for some ten thousand years without change, the industrial society gave birth to a middle class for the first time in history. Although its economic role was initially limited, the middle class distinguished itself by a high degree of awareness regarding its societal role, its place in society, and its rights. Such awareness led this class to become the most active segment of the industrial society, promoting democracy and employing it to enhance its status and protect its social and economic interests. However, the accumulation of wealth and knowledge in the hands of the few on the one hand, and the increasing cost of having the right education to maintain a middle class status on the other led to weakening the middle class and depriving it of the power it has had to influence events in its favor. And this in turn caused the socioeconomic gap to widen and the sociocultural divide to deepen. By the end of the 20th century, and due to the advancement of the age of knowledge, the middle class lost most of its economic and political power, as well as its social status and awareness. Today, no middle class has enough awareness and power and self-confidence to protect its interests and play a significant role in societal life.

Although no age has ever been free of competition, it seems that the more people advance technically and economically and claim to be civilized the more competitive they become. And as competition sharpens the divides between social classes, it causes conflict to become an aspect of competition and, thus, a justified and justifiable part of societal life. In older times, people often competed and fought trying to get the same things, making competition more negative than positive. During the tribal times, for example, tribes fought one another to steal the animals of the other and kill or kidnap their children and rape their women. Jared Diamond says in *Guns, Germs and Steel*, that until 7500 years ago, people used to kill whoever they found in their way, suspicion rather than trust had characterized inter-tribal relations and dominated their interaction with one another. However, stealing the property of others and hurting them did not change life in society; it made the defeated feel bad losing dignity and honor and property, while making the victors feel good having destroyed the life of the other. Conflict, therefore, was horizontal rather than vertical, which made people and societies move in place, not in time; it was a zero-sum game that changed nothing. During the agricultural times, things began to change slowly as the nature of

competition and conflict changed slightly. Nevertheless, the movement of society remained largely in place rather than in time. In fact, neither the tribal nor the early agricultural peoples were able to develop a conception of time.

During the industrial age both conflict and competition were heightened, however, their nature was changed substantially. While conflict became more vertical than horizontal, competition had become more positive than negative, concentrating primarily on material things, making economics the main target and the primary objective of both competition and conflict. As a consequence, people became less ideological, driven largely by economic interests rather than by moral values or religious beliefs, causing more construction. And as soon as class awareness emerged with the emergence of the labor and middle classes, conflict became more vertical than horizontal, causing people to move in place and in time without interruption and thus to change and progress. Nevertheless, competition over the resources of the other was transformed into an international colonialist enterprise that all the classes of the industrial society participated in and benefited from.

However, as the knowledge age advanced and services rather than manufacturing has become the major economic activity, relationships in society began to change. Science and technology have taken the lead role in changing life and society, causing deep sociocultural and socioeconomic transformations and thus heightened both competition and conflict. The economy, instead of concentrating on the manufacturing of goods, it began to concentrate on creating service-oriented projects; some of which were directed to satisfy needs that research and development and new technologies had created. Information, telecommunications, scientific inquiry, research and development, healthcare services, and education have become the major economic activities. Since the middle class emerged as a result of industrial expansion and economic diversification, the retreat of industrial production and most activities associated with it have caused this class to retreat as well; it no longer have the self-confidence, the awareness, or the power and numbers to maintain its status or even protect its interests as before.

Hegel saw freedom as connected to politics; he said that the “eastern nations knew only that one is free; the Greek and Roman world only that some are free; while we [the Germanic world] know that all men absolutely are free.” Since freedom is the ultimate goal

to which history aspires, Hegel argued that history will come to an end when freedom prevails. But since the struggle for freedom, as we argued throughout this chapter, will never end, history, therefore, will continue to unfold and will never end. Marx saw freedom as connected to economics and the ownership of the means of production that causes exploitation and creates classes with conflicting interests. Marx argued further that exploitation will end only when private ownership of the means of production is abolished. But since we argued that private ownership had played and continues to play a major role in motivating people to work hard, make and accumulate wealth, develop science and technology and build the machines and tools that raise productivity and improve the living conditions of almost everyone, neither private property nor history will ever end.