

THE INSTITUTE FOR ANACYCLOSIS

A GENERAL THEORY OF SOCIOECONOMIC HISTORY

Mankind's occupations do not satisfy its preoccupations. Our chief preoccupation is to attain better status. When insecure, we struggle to be secure. When inferior, we want to be equal. And when equal, we wish to be superior. Our primary occupation is to obtain better surplus. We focus our energy on improving our technology and wealth. We focus on improving our surplus because it is the main way that we improve our status.

Humanity has done well in improving its surplus. But no matter how much wealth we acquire, we never finally satisfy our desire for better status. On the one hand, for some to be superior, most of us must tolerate being inferior. On the other hand, in order to preserve equality, we must all suppress the desire to be superior. The human race, with an insuppressible desire to improve its status, can balance neither equation forever.

After we acquire one level of status, we always desire a better level of status. Because of this, we are forever locked into a struggle. The constancy of human nature orders our struggle into a sequence. The impossibility of an ending bends this sequence into a cycle. We begin in a state of insecurity, soon establish security, in time celebrate equality, and finally battle for superiority. In the end we shall return to our original condition.

Accidents of history set the events of chance against the cycle. Still, chance does not break the cycle, it only distorts it. Looking back over a long enough time to average out the occurrences of chance, the cycle can be seen. While material progress trends upward, society advances through constant revolution. Human history thus traces a cycle made by our ambitions, ascending a path lain by our achievements, like a wheel rolling up a hill.

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