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NOTES from FEE

July, 1965

THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.
IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK 10533

MAINSPRING

The history books I read in school were largely accounts of authoritarianism. I learned about battles and wars, generals and dictators, governments, political personalities. But there is another story of man which has had but little telling simply because so few historians have perceived it: the history of freedom. And the best introduction to this subject I have ever seen was written by my long-time friend, the late Henry Grady Weaver. The following passages are samplings from his 279-page book,

The Mainspring of Human Progress.

FOR SIXTY known centuries, this planet that we call Earth has been inhabited by human beings not much different from ourselves. Their desire to live has been as strong as ours. They have had at least as much physical strength as the average person of today, and among them have been men and women of great intelligence.

But down through the ages, most human beings have gone hungry; and many have always starved.

The ancient Assyrians, Persians, Egyptians, and Greeks were intelligent people; but in spite of their intelligence and their fertile lands, they were never able to get enough to eat. They often killed their babies because they could not feed them.

The Roman Empire collapsed in famine. The French were dying of hunger when Thomas Jefferson was President of the United States. As late as 1846, the Irish were starving to death; and no one was particularly surprised – because famines were the rule rather than the exception. It is only within the last century that Western Europeans have had enough to keep them alive – soup and bread in France, fish in Scandinavia, beef in England.

Hunger has always been normal. Even to this day, famines kill multitudes in China, India, Africa; and in the 1930's, thousands upon thousands starved to death on the richest farm lands of the Soviet Union.

Down through the ages, countless millions, struggling unsuccessfully to keep bare life in wretched bodies, have died young in misery and squalor.

Then suddenly – in one spot on this planet – people eat so abundantly that the pangs of hunger are forgotten.

Why did men walk and carry goods on their straining backs for 6,000 years – then suddenly, on only a small part of the Earth's surface, the forces of nature are harnessed to do the bidding of the humblest citizen?

Why did families live for 6,000 years in caves and floorless hovels, without windows or chimneys – then within a few generations, we in the United States take floors, rugs, chairs, tables, windows, and chimneys for granted and regard electric lights, refrigerators, running water, porcelain baths, and toilets as common necessities?