

Foundations of a Free Society

SUMMARY

- Freedom creates prosperity. It unleashes human talent, invention and innovation, creating wealth where none existed before. Societies that have embraced freedom have made themselves rich. Those that have not have remained poor.
- People in a free society do not become rich by exploiting others, as the elites of less-free countries do. They cannot become rich by making others poorer. They become rich only by providing others with what they want and making other people's lives better.
- The chief beneficiaries of the economic dynamism of free societies are the poor. Free societies are economically more equal than non-free societies. The poor in the most-free societies enjoy luxuries that were undreamed of just a few years ago, luxuries available only to the ruling elites of non-free countries.
- International trade gives entrepreneurs new market opportunities and has helped lift more than a billion people out of abject poverty in the last twenty years. Freedom is truly one of the most benign and productive forces in human history.
- Attempts by governments to equalise wealth or income are counter-productive. They destroy the incentives for hard work and enterprise and discourage people from building up the capital that boosts the productivity of the whole society.

- A free society is a spontaneous society. It builds up from the actions of individuals, following the rules that promote peaceful cooperation. It is not imposed from above by political authorities.
- Government has a very limited role in a free society. It exists to prevent harm being done to its citizens by maintaining and enforcing justice. It does not try to impose material equality and it does not prohibit activities just because some people consider them disagreeable or offensive. Leaders cannot plunder citizens for their own benefit, grant favours to their friends, or use their power against their enemies.
- The government of a free society is constrained by the rule of law. Its laws apply to everyone equally. There must be due process of law in all cases, with fair trials and no lengthy detention without trial. People accused of offences must be treated as innocent until proved guilty, and individuals must not be harassed by being prosecuted several times for the same offence.
- Tolerating other people's ideas and lifestyles benefits society. Truth is not always obvious; it emerges in the battle of ideas. We cannot trust censors to suppress only wrong ideas. They may mistakenly suppress ideas and ways of acting that would greatly benefit society in the future.
- Communications technology is making it more difficult for authoritarian governments to hide their actions from the rest of the world. As a result, more and more countries are opening up to trade and tourism, and new ideas are spreading. More people see the benefits of economic and social freedom, and are demanding them.