

# SOCIAL PROGRESS

## OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS IN VIETNAM'S MARKET ECONOMY

by NGUYỄN HỮU VƯỢNG

**T**he concept of social progress has rather clear meanings. Unlike other scientific concept, the concept of social progress requires no explanation, but what has been under discussion for a long time is how to realize social progress.

"Progress" comes from the Latin root "*progressus*" meaning "*forward movement*", that is, a movement characterized by the development from a low to a higher level, from a simple to a more perfect state. Social progress is considered as something contrary to "*regressus*" meaning "*backward movement*" which is characterized by a process of declining and disintegrating.

Social progress is a special feature of the history of humankind. Speaking of progress, most people referred to social progress. The concept of progress is rarely used to express the evolution of natural world. In philosophy, social progress is a concept used for orienting one's world view. The nature of social progress includes in itself standards and viewpoints aiming at the meaningful progress in quality of life for everybody. They serve as a basis for selecting different projects and measures to improve the social life. In my opinion, the social progress is a matter of great diversification and interest, but it is also a complex and problematic matter, because it is the meeting place for current events. The problem of social progress has been taken into consideration since the appearance of human beings because of the need for development, so in each period or development stage, the social pro-

gress has its own characteristics. However, before reaching a scientific viewpoint on the social progress, researchers have introduced different views on the nature, the historical dynamic and the existence of social progress. According to Marx, the social progress is considered as a process of developing from a low to a higher socio-economic form and there is no repetition of the past. History is a process of development with its own law, therefore the social progress is an objective and inevitable phenomenon.

In Vietnam, the problem of social progress hasn't been studied throughout and there are different views on it. In this article, I want to consider social progress as objective requirements in the Vietnam's market economy, instead of studying the social progress as a category.

The human society has evolved from a primitive to a civilized one for over ten thousand years. This evolution is accompanied by inventions of working tools that helped to satisfy human needs.

As we know, creative labor is a characteristic activity of the humankind which includes the making of both material and spiritual things. This activity can be found only in the humankind, and help to distinguish the humankind from animals. Achievements made by the humankind generation after generation have led to the incessant social progress. Each society is evaluated according to these achievements in all aspects. The human being is the maker of culture and they also have different cultural values which are

considered as indicators of the social progress. So the role of culture in the social progress has long been studied by numerous thinkers and social activists. Culture is considered as a companion of social progress.

Achievements of the renovation process in Vietnam recently have saved our nation from socio-economic crisis. Draft documents presented in the VCP 8th National Congress included estimates of these achievements which are as follows:

- The high growth rate was achieved and for the first time, planned targets for the five-year period (1991-1995) were surpassed.
- Many social problems were solved basically.
- Political stability and national security were maintained.
- Important changes in the political system were made.
- Foreign relations were improved, the state of being isolated came to an end and Vietnam could take part in international affairs.

In other words, Vietnam has come to a new stage of progress, a stage of fast development in socio-economic activity, of industrialization and modernization which aim at bridging the gap between Vietnam and other countries (in the world and in the region as well) and building a strong, wealthy and civilized society in Vietnam. Economic growth and social equality are central to the task of making social progress in Vietnam today, because we need a strong and healthy economy to carry out programs to develop an equitable and progressive society. This is what is of great importance to the social pro-



gress.

By responding to the "Culture for Development Decade" movement (1987-1997), the whole world prepared to finish the twentieth century and come to the twenty-first century with new orientation for spiritual life. At the threshold of the new century, all resources and potentials, including cultural ones, must be mobilized to serve the social development and progress.

At present, Vietnam is in the transition to the multi-sector market economy, besides encouraging achievements produced by the renovation process, there are pressing problems in the social progress to think of. Being influenced by the profit motive and competition law, the society has seen unemployment, unfair division of wealth, decadence of morals, social evils and pollution, therefore the Government and Party advocated changing into the socialist-oriented market economy under the management of the government with a view to realizing economic growth and social progress.

All measures to realize social progress, however effective and important there are, must depend on economic growth. Targets that the Party, the people and Uncle Ho have strived for are: to help the poor get enough food, those who get enough food become rich, the rich become richer; everybody becomes literate and has willingness to act for the good of others and the nation.

In realizing economic growth and social progress, foreign experi-

ence teaches us that social equality and progress depends on the mode of development, and the social equality could be realized to some extent even at the earlier stages of economic growth. Such economic growth will ensure a higher growth rate in future because it motivates all social classes to take part in the economic development.

Social equality and progress depend on many factors and the first one is employment which generates income. A job creation scheme in the first stage of development could ensure a high growth rate although investment is at low level. The success of this scheme will depend on investment plans and chosen techniques. If the economy is oriented towards exportation by developing labor-intensive industries, the social equality and progress could be realized by degrees.

Social equality and progress also depend on investment in human resources. To invest in human resources means to help everybody develop skills, experience and knowledge in order to make a living for individual and family. The human resource is central to the set of resources because the human being has ability to combine other resources. Moreover, other resources are not limitless and they could be exhausted while the human resource is really limitless. The human intelligence which is the main part of human resource, could regenerate and develop incessantly.

Obviously, human labor, oriented by human intelligence is the

most important and precious resource for the social progress. Foreign experience shows that investment in human resource is of great importance, in spite of a long time it requires to produce intended effects. Many governments have adopted strategies to develop human resources instead of exploiting natural resources as before.

As for Vietnam where 80% of the population live in rural areas and the better part of them are poor, so the development plans should aim at changing the structure of agricultural production, industrializing rural areas and developing trade contacts with big cities and foreign markets. In short, bridging the gap between rural areas and cities is a way to realize social progress. Development of rural economy could provide a basis for industrialization and modernization because rural areas will become sources of labor, raw materials, capital and at the same time, a big market for manufactured goods.

Recently, when the market economy is developed in Vietnam, the problem of social progress started to become a center of attention. On papers, negative effects of the market mechanism, relations between economic growth, technical advancement... and social progress are under discussion to a certain extent. However, it is the research circle who is assigned the heavy and time-consuming task of clarifying objective requirements for the social progress in the socialist-oriented economy.

