



On Consistency of Upholding the Party’s Mass Line With Developing Socialist Democracy

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Supported by Chongqing Education Commission Humanities and Social Science Researches: a phase achievement of “Research on the status quo of undergraduates’ democratic and legal education and its countermeasures under We Media era (No. 13SKSZG03)”.

Received 8 October 2014; accepted 25 December 2014

Published online 26 January 2015

Abstract

The Party’s mass line is the Party’s lifeline and the fundamental approach to its work; and the nature of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters. Upholding the Party’s mass line and developing socialist democracy have a high degree of consistency in logic as well as in the methods and approaches of implementation. The Party’s mass line fully embodies the fundamental requirement of socialist democracy and provides the epistemological and methodological basis for socialist democracy; the intensive activities throughout the Party to study and practice its mass line are a lively practice of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.

Key words: The Communist Party of China; The mass line; Socialist democracy; Consistency

Dong, Y., & Sun, H. J. (2015). On Consistency of Upholding the Party’s Mass Line With Developing Socialist Democracy. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(1), 1-5. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/6136> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6136>

INTRODUCTION

The Party’s mass line, as the Party’s lifeline and the fundamental approach to its work, is formed and

developed from the combination of Marxism Historical Materialism and the concrete practices of Chinese revolution, construction and reform; and it is the outcome of the integration of Marxist concept of the masses and epistemology with the actual practices of the Party’s mass work. The essence and core of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters and people’s democracy is life of socialism. Developing and realizing socialist democracy is an important goal of the Party in governing the country. Upholding the Party’s mass line and developing socialist democracy are both specific ways to practice Marxist concept of the masses, and they have a high degree of consistency in logic as well as the methods and approaches to implementation. In keeping to the socialist path of making political advance with Chinese characteristics, we are facing a new topic of searching for the relationship between the practice of the Party’s mass line and the pursuit of socialist democracy.

1. THE PARTY’S MASS LINE FULLY EMBODIES THE FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENT OF SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

The essence of the Party’s mass line is to put people’s interests first, which is consistent with the core of socialist democracy that the people are the masters. Putting people’s interests first means giving top priority to the interests of the people, serving the people, being responsible for the people, respecting and relying on the people. This is actually coherent with the ideas of “people’s democracy” and that “the people are the masters” advocated by socialist democracy.

The key of that “the people are the masters” is whether it fully speaks to the willingness of the masses as the masters; whether it fully realizes the legal rights of the masses; and whether it fully safeguards the legal benefits

of the masses. In search of the origin and evolution of the word “democracy”, we can see that the importance of the “people” throughout the process. The word “democracy” comes from the “demokratia” in Greek, which is a new concept combined from the word “people” (demos) and the word “power” (kratos) and means “people’s power” (Jia & Hao, 1993). After a long history of evolution, the connotation and denotation of the concept “democracy” have been constantly enriching and developing. But the values of “popular sovereignty”, “majority rule” and “the people are the masters” are deposited and preserved, and they have been recognized and highly praised by countries of different systems. Countries with different state and political systems would distinguish in the understanding and definition of democracy; however, it is generally acknowledged that democracy is the weapon to protect the interests of the people. In the difficult exploration of the political road of socialist democracy, the Communist Party of China clearly recognized that what concerns the construction effectiveness of the socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics are how to fully speak to the willingness of the masses as the masters; how to fully realize the legal rights of the masses; and how to safeguard the legal benefits of the masses and it is the core problem to be faced and solved. The Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China especially pointed out, “we should ensure that the people are the masters of the country and we should uphold the rule of law as a fundamental principle by which the Party leads the people in running the country. We should mobilize and organize as many people as possible to manage state and social affairs as well as the economy and cultural programs in accordance with the law and to devote themselves to socialist modernization, and we should better protect the people’s rights and interests and ensure that the people determine their own destiny.” Efforts should be made to ensure that the people are the masters of the country, to better protect the people’s rights and interests, and to guarantee that the people determine their own destiny. We must firmly understand the essence of putting people first and to uphold the Party’s mass line fully embodies the fundamental requirement of socialist democracy.

From the point of scientific connotation, the Party’s mass line takes the masses as the starting point and foothold, emphasizing the people’s principal position in the country and reflecting the fundamental nature of socialist democracy. The basic content of the Party’s mass line is “doing everything for the masses, relying on them in every task, carrying out the principle of ‘from the masses, to the masses’”. This was elaborated in the decisions on “Some Problems Concerning Methods of Leadership”, written by Comrade Mao Zedong in June 1943 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It clearly defined the starting point and the

foothold of the Party’s mass line as well as its approaches of implementation. From this, it can be seen that the dominant position of the people has gone throughout the fundamental work of the Party. From the democratic revolution period to the stage of socialist construction and reform and opening up, the historical position of the Communist Party of China has changed significantly, from a revolutionary party never mastering the state power into the ruling party in the leadership position, from a ruling party under socialist planned economy into the ruling party under socialist market economy. With changes in historical circumstances and conditions, the scientific connotation of the Party’s mass line has been constantly enriching, but the Party’s goal of “serving the people wholeheartedly” has never changed and neither did the fundamental essence of “putting people first” in the Party’s fundamental approach to its work. Since the democratic revolution period, our Party took as its goal of fighting for the people’s democracy and freedom, relied on the masses and mobilized them, gradually established the fine traditions and political advantages of the Party’s mass line and led the people to achieve the victory of democratic revolution. Since the founding of New China, especially since the reform and opening up, our Party has always been adhering to its mass line and leading and supporting its people as masters of the country. Efforts have been made to improve the system of democracy and diversify its forms as well as to further perform the people’s enthusiasm, initiative and creativity. The over 90 years’ glorious history of our Party is both the history of the implementation of the mass line, and the history of the development and formation of people’s democracy.

2. THE PARTY’S MASS LINE PROVIDES THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

The Party’s mass line has been proved by practice as scientific epistemology and methodology. The “Party Constitution” decides that the mass line is “doing everything for the masses, relying on them in every task, carrying out the principle of ‘from the masses, to the masses’, and translating its correct views into action by the masses of their own accord.” (*Constitution of the Communist Party of China*. (2012, p.19) The socialist democracy requires expanding people’s orderly participation in politics at all levels; and ensuring that the people conduct democratic elections, decision-making, administration and oversight in accordance with the law and conduct checks and oversight over the exercise of power, which is consistent with the Party’s mass line in the method and approach. The effective use of “Everything

relying on the masses, from the masses and to the masses” would be more conducive to the implementation of socialist democracy.

The epistemology of “from the masses, to the masses” would help maintain the quality of people’s political participation. Epistemology, also as methodology, is a method of understanding the world. Mao Zedong once said,

In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily ‘from the masses, to the masses’. This means: Take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. (*Selected Works of Mao Zedong [Vol.3]*, 1991, p.993)

That is, any ideas or leadership of the Party should concentrate the scattered ideas taken from the masses into systematic ideas, propagate and stick to these ideas among the masses, and test the correctness of these ideas in the action. To intensively carry out the mass line is a process for the Party to understand and reflect the masses’ wishes and also a process for the masses to express their wishes and aspirations as well as to participate in the political decision-making. Since the founding of New China, representing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people is the basis for the legitimacy of the ruling Communist Party of China. Currently, the most important political development context of China is keeping to the socialist path of making political advance with Chinese characteristics, whose fundamental feature is the integration of the Party’s leadership, the position of the people as masters of the country, and the rule of law (Yu, 2013). However, the Party’s leadership does not necessarily equal democracy. In order to translate the Party’s correct views into action by the masses of their own accord, efforts should be made to promote the masses’ expressions of their wishes and political participation, so as to raise the level of democracy. The Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China and the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Party of China Central Committee fully recognized consultative democracy as an important form of socialist democracy, and noted in particular, that consultative democracy is a unique form and advantage of China’s socialist democracy as well as an important manifestation of the Party’s mass line in the political sphere. Consultative democracy is an important complement to electoral democracy. The will of the masses, other than expressed by the people’s representatives, should also be expressed by the masses themselves through direct political participation.

Various forms of consultative democracy, including dialogues, consultations, discussions, hearing, exchanges, communications, considerations, debates, controversy, etc. are actually important channels for the people to participate in the democratic and political life as well as indispensable part for the decision-making to become scientific and democratic. Under the leadership of the Party, we should take as contents the major problems concerning economic and social development and the practical issues relating to people’s immediate interests, carry out extensive consultations in the whole society, invite statements and gather wisdom of the people, repeatedly collect wisdom and public opinions from up-bottom and bottom-up, insist on consultation before decision-making and in the implementation of decision-making. Thus, with the understanding and method of the mass line, we should ensure the quality and effectiveness of the people’s political participation and guarantee scientific and democratic decision-making in accordance with the law.

The methodology “All relying on the masses” would help implement the checks and oversight over the exercise of power. Historical Materialism thinks the people are the creators of history, subject of the practice, and decisive force for social reforms. Historical Materialism is the worldview of the proletarian party, and the kind of worldview decides its kind of methodology. As Deng Xiaoping put it in Report on the Revision of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China at the 8th Communist Party of China Central Committee, “the working class must rely on the power of the masses of its own class and the power of all the working people, in order to realize its historic mission: To liberate themselves meanwhile to liberate all working people.” (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping [Vol.1]*, 1994, p.217) “All relying on the masses” is decided by the historical status and role of the masses. The fundamental guarantee for the success of the Party’s cause is to fully trust the masses, tightly rely on the masses and closely unite the masses. Since the Party began ruling the country, it has been in the political and legal status of better serving people’s needs; meanwhile, it has acquired more power in ruling and managing the country. From ruling under planned economy to rule under market economy, the Party has begun facing the test of making proper use of power and resisting the temptation, which comes along with the huge vigor and vitality of the market economy. For the checks and oversight over the exercise of power, the Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly pointed out “to ensure the people’s right to supervise, to let people supervise the exercise of power and to make the power exercised in a transparent manner”. The underlying goal of socialist democracy is that the people are the masters of the country. The right to supervise is a fundamental constitutional right of every citizen. The speed and effect of implementing the people’s

supervision directly reflect the level of democracy and the rule of law in a modern state, which also concerns the success of constructing the socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics. For example, with the advent of the Internet era, network monitoring as a new form of supervision by the people, doesn't only expand the scope and areas of oversight, but also truly realizes the bottom-up comprehensive oversight from time and space. Along with the economic and social advances, the Internet users have seen increase in the number and the improvement in their quality. To fully mobilize and rely on the power of the masses would contribute to conduct the checks and oversight over the exercise of power and thus promoting the construction of socialist democracy.

3. THE INTENSIVE ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE PARTY TO STUDY AND PRACTICE ITS MASS LINE ARE A LIVELY PRACTICE OF SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

On June 18, 2013, at the Work Meeting on the Party's Mass Line Educational Practice, Xi Jinping, the General Secretary stressed that the mass line is the lifeline of our Party and the basic line of work. To carry out intensive activities throughout the Party to study and practice its mass line constitutes inevitable requirements for striving to accomplish the objectives specified at the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China; for maintaining the Party's advanced nature and purity and consolidating its basis and position as the governing party; and for solving pressing problems of keen concern to the people. Since intensive activities throughout the Party to study and practice its mass line were carried out nearly a year ago, all regions and departments have been focusing on the need to serve the people and to be down-to-earth, honest and upright in conduct, firmly fostering the view of the masses, and promoting intensive activities throughout the Party to study and practice its mass line, in an effort to establish and improve a long-term mechanism of the mass line. Meanwhile, we should attach greater importance to the consistency of upholding the Party's mass line with developing socialist democracy; continue to advocate the concept, to expand channels, to strengthen supervision and to improve system of democracy; promote the course of socialist democracy; and stimulate the vigor and vitality of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.

3.1 Adhere to Carrying Out Activities With Door Open and Expand the Channels for the People's Democratic Participation

All regions have adhered to the "door open" principle throughout the activities and organized the people's

orderly participation in the whole process of educational practice. With the implementation of open educational practice, the educational practice of the leading organs is open to the masses; NPC deputies, CPPCC members and representatives of the masses get involved in the meeting; and opinions from all sides are solicited through various forms. The views and suggestions of the Party members and the masses should be extensively solicited through ways like holding seminars, setting up suggestion boxes, distributing questionnaires, installing hotlines, and e-mails, etc. The Party officials should step out of the office buildings, go on primary-level field trips with down-to-earth mood, and get to know the ideas, considerations, desires and requirements of the public. People should be invited to the development of reform proposals and the introduction of related systems. To the issues relating to people's immediate interests, the masses should be mobilized in the discussion and their opinion should be fully listened to. The adherence to synchronization of listening to the people's views and suggestions for their democratic participation fully reflects the breadth of the people's democratic participation.

3.2 Focus on Solving the "Four Forms of Decadence" and Strengthen the Enthusiasm and Initiative of the People's Supervision

Undesirable work styles are a breeding ground for corruption. The "four forms of decadence" (i.e. formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance), contrary to the nature and purpose of our party, are abominated and most reflected by the current masses and might act as a major source of damaging the tie between the Party members and the masses as well as the tie between the Party cadres and the masses. The masses have the most convincing and the final say towards the criticism on the "four forms of decadence". The people from all areas are mobilized and a thorough investigation is conducted for improving the work style and strengthening party and government discipline. The supervision and implementation of the "eight-point guidelines" have revealed the most obvious effect. The process of the masses' supervision is also the process in which the people have cultivated the awareness and developed the behavior of political participation. The achievement of solving the "four forms of decadence" in turn has inspired the masses to be more enthusiastic and initiative in democratic supervision.

3.3 Attach Great Importance to Establishing Systems and Promote a Long-Term Construction of the Democratic System

The Party's mass line has been formed during the democratic revolution period, and created many successful experiences and practices based on the actual situations of the revolutionary war. To continue to maintain the mass line robust, great importance should

be placed on the relevant systemic building. The system “issues are more fundamental, comprehensive, stable and long-term.” (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping [Vol.2]*, 1994, p.333) Thoroughly implementing the mass line as the lifeline should be guaranteed by the system and the Party’s mass line educational practice has placed systemic building in an important position. Efforts should be made to establish and improve a variety of systems and mechanisms, including the system of the Party officials’ direct interaction with the public, a sound system of handling people’s complaints expressed in letters or visits, the mechanism of upholding the rights and interests of the people, a system of smoothing the channels for the masses to express their interest demands, a scientific and democratic decision-making mechanism reflecting the masses’ wills, a system of evaluating the Party officials’ work style, etc., which also means the establishment and

improvement of democracy mechanism in related areas and levels.

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