

Chou En-lai's Exploration of China's Democratic Political Construction

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Abstract - Chou En-lai explored the Chinese democracy construction, asserting that democracy was the essence of socialism. He summarized principles and approaches of expanding democracy and advocated consultative democracy and democracy within the Party, setting a base stone for people's democracy and guiding the development of it.

Index Terms - democratic politics, people's democracy, consultative democracy, democracy within the party

1. Introduction

The Communist Party of China (CPC) pursuits consistently the development of democratic politics. Chou En-lai, as one of the first-generation leaders of CPC, explored the Chinese democracy construction and made many important suggestions on developing democratic politics, which bear immense theoretical and practical value.

2. Asserting that Democracy Was the Essence of Socialism and Illuminating the Development Course of Democratic Politics

With the ambition of studying for the rise of China, Chou En-lai held that democratic politics was the prerequisite for national independence and prosperity and resultingly developing democratic politics was of substantial value.

When People's Republic of China (PRC) first came into being, Chou En-lai illustrated that democratic political construction was the most important task. He said at the 46th meeting of the Government Affairs Department in August 1950, "Democratic political construction, relief work and demobilization are three main tasks for the Civil Affairs Department, and democratic political construction is the most important of the three".^[1] At that meeting he emphasized the importance of democratic political construction and maintained that its core was based upon the organization of the people's congresses at all levels.

Right at the historical moment of establishing a socialist system in PRC, Chou En-lai made clear the new task of furthering the construction of socialist democratic politics. At CPC's first People's Congress of Shanghai in July 1956, he said, "What needs to be done with our people's dictatorship is that our dictatorship shall continue and our democracy shall expand...With the further consolidation of our dictatorship and the working class's gaining more power, we should democracy be expanded rather than contracted. On the one hand, we have favourable conditions to do so; on the other hand, that is a lesson we have drawn from the history of the proletariat

dictatorship. Our people's democratic dictatorship aims at establishing socialism and eliminating the exploiting class. Although it has its base on democracy, the power of our dictatorship is quite concentrated and strong. Without exercising it properly, we will neglect democracy. We can take a lesson from the history of the Soviet Union. So we have to keep alert. We have to work regularly to expand our democracy. That bears more substantial meaning."^[2] Here Chou En-lai summarized the historical value of expanding our democracy: a. it is a need by the development of society; b. it is a lesson from the history of the Soviet Union; c. expanding democracy has essential value. Although he didn't make it clear that democracy was the essence of socialism, what he said had such valuable implications.

3. Summarizing the Principles and Approaches of Expanding Democracy and Exploring the Practical Way of Democracy Construction

After the establishment of the People's Congress system, Chou En-lai, as one of CPC's first-generation leaders and state government leaders, further explored the practical way of establishing and refining the democratic political system and expanding democracy.

Chou En-lai put forward grassroots elections, stressed the principle of the general election and aroused the enthusiasm of the masses. When presiding over the 8th meeting of the Government Affairs Department in November 1949, he led a discussion of three organizing principles for the People's Congress, saying, "We have to rely on the masses' enthusiasm and creativity. Only in this way can we be justifiable. Then how can we arouse the masses' enthusiasm? Universal suffrage is the key".^[3] In December 1952, he summarized the universal suffrage policy for the people's congress in this way, "In the course of this general election, all CPC members will get involved. The government will assume responsibility. We will arouse the enthusiasm of the masses. We will have extensive promotion. We will guarantee a serious election, so as to achieve the purpose of democratic political construction".^[4] At the 20th meeting of the Central Government in January 1953, he said, "Universal suffrage is the election principle of the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at all levels. The key to a general election is the direct voting by the masses".^[5] In February 1953, when he replied to some people's questions about the general election, he said, "The key to the general election lies in people's degree of awareness

and their organization, not in their education or in our national economic situation".^[6] The people require universal suffrage so that they can elect who they consider necessary and satisfactory. The elected people will, on behalf of the voters, take part in the work of government departments and manage the national affairs and the things related to the voters. We have no reason, or no power to reject or put off the people's exercising of the basic rights.

Chou En-lai brought into play the deputies' rights, realizing and expanding democracy. In July 1956, when talking about how to expand democracy, he put forward three suggestions. First, the deputies should do twice personal inspections each year among the masses and check whether our work was proper or not. Second, the speeches of all the people's representatives should be published, including the ones criticizing the government work, whether they are right or not. The communists should have the courage of facing the reality and errors, and then correct them. Third, the deputies should inspect the government work, public security and justice work.

4. Developing Deliberative Democracy to Confirm the Implementation of Democracy

Democratic republic is the goal and direction of China's political development in modern times. Deliberative democracy is rooted in Chinese history and the reality of social development, which is in line with China's national conditions and political system. At the same time it is also an important political principle and operation form. As chairman of the first Prime Minister of the Republic and the National Political Consultative Conference (firstly as deputy chairman, secondly, thirdly, fourthly as the chairman), Chou En-lai not only has made important contributions to the establishment of the multi-party cooperation and political consultation system, but also plays an important role in uphold and deepen the Consultative democracy.

Chou En-lai adhered to the Communist Party and the democratic parties in the long-term coexistence. In November 1949, Chou En-lai pointed out in the Democratic League fifth national cadres conference speech that a revolutionary party should not be afraid of being eliminated, but the Chinese peasants and workers Democratic Party has not come to this period, who has its historical mission and should not be terminated. In December 1949, he expressed his views on the future and the development direction of the NLD at the tea forum of the Fourth Plenary Session of the enlarged meeting of the NLD which is held by the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee: "Democratic Parties have made contributions to the Chinese revolution, whether the China Democratic League or other democratic parties should continue to exist...We cannot cancel parties today."^[7] In the January of 1951, Mr. Chou stressed at the tea forum of United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee that the total number of all the members of the democratic parties of China is not many. In a big country like China, beside the about five million Party members of the Communist Party, all

members of the democratic parties is too small to match. We should let the Democratic Party be and make it development. In April 1957, in a report on the working conference of Zhejiang provincial Party committee propaganda, when speaking of long-term coexistence, mutual supervision of the implementation of the problem with the democratic parties, he said that it should be proposed and truly done by the Communist Party. He mentioned, "No matter how long will our party's life be, democratic party's life will be the same, who will always coexist to the future that party is no longer needed for the development of society."^[8]

Chou En-lai advocated to give full play to the democratic consultation and democratic supervision of all parties and the democratic personages without party affiliation. In the October of 1949, at the second meeting of the CPPCC conference of leading Party group, he pointed out that we carry out the principle of democratic centralism in the organization, adhering to extensive and highly concentrated democracy. On all important issues including the Common Program and two organizational laws, we should have full consultation with all parties and non-party Democrats in advance. In April 1950, he made a speech of On Diplomacy and the United Front of the Report in the Third Plenary Session of the Seventh CPC. He pointed out: "We could not think that democratic parties are of no use in the party relations at the present stage. The people's democratic dictatorship task is not completed yet today. Even in socialism, democratic parties will go with us. We cooperate with the democratic parties in order to be more close to the masses."^[9]

In March 1957, he spoke at the Chinese people's Political Consultative Conference at the closing plenary session: the conference committee members spoke enthusiastically with rich content which can also be said that we achieve the contention of divergent viewpoints. For criticism, it should be solved properly, because people are starting from a positive attitude. The criticized departments should earnestly study it and then answer it. For good criticism we should accept, and for bad one we should explain. This work should be continued, which will promote democratic life, that is to say, we, the Chinese people's Political Consultative Conference, should play a role to play it.^[10] In the November of 1958, the fifty-one Democrats forum is held. On the democratic political freedom and the independence of the organization he considered that Democratic Party who is under the leadership of the Communist Party is full of political freedom and the independence of the organization in the range of rights and obligations enshrined in the constitution. This kind of political freedom is the freedom adapting to the necessity of the social and historical development. Political freedom, Democratic Party with its organizations and independent act by the laws of social development and do a lot of things in the range of socialism and the scope of personal activity is also large. In the April of 1962, he attended the closing speech at the third CPPCC National Committee third conference and focused on the new development of China's National People's Democratic United front. He proposed: when entering the stage of socialist

construction, the new mission of the people's democratic united front is to unite with all the forces that can be united and mobilize more factors as much as possible which are willing to participate in the socialist construction and expand our democracy. At the same time, he pointed out that democratic parties should jointly responsible, long-term coexistence, mutual supervision and take up the responsibility of supervision to make things better in the future. So the responsibility of democratic parties in the socialist transformation and socialist construction is not light but heavy. The democratic parties are to serve the cause of socialism. To serve the cause of socialism can steel various parties and their members.^[11]

5. Proposing Democracy within the Party to Establish the Realistic Foundation of Realizing People's Democracy

Chinese Communist Party is the proposer and practitioner of democratic politics. During the process of China's revolution and construction, Chinese Communist Party becomes the core of the Chinese nation and the whole country, thus creating logic of politic development with Chinese characteristics—democracy within the party lead, demonstrate, drive and promote people's democracy. As the important member of the first leading group, Chou En-lai knows very much the importance of developing democracy within the party and proposes a series of important thoughts.

To develop democracy within the party, the first thing is to change the work style of the leading cadre. In February 1962, “we should develop democracy, renew and reinforce normal democratic life within the party” and “normal democratic life should be developed within the party; we should be practical and realistic; we should work according to Party Constitution.”^[12] were put forward in enlarged meeting of the central committee of the communist party of China. In June 1961, “emancipate people's minds, get rid of superstition, dare to think, speak and act” was proposed and “the work style of the cadre should be changed first. To change the work style of the cadre, the work style of the leading cadre should be changed first. To change the work style of the leading cadre, our work style should be changed first” was emphasized in the meeting held by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.^[13]

The development of democracy within the party must insist on collective leadership. In September 1956, when Chou En-lai met delegation of Communist Party of Australia and of New Zealand, speaking of Stalin's secret report, he said, ten years after Lenin's death, Stalin's work style was not democratic and the environment was also an important element. This was a lesson to us and this taught us to pay attention to democracy within the party, to listen to the views of the masses and to insist on collective leadership. If there is no democracy, there is no centralism. Centralism is based on democracy. This is very important to our ruling party. In April

1962, Zhou especially emphasized at the Third Session of the CPPCC third closing statements that “the leadership of the Communist Party is the party's collective leadership”; “it is mainly the Party's principles and policies that plays a leadership role, rather than individuals. Every individual is equal. From the work point of view, we are servants of the people and we should equally exchange views, we must not consider ourselves as leadership. “Otherwise, our democratic life and democratic culture will not be able to carry forward.”^[14]

Achieving democracy within the party promotes people's democracy. Chinese Communist Party's ruling status, historic mission and China's national conditions determine that the democracy within the party is the foundation and guarantee of the People's Democracy. Chou En-lai holds that there is interrelationship between the Chinese Communist Party's leadership and People's Democracy. The achievement of the democracy within the party is bound to serve as a model and exert promoting effects on the development of the People's Democracy. Thus achieving “a kind of political situation as: centralism and democracy, discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind and liveliness” just as Chairman Mao said. Therefore, in January 1965 at the first meeting of the fourth session of the CPPCC National Committee, Chou En-lai noted that our democracy is developing democracy and people's democracy, which is under leadership.

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