

On the Relationship between Democracy, Public Sentiment, and Class Rule

A Talk delivered at the Utopian Bookstore, at the end of October, 2007, by Fred Engst

Introduction

There is a renewed interest about democracy among people in China. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about some of the thinking and reflections that I have had on this subject in last few years.

I do not like to quote the classics, nor do I know how to. I'm not sure if it is because I don't like to that I don't know how, or if it is because I don't know how that I don't like to. In either case, I feel that people are quite familiar with what Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao have said in terms of democracy, class, and dictatorship, so I don't feel the need to repeat them again here.

I don't like to quote the classics for another reason. That is because in today's world, what we need the most is to use reason to convince people rather than quoting classics to attack people in a discussion or in an argument. Furthermore, for all classical theories we need to ask questions, and only then are we able to comprehend them and perhaps integrate them into our thinking.

It seems that people need to have both positive and negative experiences in order to understand the truth. I have been taught Marxism-Leninism and Mao's Thought ever since I was a child. However, I only knew "what it is," not really "why it is." When I went to the U.S. and was bombarded with the overwhelming power of capitalist ideology, I wavered. Only after some sharp and sometimes painful struggles in my head – trying to sort through and make sense of two conflicting world outlooks, attempting to understand and explain different realities between China and the U.S. – was I finally able to understand some of the "why it is" of Marxism-Leninism and Mao's Thought. So, what I am going to say today is a kind of a summary of the thinking that I have been struggling through for the last few years.

Starting from the reality of class and class struggle, standing on the side of the working class (the proletariat), based on my understanding of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and the method of dialectical materialism, I will try my best to talk about the relationship between democracy, public sentiment (the dominant ideology in society) and the rule of a class (for example, the dictatorship

of the bourgeoisie). My hope is to have a discussion and an exchange of ideas with everyone here. Or, as a Chinese phrase goes: “Throwing a brick and hoping to end up with a jade”.

Part 1: A Few Questions Concerning Democracy

First, let me present a few of my thoughts on democracy.

1. Is democracy a means or an end in itself?

Of course, from the perspective of the majority of the people, having democracy is better than not having democracy. For example, is it better for people to queue up for a bus, or to let those with the greatest strength elbow their way on first? In terms of the majority of the people, democratic process offers a better chance to protect the perceived interest of the majority. It is true that to avoid missed opportunities, we often want decision makers to be decisive rather than have every decision be put to a referendum. But overall, on major issues, we like to have the majority in charge rather than the minority. But this is not the end of the story. Under a system of private ownership of the means of production, if only a few people have their say, it becomes a dictatorial rule. This situation most likely will harm the interests of other property owners, as well as the vast majority of people. Under a system of common ownership of the means of production (ownership by the whole people), if only a few people have their say, then it will not only demoralize the majority, but sooner or later it will also change the system of ownership from a common one to a private one. Thus, regardless of common or private ownership of the means of production, democracy is a means to maintain and protect the perceived interest of the majority under the current system, not an end in its self. It helps resolve social contradictions under both systems. In other words, democracy does not address which class is in power. I will talk more about how democracy serves the rule (dictatorship) of a class later.

2. Why do we want democracy?

If we analyze why we like democracy a step further, we will discover that the answer to this question is not divorced from class. In fact, the reason for capitalists to embrace democracy is completely different from that of the working class. All capitalists would like to wipe out their competitors and become a dictator in their own right. If not for the fear of other people being dictators, which might harm their interests, capitalists would not embrace democracy. Therefore, they settle for democracy as a means to protect their interests.

For the working class, however, it is just the opposite. If a member of the working class becomes a dictator, he or she would no longer be a member of the class. That is why a member of the working class can break away from, or betray, the class and liberate himself or herself; while the class can only liberate itself by completely liberating the whole of humankind. For the working class, without democracy there is no liberation to speak of, because democracy is the very condition for its liberation. The craving for democracy by the working class is an expression of its craving for equality – and its hatred for exploitation and oppression. Thus, we can state that capitalists accept democracy for self-defense, and the working class embraces democracy for liberation.

3. The Relationship between Democracy and Public Sentiment.

Even though we say that democracy is a good thing, it does not mean that as long as we have democracy everything is fine. Today there is widespread discrimination against the people from Henan¹ province in China. Suppose we had a referendum and were able to officially designate the people of Henan as second class citizens in the People's Republic of China. Would that be a good thing? Don't think this is only a joke. Prior to the 1960s in the South of the U.S.A., there were many laws passed through democratic means that openly discriminated against African American people. For example, black people were not allowed to go to schools designated for whites, not allowed to sit on bus seats designated for whites, and not allowed to drink at water fountains designated for whites. Those discriminatory laws were only abandoned after the heated Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and '70s.

Why did democracy prior to the sixties openly discriminate against black people? A direct reason was the widespread ideology of racism among white people at that time. This example shows that it is the dominant ideology that sways public sentiments and ultimately dictates the results of a democratic process.

Let us see how democracy has operated in other countries. In China, when people talk about democracy, they tend to compare China only with the United States or Western Europe. But huge differences between Chinese and Western Societies – in terms of historical backgrounds, cultural traditions, and economic strengths – render these comparisons meaningless. By contrast, China and India have a lot more in common. India claims to be the largest democracy in the world. Its democracy has been in existence for over 60 years. However, the working people there have not been able to escape from the fate of oppression and exploitation. The contrast in India between the rich and the poor is bigger than in

¹ The most populous province in China, located south of Beijing, Henan has one of the lowest per capita incomes and the largest emigration rate of peasants to other parts of China.

China. The corruption in India is worse than in China. The people in India have voted repeatedly, but the rich are still getting richer and the poor are still getting poorer. So, if China copied the Indian style of democracy, would the fate of the working people in China be any better than that of the people in India? Could the democracy of the working class be the answer to their liberation? Last year I saw a translation of an article by the Trotskyist Fourth International² posted on the Utopian Bookstore's website. There were highly charged revolutionary slogans in it. For example, it advocated using armed struggle to overthrow the bourgeois state machinery and crush the resistance of the capitalists. A large portion of the article focused on the centrality of having workers' representative congresses at various levels. It saw workers' congresses as the basis of all power in society, and asserted that proletarian dictatorship (working class rule) can only be defended by relying on working class democracy. After I read it, I realized that these Trotskyists seem to believe that as long as there is working class democracy, everything else would be easily resolved. But what about overcoming the influence of individualism, localism, cliquishness, and hired-labor mentality among working people left over from the old society? Or how to prevent a small group of workers from a local area, or from a few enterprises, from conducting business in such a way as to sacrifice the interests of the working class as a whole? I saw no discussion of these points. It seems that either the Trotskyists don't want to talk about how public sentiment dictates the outcome of democracy, or they don't understand that relationship.

As long as the majority of the working class pin their hope of liberation, consciously or unconsciously, on becoming bosses themselves one day – on paying their dues and climbing up the social ladder – then the system of capitalism cannot be overthrown. Even if the working class wins democracy, with this type of ideology dominating people's thinking, such a democracy will end up serving capitalism. The dominance of ideology, or public sentiment on democracy, is the fundamental reason why democracy is only a means and not an end in itself.

4. The Prerequisite for Democracy

The effectiveness of democracy as a tool to solve social contradictions depends on the kind of a problem that confronts it. In general, democracy works fine for resolving minor conflicts of interest. When faced with clashes between fundamental interests, however, the principle of majority rule often breaks down – democracy fails. Only when all parties involved believe that democracy will not harm their fundamental interests will there be the possibility of the minority going along with the majority, the

² See Documents of the Fourth International : World Congress Decisions, 12th World Congress - 1985

possibility of resolving conflicts through democratic means. For instance, the conflict between labor and capital in Western society is not an example of resolving conflicts through democratic means, because the capitalist might be out voted in that case. Instead, the conflict is resolved through negotiations and strikes – through a show of strength on both sides.

Another good example of the ineffectiveness of democracy in resolving fundamental conflicts was the U.S. Civil War, some 150 years ago. The United States, which claimed to be a democracy, was not able to resolve the conflict between the North and the South through democratic means. To understand why, we need to have some basic understanding of the history of the United States. Some say that the U.S. Civil War was about the abolition of the system of slavery. However, I believe this point of view was mainly due to the propaganda of northern states seeking to get public support for their war effort. Northern capitalists believed only in the almighty dollar. If there was nothing in it for them, for their own self interest, they would not have spared a dime for the cause of freeing black slaves.

To understand the real reason for the U.S. Civil War, we have to look into the economic conflict between the states of the North and the South. At the time, the northern capitalist economy had just started to develop and factory owners found it difficult to compete with England's well established capitalism. Therefore, they strongly urged the U.S. government to impose protectionist import tariffs – wanting to reduce the influx of industrial goods from England, such as textile products. However, the southern plantation owners wanted to have free trade with England. They wanted to exchange their agricultural products, produced by relatively inexpensive slave labor, for cheap industrial products from England and without the added cost of import duties. The northern states had more votes in Congress; and they wanted to raise tariffs to force the South to buy industrial products from the North. The South refused and thus wanted to be independent from the control of the North. The North said, "No way! We want to preserve the union." That was the real reason for the Civil War.

A more recent example of where democracy needs prerequisites to function can be found in the Cultural Revolution. When there were different opinions among people in the mass organizations, when neither side could convince the other, then the minority often would not go along with the majority view. Their way of resolving the conflict was to make a split, to form another organization, and to raise another flag. Wasn't this the case for the factional fighting that we might be familiar with in Qinghua (University)? Or the two citywide factions in Beijing: the Heaven Faction (led by the Beijing Aeronautics College), and the Earth Faction (led by the Geological College)?

I witnessed many splits of this kind among the left in the United States, especially among Trotskyist groups. When a minority cannot go along with the majority, there will be one split after another, until

finally the group can't get any smaller. I believe rightist groups are having similar problems now, especially among religious groups, resulting in very fine divisions among them.

Throughout the history of the CCP, especially during the Jinggang Mountain period and the time of the Long March, we saw that Mao acted just the opposite in the way he conducted inner party struggle. Under attack from wrong lines practiced inside the Party during that period, he still upheld majority rule, upheld democratic centralism. He did not split the Party, or the Red Army. How many people can match his deep belief in democracy in such a difficult time? All those who claim that Mao was undemocratic do not understand what democracy is – or they don't understand the role democracy plays, or the kinds of problems democracy can resolve, or the relationship between democracy and the rule of classes in a class society. Or else they might be an enemy of the working class to begin with – in which case, not sharing the perspective of the working class, they have no right to judge whether Mao was democratic or not³.

5. Democracy of the People versus Democracy of the Dollar

Western countries love to put themselves up as the example of democracy. They love to play the role of the big brother of democracy. They love to denounce practices of other countries as undemocratic. Based on this outlook, one would think that they would support mass organizations that emerged during the Cultural Revolution. After all, the formation of these organizations reflected sentiments of ordinary people in their struggle against the Party and government apparatus, which, according to Western viewpoints, were undemocratic. In reality, this stand was not taken by the West. What we found was that the Western countries were afraid of the masses. What they supported was a democracy that money can buy: a democracy that is external to the structures of private property, or capital-worker relations – a democracy among capitalists. They do not want a democracy within capitalist enterprises, nor a democracy originating from the people, since in either case it can threaten private property rights.

³ For a Western audience I need to explain a bit more about this perspective. Mao was one of the few people who actually organized the Red Army in Jinggang area. Later, leading party officials from the Central Committee came in from Shanghai and started calling the shots. They criticized Mao's guerrilla warfare tactics and pushed Mao aside. From 1927 to 1934, for almost seven years, all the gains that Mao, Chu De and others who worked so hard to build up the Red Army – all were almost totally destroyed by these people from the center. This situation was the reason the Red Army had to go on the famous Long March – as well as to escape from the Kuomintang's encirclement. Anyone other than Mao most likely would have split a long time earlier. They would have said, "To hell with you guys." But Mao did not. Mao didn't believe in splitting the Red Army. Instead, he just kept on struggling with the people in leadership, while at the same time obeying majority rule. That is the true meaning of democracy within the Party. This part of the story is something most people in the West don't know much about, especially young people.

“It doesn’t matter what kind of democracy it is, so long as it is democracy,” my rightwing friends might say. “Aren’t the Western societies quite democratic?” Or, “How come in capitalist society, the working class, which is the majority of the population, obeys capitalists, who are only a small minority?” To answer these questions we need to go deeper into the true nature of capitalist democracy.

My view is that the democracy practiced in the West, under the system of private ownership of the means of production, is in reality a shareholding democracy of the dollar.

From a micro point of view, within a private enterprise there is no democracy. Investors simply will not allow themselves to be outvoted and lose control of the enterprise. When capitalists invest together in joint stock companies, how much say each person has is proportional to how much capital each invests. From their perspective this is the most reasonable system. But this system is a one-dollar-one-vote democracy of the dollar, not a one-person-one-vote democracy of the people.

What about Western democracies from a macro point of view? Again, I think it is a democracy based on the system of private ownership of the means of production, under which the rights of private property are sacred and inalienable. Thus, it is a democracy under the dictatorship of the capitalist class.

I say this because such a democracy passes laws and regulations that decide, for example, how much tax the rich should pay and how much tax the poor should pay. It controls resources devoted to the standing army, the social welfare budget, regulating the market, and environmental protection. Based on these concerns, capitalists care about who should be in government office to enforce these laws and regulations. They use what is on the surface a one-person-one-vote method to resolve conflicts between different interest groups and between different classes in society – all without ever harming the basic rights of private property ownership. This kind of democracy will not tolerate any attempts, regardless of how democratic, to undermine the system of private ownership of the means of production. That is why it is called a dictatorship of the capitalist class.

This is the main reason why Western theories of democracy denounce, when it suits them, the so-called “tyranny of the majority.” They use “human rights” and “personal freedom” to prevent the majority from expropriating the wealth of the affluent minority. So, under the Western system of democracy, the capitalist class will not allow a vote on the sacredness of private property. Even if the people decided that private property is no longer sacred, that they wanted to abolish the system of private ownership of the means of production, capitalists would not accept that outcome. They would fight to the death.

Thus, voting cannot change the system of ownership. While capitalism is strong, a peaceful transition to socialism is impossible.

And even when such is the case, when private ownership of the means of production is secure, the Western system of democracy, in reality, is not one-person-one-vote. Suppose the people in one locality or in one country were able to force their legislature to pass some anti-capitalist laws, or enable some anti-capitalist candidates to win an election. Besides other means, capitalists can simply refuse to invest in the economy and cause its downturn. When unemployment swells, when people's living standards go down dramatically, many among the working class might wish to abandon those policies that are unfavorable to capitalists. They might want to remove the anti-capitalist candidates from office, or force them to change their minds. The workers might then support new laws in favor of the interest of capitalists, in the hope of improving their own economic position. Thus, under capitalism, those with more capital get pampered more by other people. It becomes clear from this example that under the system of private ownership of the means of production, what is on the surface a one-person-one-vote democracy is in reality a one-dollar-one-vote democracy. The democracy of the people becomes the democracy of the almighty dollar. Those who have the biggest share of capital have the biggest voice.

6. Whom Do Those Lofty Theories on Democracy Serve?

From the above analysis, we can see another meaning of the rule by the capitalist class (dictatorship of the bourgeoisie). One basic point of this rule is that it will not allow people to use democratic means to change a system of private ownership of the means of production into a system of common ownership of the mean of production. The sacredness of privately owned property, though not stated explicitly, is the very foundation of their Constitution – and any violation of this condition can be viewed as unconstitutional. The vast resources the capitalists devote to supporting the overwhelming state machinery (the police, military, courts, and prison system) is not to protect the private ownership of the means of living, but to protect the private ownership of the means of production.

The rule by the working class (dictatorship of the proletariat) is similar in this regard. Learning from capitalists, the rule by the working class would not allow people through democratic means to change the system of common ownership of the means of production into a system of private ownership of the means of production. The reason is that under the latter system workers cannot hope to achieve equality. They cannot escape from their position of being exploited and oppressed.

However, the rule by the capitalist class cannot depend solely on its control of the state apparatus – solely on using force to suppress the people who threaten their system. More importantly, class rule

depends on the dominance of capitalist ideology in society – on the control of public sentiment – and on people’s acquiescence to capitalism.

A key point in capitalist ideology is the concept of bourgeois right. According to this ideology, differences between rich and poor people within the system of private ownership of the means of production is due to differences in ability and intelligence among people, rather than to differences in the amount of capital each has. It lumps together as one and the same two very different things: 1) the means of living – consumption goods, such as food, clothing, housing, transportation – which people need for daily life, and 2) the means of production – investment goods, such as tools, machines, factories – which capitalists use for profit making. Bourgeois right considers both classes of goods to be private property. And so ordinary people should be willing to defend them both.

This ideology believes that people need to put themselves first – take self-interest as the guiding principle for action. It does not believe in thinking about what is good for the society as a whole, what is good for the majority of people, or what is good for the overall interests of the working class. This outlook is one of the main reasons why democracy under capitalism – based on the concept of privately owned property – defends the system of private ownership of the means of production. In doing so, the capitalist class, a minority in society, is able to control the working class, the majority, through democratic means.

This discussion points to two pillars of capitalist class rule: first, the overwhelming strength of the state machinery; and second, the domination of ideology through manipulating public sentiment.

Thus one can ask, “Is it true that any theory on democracy today that is divorced from the dominance of capitalist ideology in society – divorced from class struggle in the realm of ideology – is a theory that, in essence, serves the interest of the capitalist class? The answer is clearly, “Yes.”

7. An Evaluation of Democracy as a Standard of Judgment

For many intellectuals I know who are under the influence of capitalist or petty-capitalist ideology, the first thing they think of is their personal liberation – their personal freedom – not the liberation or freedom of the working class. They often consider democracy outside the capital-worker relation – democracy between capitals – as paramount. They ignore class struggle within a class society and treat exploitation and oppression as shortcomings of a democratic society.

The standard we use to judge a person, party, or government in a class society, however, cannot be abstract and above classes. Thus, our primary concern should not be based on whether there is

democracy, but which class a person, party, or government serves. The key question we should ask is whether people stand 1) on the side of the working class, defending the system of common ownership of the means of production, or 2) on the side of the capitalist class, defending the system of private ownership of the means of production. Only after we have determined which side people are on can we talk about whether the structure they are part of is democratic or not.

Differences in point of view can lead to conclusions that are polar opposites. One example is people's judgments of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. Some people from the South thought Lincoln was a tyrant, while most of the people from the North considered him to be a hero who kept the union together.

This situation reminds me of appraisals people have of Stalin. My impression of Stalin is that he was a nondemocratic person. He did not trust the masses. He liked to take care of things by himself and be the one in charge. Not only did he not educate the Soviet people on ways to fight against revisionism, he also brought many difficulties to the Chinese people's movement for liberation. However, I do not think the people who condemn Stalin as a tyrant ever think about which class Stalin really served.

Leaders of any nation are not just individuals – for them to be in power they must represent the interests of a particular class. Many right-wingers and ordinary folk who do not have a clear understanding of this perspective might ask, “Why it is that people in the West can denounce their president, but in China a person cannot denounce Mao?” I thought about this too. But after thinking it over, I realized the problem with this kind of question is that it looks at the world from a static point of view. It compares how the people treat a leader from a newly established socialist country with that of a president from an old entrenched imperialist country.

On the one hand, when a capitalist power is under threat, it will not tolerate dissidents. In the United States, there is a long history of suppression of dissenters. For example, after the U.S. Revolutionary War, many pro-British loyalists escaped to Canada. During the U.S. Civil War, on both sides there were well-documented persecutions of people with opposing political views. The persecution of communists in the early 1950s under McCarthyism is still fresh in our minds – not to mention those in the United States who opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq and are still being watched today.

On the other hand, in normal times cursing a president does not threaten the system of private ownership of the means of production. Nor does it necessarily mean that one is against the system. Rather, it expresses opposition to a president's policies, which might have harmed one's own interests. After all, in Western society, the president is really just a servant of the capitalist class and not the leader of the

class. When a president is being condemned, the system is not. By contrast, you can imagine what would happen if you cursed your boss in a factory or in a private business!

In China when someone cursed Mao, that person was not cursing him as a person. That person was cursing the system which Mao represented – and him as the leader of that system. Try cursing Lincoln during the U.S. Civil War and imagine what you would get. People would get angry because Lincoln came to represent not only the interests of northern capitalists, but also the aspirations of working class people, both enslaved and free.

One day, when working class politicians become mainly servants of the class rather than its leaders – in other words, when rule by the working class becomes truly consolidated – people will be able to curse their leaders all they want.

To summarize what we have so far:

1. Democracy is a means, not an end in its self.
2. Democracy inspires liberation for the working class while ensuring self-defense for the capitalist class.
3. Democratic outcomes are dictated by public sentiment.
4. Democracy works only when the minority is willing to go along with the majority.
5. Democracy is divided between democracy-of-the-dollar and democracy-by-the-people.
6. “Democracy above classes” is a theory of democracy for the capitalist class.
7. Democracy is a secondary criterion to one’s class stand.

Part 2: Some Remarks Concerning Public Sentiment

Now that we have some clarity on the role of democracy and its realm of operation, I would like to make a few additional remarks about public sentiment.

1. Remarks on Ideology

Since public sentiment dictates the outcome of democracy, how does the capitalist class manage to determine public sentiment? One of the main ways, I believe, is through the deeply rooted influence of the ideology of private property ownership, as well as the fact that a large proportion of the population are petty-capitalists (petty-bourgeoisie). One cannot easily overcome the entrenched influence of the

ideology of private property ownership – cultivated by ruling classes over thousands of years – with the establishment of socialist societies in a few countries. Nor can one easily change the proportion of petty-capitalists in the population.

The process of changing one's ideology is different from the process of learning natural sciences like math, chemistry or physics. For natural sciences, one can read some books, go to some lectures, get some practice, and become knowledgeable. In contrast, one's ideology cannot be easily changed through learning in a classroom. It comes mainly through the practice of class struggle, from one's positive and negative experiences.

We can accept the truth of natural science with objectivity. But that is not true for social science. Our self-interest influences our acceptance of the truth. For example, we can test easily through practice whether one plus one is two. But there is no universal objective standard to test whether private or common ownership of the means of production is better. It depends on who you are – and on your class stand and world outlook.

From this analysis it becomes clear that people in China who claim practice as the sole criterion of truth, yet who never link their practice to the ongoing class struggle – in reality, these people have ulterior motives.

2. Remarks on Human Nature

If human nature is fundamentally selfish, if the majority of the working class aspires to the type of freedom characterized by the petty-capitalist ideology of “go it alone” rather than thinking about the good of the class as a whole, then how can there be any hope for socialism? Is it true that only the capitalist ideology of serving oneself is compatible with human nature? Is it true, as defenders of the system of private ownership of the means of production claim, that the communist ideology of thinking from a global perspective above self-interest violates human nature?

Faced with these accusations, for a long time I couldn't find a definitive refutation. Later, I discovered that capitalists are not opposed to self-sacrifice. For example, when U.S. soldiers go to war in Iraq, they often have a very high patriotic spirit. And they are supported overwhelmingly by U.S. public opinion, even by those who oppose the war. But that patriotism is based on sacrificing one's self-interests, even including giving up one's own life. This idea is opposite to the capitalist ideology of serving only oneself. Isn't this a contradiction?

It became obvious that the only time the capitalist class advocates self-sacrifice is when their system of private ownership of the means of production is in danger. When capitalists need people to sacrifice their self-interests to protect the interests of the capitalist class, they no longer promote selfishness, no longer claim everybody should look after only him or herself. Just the opposite: they glorify all those who sacrifice their own interests to defend capitalism.

What the capitalist class is opposed to is heroism in defense of the system of common ownership of the means of production. It is opposed to people putting the interest of the oppressed classes as a whole before their self-interest. Isn't it clear that this kind of human nature has a clear class orientation?

Furthermore, under capitalism, only the greed of capitalists in the market place is taken for granted. All other politicians or members of the state machinery are there to serve the capital class. They are paid to do their jobs. If they abuse their positions of power to serve themselves, they are seen as corrupt. The capitalist class demands that all members of the state machinery – members of the military, police, judiciary, and politicians – are not allowed to put their self-interest above the interests of the capitalist class, whom they serve.

Towards this end, one method the capitalist class uses is to buy the loyalty of their servants with high salaries. Another is to promote professionalism and use public opinion to restrain their servants' self-interest. In other words, capitalists are opposed to the greed of their hired officials but not their own greed.

Based on the above analysis, someday it will be possible, under the system of common ownership of the means of production, to have the majority of people look out for their overall class interest first. The reason I believe this outcome to be possible is not only because socialism will simply be a utopian pipe dream otherwise. We have seen that capitalists, for their own self-interest, are able to establish patriotism and cultivate professional ethics among the people to serve the interests of the capitalist class. Similarly, the working class, advancing the interests of the majority of people, will be able to popularize communist ideology among the general population, promoting overall class interests over individual self-interest.

Actually, there was a great deal of success in this regard during Mao's period in China. The key is not whether the ideology of "looking out for the overall class interest first" can be established among ordinary people, but whether it can be established among the people in leadership. As the proverb says, "a crooked stick will have a crooked shadow." If the majority of party cadres, especially those in leading positions, uphold the ideology of "looking out for the overall class interest first," then their examples

can have immeasurably powerful influence. Therefore, the key to a successful consolidation of the socialist revolution is popular supervision of cadres in leadership position, on the one hand, and transformation of people's ideology, on the other.

3. Remarks on Selfishness

Even though socialism is in the long-term interest of all working people, nevertheless under the influence of the ideology of private property ownership, ordinary people quite often do things that go against socialist principles, thereby harming their long-term interests. For their short term or immediate self-interest, people will often sacrifice their long-term interests.

Can we say that communists have no self-interest then? I think not. I think the issue is not whether we have self-interests, but how our self-interests are satisfied. Are they satisfied at the expense of, or before, the overall class interest? Or are they being satisfied as a component of, or conditional on the overall class interest. When the overall interest is being served, then our own interests will be served as well. In other words, when the water rises for everyone, my boat rises too.

Let me illustrate this point with more examples. Suppose we are in a queue to buy something and someone butts in to the front of the line. If I didn't have any self-interest, why would I care if someone butts in? Why do we care about maintaining the order of a queue? Even if we are not in the line, why do many of us might still feel a sense of outrage to see someone butt in to the front of the line? I think the reason is that we believe everyone's interests can be satisfied by maintaining the order of a queue. All those who butt in to the front of the line necessarily sacrifice the interests of the majority of the people on the line. That's the basis of our sense of righteousness in denouncing those who butt in.

As anyone who ever tried to get on a bus in Beijing knows, it is very difficult to maintain a queue. The fewer buses there are, the more difficult it is. So at the beginning there must be strict enforcement of a queue by some authority. Otherwise, there will be chaos. As soon as people can consciously maintain and protect the queuing order, then the enforcement is no longer necessary. This change in attitude can be accelerated with a corresponding change in material conditions. As more busses become available, we are likely to see more people willing to queue up voluntarily.

But people's old habits are very hard to change. Once, when a young friend of mine was going back to China, I sent him off at JFK airport. I was embarrassed by his behavior before getting on the plane. To my bemusement, I saw my friend butting into the front of the line in order to be the first on the plane – even though we all know that everyone has a designated seat. It seems as though he was so used to

butting into the front of a line in Beijing, that without being the first on the plane he would not be content.

This example reflects the dialectical relationship between people's material conditions and their ideology. The ideology of private property ownership arose as a result of scarcity in the means to fulfill the minimum of human needs. But the ideology of private property ownership will not disappear spontaneously as material wealth accumulates.

4. Remarks on Class Rule

Like the system of queuing for busses, the system of common ownership of the means of production is also an orderly system. Under socialism, the law-and-order of the system of common ownership of the means of production, manifested in the realm of the economy, is "to each according to his/her work" and looking out for the overall class interest first. Thus all prior practices – such as, to each according to his/her capital, status, position, hierarchy, or privilege, as well as any practice that is based on local or self-interest first – all such practices are in opposition to this socialist law-and-order. It is in the self-interest of each member of the working class to maintain this law-and-order. When people do not voluntarily look out for the overall class interest first, then a forceful method to maintain this socialist law-and-order becomes necessary. This forceful means is the rule of the working class (dictatorship of the proletariat).

The system of private ownership of the means of production has a different kind of law-and-order. Under capitalism, it is a money- or capital-based law-and-order. Those with money don't have to queue up for public buses, don't have to queue up for doctors, and don't have to worry about their education. What rule by the capitalist class (dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) maintains is this kind of law-and-order. If people do not have the money, they cannot afford doctors, cannot afford private schools, and have to queue up for public buses,.

Under capitalist logic, people's lack of money is due to their lack of ability. They can only blame themselves for their lot in life. If people have the ability to organize others to fight against the system, this same logic asks, "Why not use those skills to serve your own personal interests?" This reasoning is why those who do not like socialism are mostly self-centered people who claim to be among the "talented elite" – rather than ordinary working class people.

5. Remarks on Petty-Capitalist Ideology.

What is the petty-capitalist ideology of “go-it-alone” we’ve touched upon earlier? How is it different from straightforward capitalist ideology? Recently I had a new revelation: in a capitalist society, except for the discipline of the marketplace and the law, only small businesspeople – such as, family farmers, small peddlers, petty-businesses, and free-lancers – are not constrained by anybody. They are their own bosses. They can go it alone. They can do whatever they want, so long as they are willing to face the consequences of the marketplace, and so long as what they do is not against the law. These petty-capitalist are the freest of them all.

We do not have to mention that workers cannot go it alone. Even top bosses in big corporations cannot do whatever they want. They cannot go it alone, either. They are constrained by their corporate investors, whom they have to negotiate and bargain with. Executives also have to cooperate with other people in their company to do business. That is why petty-capitalists are the freest – in the negative sense of without constraints. Other than being restricted by law and the invisible hand of the marketplace, petty-capitalists can do whatever they want.

Petty-capitalist ideology shares the capitalist ideology of self-centeredness. Both are a reflection of private property ownership ideology. What distinguishes petty-capitalist ideology from that of the capitalist class is the idea of going it alone – being free of other people’s constraints. This is the distinctive characteristic of petty-capitalist ideology.

Under the influence of this kind of petty-capitalist ideology, the democracy of the working class does not necessarily consolidate rule by the working class. For instance, the problem of factionalism that emerged among the masses while they were exercising broad democracy during the Cultural Revolution is directly tied to the prevalence of petty-capitalist ideology among the people.

That ideology is the main reason why we often see that among working people the minority is not willing to go along with the majority; or local interests, with the overall interest. Many people, under the influence of petty-capitalist ideology, love to be a big fish in a small pond, love to be the boss, love to do things their own way, love to have their say, and hate organizational constraints.

Under the influence of petty-capitalist ideology, the public sentiments manifested among the masses often represent their own short-term self-interest or their local interests. These interests are often in contradiction with their long-term interest.

Thus, we see, the struggle in the realm of ideology between the working class and capitalist class is a struggle over winning public sentiment to their side. This struggle will be long and difficult.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis of democracy and public sentiment, it is not difficult to see that capitalist democracy is a democracy based on the private ownership of the means of production. As long as capitalists can control public sentiment, democracy is used to consolidate the rule of the capitalist class. It is used to protect and defend the system of private ownership of the means of production.

Similarly, if the working class wants to defend its own political power, it must learn from the capitalist class. It not only needs to use force to suppress those who are against the common ownership of the means of production. It also needs to carry out struggle in the realm of ideology. The working class must engage in fierce struggle against the influence of petty-capitalist ideology on public sentiment. Only then can the working class consolidate its own political power through democratic means.

With this understanding, we are able to see why Mao launched the Cultural Revolution – and appreciate why the movement claimed to be a revolution that deeply touched people’s souls.

It is true that the Cultural Revolution – an unprecedented example of heroic working class democracy – was not successful. And capitalist roaders were able to sway public sentiments and usurp the political power of the working class. Nonetheless, the working class will not remain dormant forever.

The reality of class struggle is educating people every step of the way. Class struggle forces people to summarize their past experience and overcome the influence of petty-capitalist ideology in their ranks. Only then can the working class carry out the historic task of liberating the whole of humankind.

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