

To Learn Democracy in Competitive Democratic Election and Learn to Safeguard Democratic Rights of the Party Members --- Review and Reflection on the First County-level Competitive Direct Election Experiment among Party Representatives of the Communist Party of China (CPC)

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Abstract

How a ruling party in a developing country learns democracy in practice and learns to safeguard the democratic rights of the Party members and constructs a corresponding democratic safeguard mechanism in modern democratic social construction is an important subject that is faced up by the ruling party of each developing country. Located in the western part of China, Yucheng District Ya'an City in Sichuan Province, for the first time, conducted a competitive direct election experiment among Party representatives of the CPC in 2002, and pioneered competitive democratic election, which offered new thought and experiences for the CPC to learn democracy in competitive democratic election and construct democratic rights safeguard mechanism of the Party members.

Keywords: Learn democracy, Competitive direct election, Mechanism of democratic rights safeguarding of Party members

1. Study of classical Marxism writers on the inner-Party democratic election thought

The original meaning of "democracy" means that a decision is made according to the will of a majority of people. Just as Lenin said, the Communist Party was constituted by a large number of party members who volunteered to take part and was "organized in a democratic way". Thus, party members are the subject in the Party. The core to develop inner-Party democracy is to respect and safeguard the democratic rights of party members and institutionalize their rights. In the process of establishing the political party of the working class, Marx and Engels applied the democratic social management pattern into inner-Party activities and deeply expounded the importance of inner-Party democratic construction.

According to Marx and Engels, inner-Party democracy was based on inner-Party election system. For instance, "Communist League statute" abandoned the features of schools, classes and conspiracy, etc., of its predecessor "Germany League of the Just" and stipulated that, all party members were all equal and were obliged to help each other at all occasions; the leading organs of the party at all levels, from the grass-root to the central organs, had to elect from bottom to top and could be removed at any time; the congress was the supreme organ of power of the whole party and determined all significant issues of the party; the central committee was the executive organ of the supreme power of the party and was obliged to report its work to the congress etc.

In his book "On the History of the Communist League" that was written in 1885, Engels pointed out that inner-party election was an important reflection of inner-party democracy and that the organization of the party "was totally democratic and all of its committees were constituted by election which could be removed at any time. It was just this point that had jammed the path of any conspiracy maniac who requested for dictatorship."

Lenin thought that “the party was organized in a democratic way”, since all the principals, all the leading personnel and all the organs of the party were constituted by election who had to report their work to the party members and might be replaced at any time”.

Thus, it can be seen that, the above statements by the classical Marxism writers clearly indicate that, “the authority of the Party comes from the vast majority of the party members and the leading organs at all levels of the party have to be absolutely elected in a democratic way from bottom to top. It is also indicated that, the functions of these leading organs are generated by the entrusting mode of election by the vast majority of party members. Without democratic election, there is no so-called leading functions, let alone the Community Party in its real sense.” Statement of these Marxism leaders about inner-Party democracy and inner-Party election thought lays an ideological foundation for the CPC to learn democracy in a democratic election in a new period and construct a democratic safeguard mechanism.

2. Inner-Party democratic election of CPC since 1978 and discussion on the democratic rights safeguard mechanism thought of party members

Although the inner-Party democratic election thought and principles of CPC have been reflected in the Party Constitution and the conference documents of the 8th National People’s Congress, etc., for a long time, the CPC only had the name of inner-Party democratic election principles, and actually had the leading system and organizational system of top-to-bottom cadre and Party representative appointment system as a result of the traditional political and cultural influences for thousands of years and the inertia effect of the class struggle thinking of the revolutionary party.

Ever since the reform and opening up in China, the CPC has emancipated the thoughts of its people and has conducted orderly theoretical and practical innovation in inner-Party democratic election and democratic rights of party members, especially the safeguard mechanism. Then, the ideological understanding has had a new breakthrough. “Multiple Norms about Inner-Party Political Life” was passed in the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party and on the basis summarizing experiences in dealing with inner-Party relations since the Central Committee of the CPC was established, and especially for more than 30 years of its being in power, made several regulations about how to realize democracy of inner-Party political life and, for the first time, clearly proposed the method of multi-candidate election in inner-Party election. That is, “the multi-candidate election method should be used in an election that the number of candidates is larger than the number of those to be elected, or firstly candidates are elected for preliminary election by the means of multi-candidate method and then a formal election is made.”

The Central Committee of the CPC stipulated in “Provisional Regulations for Election of Grassroots Organizations of CPC” in 1990, “Election ought to respect and guarantee the democratic rights of the Party members, fully carry forward democracy and embody will of electors.”

In 2002 when China entered a new century, Chinese President Jiang Zemin proposed out, “Inner-Party democracy is the life of the Party and has important demonstrative and driving effect on people’s democracy. We should establish and perfect inner-Party democratic system that fully reflects the will of Party members and the Party organizations on the basis of safeguarding democratic rights of Party members, with the emphasis of improving the Party Representative Congress System and the Party Committee System, starting out from reform system and mechanism”. He also put forward the task of “reforming and perfecting inner-Party election system” from the perspective of developing inner-Party democracy, strengthening the Party’s vigor and unifying the Party.

Then, the Central Committee of the CPC promulgated in 2004 the important inner-Party regulation “The Rights-safeguarding Regulation for CPC Members” that was tried for implementation in the 1990s. The superior leaders of CPC came to a common sense that, “Election is one of the major means to realize inner-Party democracy and only if democratic election is implemented within the Party, is it likely to construct a prestigious and potent leading group among the Party members and the public.”

In 2005, the present Chinese President Hu Jintao further pointed out that “Party members are the cells of the body of the Party and the behavioral agent of the Party”. The 17th CPC National Congress developed this “basic” and “subject” thought and for the first time, the political report in the congress of Party representatives clearly proposed, “respecting the subject status of Party members, safeguarding the democratic rights of Party members, propelling publicity of Party’s affairs and building inner-Party democratic discussion environment”, in which the fundamental requirement of developing inner-Party democracy was made clear.

At the time of propelling economic system reform, the Central Committee of CPC also propels inner-Party

democratic construction and proposes the orderly Chinese political and democratic path that pushes forward people's democracy by means of inner-democracy. On one hand, policies made by the leading personnel of the Central Committee of CPC are promulgated from top to bottom. And on the other hand, the grass-root organizations of local Party conduct democratic practice from bottom to top.

Inner-democratic election is the foundation to realize inner-Party democracy. However, how to elect satisfying candidates of the Party members by means of election, and especially competitive election, regularize, institutionalize and normalize the measures of election has become a central aspect in inner-Party democratic construction ever since the reform and opening up in China.

In 2002, the Party organization of Yucheng District Sichuan Province which is located in the western part of China, for the first time, carried out the county-level direct election experiment among the Party representatives, which offered new thought and knowledge for competitive and democratic election and safeguarding of democratic rights of Party members in a new situation.

3. To learn democracy in competitive direct election of Party representatives and learn to establish democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of Party members

“Openness”, “justice” and “standardization” are the three principles for construction of the competitive direct election and removal system among the grass-root Party organizations in Ya'an City.

With the above as the point of strength, the grass-root Party organizations in Ya'an City took the lead in trying the competitive democratic election, pursued unification of form and content, actively carried out the Party representatives' democratic election project of “letting the Party members be the masters”, aroused the consciousness of Party members in the rights, mobilized the Party members to actively take part in supervision and management, etc., and initially pioneered Chinese Party representatives' direct election mechanism and corresponding three principles, which offered new thought and experiences for inner-Party democratic construction of the Central Committee of CPC.

3.1 The “six procedures” mechanism of openness, equality and transparency in the procedure of getting registered

Firstly, the eight procedures and specific operational flow for direct election among Party representatives should be publicized in face of all the Party members. The vast majority of Party members are entitled to know the inside story and their enthusiasm and initiative in participation of the election should be stimulated.

Secondly, the mechanism of “no threshold” should be initiated. The unique mode in the past in which the organizations recommended was broken through and at present each party member is entitled to take part in direct election of party representatives. Whether the candidates are officials or common people that have the will to participate in the direct election of party representatives have to be active to go to the branch to which they are attached to sign up for participation and break through constraint of identity. All candidates have to face up with the same democratic electoral procedure, namely, “sign up --- recommending the initial person elected for the representative candidates --- initial approval --- recommending preparatory person elected for representative candidate --- qualification approval --- public notice --- electing formal representative --- public notice”. This zero starting point mechanism without setting of threshold has effectively stimulated party members' enthusiasm in democratic participation in politics and management and has broken through the out-dated thought of “electing officials from officials and official ontology”, etc.

Thirdly, design of equal ballot ticket. The former old framework has been changed that ranked according to the positions of cadres. At present, names of all candidates (volunteering to sign up or organize, recommended by the public, cadres or the common public) are printed on the same ballot according to the strokes of their family names to ensure openness and justice of the election procedure.

Fourthly, establishment of regional ballot mechanism. It is necessary to break through former rigid quota restriction and the quota of representatives is confirmed according to the classification of election district and the quantity of party members.

Fifthly, establishment of limited ballot mechanism. In order to reflect diversification of candidates for party representatives, expand their representativeness, put an end to “election of officials from officials” and protect the democratic rights of the vast majority of party members in election, election of party representatives in Yingjing County in 2006 stipulated that, candidates above the section-level cadres should not be higher than 58% of the total candidates, candidates in the first line of production should not be lower than 42% and women also had a certain proportion of election.

Sixthly, establishment of examination and approval mechanism. In the new mechanism confirmed by direct election of party representatives, according to the election procedure, election committee only examines and approves the preparatory candidates by considering the representativeness of the candidates and no longer examines and approves the candidates to be elected.

According to statistics of relevant data about Yucheng District and Yingjing County, the quota of party representatives for one district and one county in 2002 were 325, and there were actually as many as 2000 people who applied to sign up. In 2006, there were more than 3000 party members among 4095 in Yingjing County who took an initiative in applying to sign up for the direct election and the number accounted for approximately 70% of the total party members.

3.2 Survival of the fittest competitive mechanism in the procedure of competitive election

The scholar Yu Keping thought that, democracy is just like a peg-top and only if it revolves, it has its significance. However, the breakthrough to “let the democratic peg-top really revolve is to execute competitive election”. The “survival of the fittest” in election of grassroots party representatives in Ya’an City is mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

Firstly, competitive election speech mechanism. A candidate has to have his own competitive election project by means of on-the-spot investigation and survey. In the day of election, he is supposed to face directly with all party members, go to the stage to give a speech for competitive election, explain his competitive election outline, accept questioning of other party members and makes commitment to solution of a problem, etc. The vast majority of party members should independently decide to elect whom as the party representatives through the competitive election mechanism, but should not be subordinate to the organizations or others, which reflects the subjectivity of their rights.

Secondly, secret ballot mechanism. A secret ballot place should be set up. On one hand, the multi-candidate direct election and secret ballot mode can ensure “whether one will be elected is directly decided by the party members themselves”, which fully reflects sufficient safeguarding of democratic rights of party members and the practical implementation and strengthens the political responsibility sense of those to be elected and their sense of being the “master”. On the other hand, the candidate can be faced up with great competitive pressure and strengthen their political mission sense of performing the obligations of party representatives.

According to relevant data statistics, in the first county level direct election among party representatives in Ya’an City, five section level cadres failed to be elected, one district committee member failed to be elected and one township committee secretary failed to be elected.

3.3 Report evaluation and on-field removal mechanism in the annual report procedure

Party representatives are automatically elected by the vast majority of Party members, while whether the Party representatives are qualified during their resumption and whether they should be removed depends on the vast majority of Party members who have the final say. Ya’an City initiatives an open annual reporting on-spot removal mechanism at a regular interval for party representatives. The essence of this mechanism is to abolish the lifelong tenure of party representatives so as to safeguard the supervision rights, management rights and decision making rights of the vast majority of Party members.

In the first place, the party representatives ought to report their work which should be assessed. In the annual reporting assessment mechanism, all party representatives who have been elected have to make a public report about their performance situation, implementation and effects of the significant events they have promised in their day of election and receive questioning and assessment on their performance by all the party members in face of all in the election district.

In the second place, on-spot assessment and secret ballot writing mechanism. The secret ballot writing mechanism should be established. The vast majority of party members in the election district are required to give a score and write their ballots independently in a secret ballot writing room so as to practically ensure that the democratic rights of party members are effectively and independently executed.

In the third place, on-spot immediate removal conversation principle. After the party representatives report their work on the spot and are assessed, the assessment scores are publicized immediately which include three levels, namely, excellent, qualified and unqualified. With the critical point of 30% as the unqualified annual assessment, if the party representatives attain more than 30% in being unqualified, the procedure of removing party representatives will be automatically started. For those party representatives who are close to the 30% of critical point, the organizations will start the special conversation within the Party organizations to supervise their performance of obligations and to see how they behave in the future.

The party members said, we had no idea whether we were qualified for party representatives. However, at present, everything is different. The party representatives report their work before us and of course we have a clear idea about what they have done and whether they have done it well or not.

4. To learn democracy in competitive democratic election and several thoughts in learning to construct democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of Party members

The grassroots Party organizations of Ya'an City, for the first time, conducted county level direct election among Party representatives, broke through the old thought from the thinking concept to operational procedure, returned the rights to the whole Party members and the flower of democracy were in full bloom. The principle of openness, justice and competition and relevant mechanism stimulate the Party members to take an initiative in executing self-consciousness and enthusiasm of democratic rights and the strong sense of responsibility among democratic representatives. Representatives elected by people represent the will of the vast majority of people and possess sufficient representativeness and authority, which, without doubt, unprecedentedly strengthens the centripetal force of the Party members in the career of the Central Committee of CPC and the innovative vigor of the Party organizations of CPC. Initial establishment of direct election and mechanism principles of Party members in Yucheng District in Ya'an City, without doubt, has brought new thought and new knowledge to democratic construction with Chinese characteristics and post-developing countries and their democratic construction of the ruling parties.

4.1 Competitive election and relevant mechanism can, likewise, grow on the trunk of inner-Party democratic construction of CPC with Chinese characteristics, but it needs emancipation of thought and the open mind to be good at learning human civilization achievements

Gradual construction of competitive and direct election and relevant mechanism of local grassroots organizations of CPC in 2002 indicates that democratic politics is the common value of human beings, but has clear-cut regional and epochal characteristics when democratic system is at different areas and at different time.

How to deal with multi-candidate election, how to have knowledge in competitive election and how to construct democratic rights safeguarding mechanism by means of election needs to break through the thinking cage of the surname of socialism and the surname of capitalism in election. We need to have the scientific idea of Deng Xiaoping that "socialism may exist in the market economy and capitalism may exist in the planned economy" and the clear judgment on the current situation, let alone the large emancipation of thought and the open mind to learn human civilization achievements.

The essence of a lot of problems in a new situation is how to practically guarantee people's democratic rights and ensure the democratic rights of Party members. In order to realize that, it is necessary to continuously emancipate the thought and have the courage to break through the set thought and experimental thought that do not fit in with the development of the times. According to the democratic principle of Marxism, competitive election and relevant mechanism are the means. It is the necessity of social development for Marxism ruling party to propel realization of the political system in which people are the real master in the human history by democratic means and reality that fits with the times.

Only the ruling party that takes responsibility for its people can have the courage of and be good at referring to other countries in terms of both knowledge and action and the historical and realistic experiences of other ruling parties in competitive election, so as to accumulate new experiences in safeguarding the democratic rights of the Party members, create an inner-party democratic path that fits in with the national situation of China and the actual situation of the Party, push forward democratic construction and development with Chinese characteristics with a cohesive force of the Party.

4.2 Confirmation of the subjective position of Party members is the core to innovate democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of Party members and to strengthen the cohesive strength of the ruling party

The essence of securing innovation of the effective mechanism of democratic rights of Party members is to base on Party members, practically guarantee the subject position of the vast majority of Party members, construct a long-term effective democratic rights safeguarding mechanism, let the vast majority of Party members make suggestions with the identity of being a master and manage the decision making. Only in this way, can the ruling party be always filled with vitality, vigor and cohesive strength.

The development process of gradually constructing democratic safeguarding mechanism of Party members by means of competitive democratic election is to let the party members reflect freely and independently and participate in inner-Party affairs, and is to create conditions to construct relevant mechanism to enable the vast majority of party members to tell the truth, put an end to copy mechanically the top leaders and the books, and to

return rights to the vast majority of common Party members.

Only if we let the vast majority of Party members really place themselves at a position of being the master from thinking to action, can we break through such feudal privilege thinking and thought residual of “selecting officials from officials and official ontology”, let the vast majority of Party members execute the democratic rights and perform their obligations by means of the mechanism and procedure they recognize and really make the Party members integrated into one whole with the career of the ruling party and come into common sense.

4.3 Construction of democratic rights safeguarding mechanism in election depends on organic integration of multiple factors under leadership of the CPC

It is proved by the history that, only with political or organizational guarantee under a potent ruling party or political power, it is possible for China that has a large population to offer necessary social environment for reform, especially political reform. The first county level competitive direct election among Party representatives in 2002 was proposed, continuously insisted and improved by the Party committee of Yucheng District with support of Party committee at a higher level, which proved their courage and insight of “crossing the river by feeling the stones”. This experiment indicates again that, the ruling party is the key to take the path of democratic rights safeguarding mechanism by means of election in such a large country like China.

Renovation requires a relaxed political environment and democratic atmosphere in which one can tell the truth and say true words and requires the top leaders of the CPC to have the state of self-revolution of “being willing to part with or use and daring to catch them” and the courage of positively emancipating the thought. In a certain sense, the degree of thought emancipation of the leaders of the ruling party determines whether the democratic rights safeguarding of Party members is implemented or not. It is necessary to construct democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of Party members through election and it is more expected to form mutual restraint and supervision mechanism within the leading group of CPC, so as to avoid that the top leaders have the final saying and avoid any attacking or retaliating on the common Party members. It is necessary to construct democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of Party members through election and it is more necessary to require the vast majority of Party members that have a subject position to continue to improve their democratic quality, thinking state, political intelligence, initiative in participating in inner-Party democratic construction, and to put an end to canvass and bribery, etc.

4.4 It is a self-revolution launched by the CPC to construct democratic rights safeguarding mechanism in the competitive election

Pu Zhong, Secretary of Commission of Yucheng District in Ya'an City, made such an evaluation, “Trial on the permanent tenure is no easier than a revolution, in which one might remove his own authority.”

Democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of party members is a footstone of inner-Party democratic construction in a new period. The meaning of constructing democratic rights safeguarding mechanism and its innovation in the process of election lie in that the new mechanism will abandon the feudal privilege thought of leaders having the final say, a small group having the final say and those within the party having the final say. On the pre-condition of insisting on and improving Chinese democratic management of CPC and scientific decision making and collective leadership system, it is necessary to direct, protect and guide each party members to participate in and manage inner-party affairs within the stipulated scope of the Party Constitution, supervise the initiative and enthusiasm of the Party, fully execute democratic rights of the Party members and pool the wisdom of the masses. Without doubt, construction of democratic rights safeguarding mechanism of party members is a brand-new self-renovation. Such democratic practices as county level direct election in local grassroots are being continuously propelled. Then, how should the direct election and mechanism system of the provincial first level be constructed? How should the direct election mechanism and system of the first level of the Central Committee of the CPC be constructed? Governing a big country is just as cooking a small fish. It can be said that, there is still a long way to go for the democratic election system of the CPC and it still needs to be continuously explored.

4.5 It is a path of democratic construction with Chinese characteristics to promote social democratic development with inner-Party democratic development

Democracy is a kind of system, a basic value and is more a practical action. Democratic politics requires unification of form and content. Just as Yu Keping says, “Likewise, democracy in China can't go without election by people, supervision of authority and participation of citizens, but the election system, supervision system and participation system have obvious Chinese characteristics.” Similarly, inner-Party democratic construction will be of Chinese characteristics, namely, to refer to experiences of all other countries in the world

in the experiences of construction of the ruling party, to set foot in the realistic China at the initial stage of socialism, to keep established in the current economic and social development level of China, the Chinese history and the realistic national situation of Party situation, and to continue to reform and innovate.

As a ruling party that has a large population of 1.3 billion and great differences in different areas, it is doomed by the history that inner-Party democratic construction of the Central Committee of CPC is an important part of democratic construction with Chinese characteristics and will demonstrate and push forward social democratic construction. It is a process that integrates the organic and coordinated development of such relations as decentralization and concentration of innovative power, concentration and democracy, local and whole and personal rights and organizational rights and interests, generally presenting a progressive path and exhibiting a trend of an explorative experiment of grass-root organizations from bottom to top, stabilization by legislative means from top to bottom and progressive development from local to whole.

Success of the reform and opening up in China has come from revolution in the economic field and also from reformation in the political system. Although inner-Party democratic experiment that is represented by new mechanism and new principles in the direct election process of grass-root Party representatives in Ya'an City still needs to be institutionalized and normalized in continuous experiment, innovation of its ideas and practices, without doubt, will have significant innovative and demonstrative meaning to the inner-party democratic construction and Chinese democratic construction and development in the past ten years.

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