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新民主主义

New Democracy

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New Democracy’ (*xin minzhuzhuyi*) was a theory, an overarching revolutionary strategy, and a period of the Chinese Revolution that lasted from the 1930s until the first half of the 1950s. Mao Zedong explained it in his classic 1940 essay ‘On New Democracy.’ He argued most centrally that:

The Chinese revolution must go through two stages, first, the democratic revolution, and second, the socialist revolution, and by their very nature they are two different revolutionary processes. Here democracy does not belong to the old category—it is not the old democracy, but belongs to the new category—it is New Democracy.

Shaped by the material forces of the class struggle at the time, New Democracy involved specific economic, political, and cultural forms to be elaborated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It stood as a ‘necessary’ bridge between ‘the old European-American form of capitalist republic under bourgeois dictatorship, which is the old democratic form and already out of date’ and ‘the socialist republic of the Soviet type under the dictatorship of the proletariat which is already flourishing in the Soviet Union.’

Politically, ‘a system of really universal and equal suffrage, irrespective of sex, creed, property or education, must be introduced,’ though Mao was careful to add immediately that it would be part of the Party’s ‘system of democratic centralism.’ In economic terms, large industrial, financial, and commercial enterprises would come under state ownership, but under New Democracy ‘the republic will neither confiscate capitalist private property in general nor forbid the development of such capitalist production as does not “dominate the livelihood of the people,” for China’s economy is still very backward.’ Landlords’ holdings would be distributed to farmers as private property.

‘In general, socialist agriculture will not be established at this stage, though various types of cooperative enterprises developed on the basis of “land to the tiller” will contain elements of socialism.’ Culturally, Mao identified it with the breakthroughs of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and with ‘native legacies, especially popular culture’ and in contrast to the immediately preceding ‘imperialist’-inflected ideas of the bourgeoisie. Under New Democracy, the Party’s ideology and propaganda would place communist ideas decidedly on the back burner, ‘prepar[ing] the ground’ by emphasising instead attacks on feudalism and imperialism.¹

Hidden Controversies

Between 1949 and 1953, a controversy among the top leadership began to bubble below the surface about whether to shift to what Mao had always said was going to be the subsequent phase of socialist revolution. According to Arlen Meliksetov, a Moscow State University scholar who has analysed Soviet archives, Mao began to abandon New Democracy, while Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, Bo Yibo, Deng Xiaoping, and others continued to support it. At a June 1953 meeting of the Party’s Politburo,

Mao came down heavily on those [Party] members who sought ‘to establish firmly the new democratic social order ...’ ‘There are some,’ Mao Zedong said, referring to Liu Shaoqi and his supporters, ‘who, after the victory of the democratic revolution, are still marking time. They do not realise that the nature of the revolution has changed, and instead of socialist reforms they continue to dabble at their precious “new democracy.”’²

Between 1953 and 1956, as the socialist transition got underway, Mao continued to relegate New Democracy to the past. In 1957, the Communist Youth League, which in 1949 had been renamed ‘New Democracy Youth League,’ reverted to its original name. With the onset of the Anti-rightist Campaign, also in 1957, and the following Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, New Democracy would not play a significant role in the Party’s policy for the next two decades.

Legacies

Yet it left some legacies. Saloth Sar—who changed his name to Pol Pot—was first attracted to Mao’s thought by the theory of New Democracy, though by the time the Khmer Rouge finally came to power, any trace of it had vanished to say the least (see Mertha’s essay in the present volume).³ New Democracy did leave a more lasting impact on China’s own nationality policy (see Bulag’s essay in the present volume). On the one hand, it kept Han chauvinism in check; on the other, it presupposed that the Party would lead the country’s minority nationalities (as it did all classes and groups), thus precluding any movement toward national self-determination.⁴

New Democracy began to stir from its coma with China’s turn to structural reform starting in 1978. Arif Dirlik has observed that:

there was much in common initially between reform policies after 1978 and policies of New Democracy that had brought the Communist Party to power [including] a mixed economy blending private national capital and state management and direction (bureaucratic capital) ... and a culture policy that sought to integrate a new Communist culture with native legacies, especially popular culture.

The Mao Zedong Thought the Party restored in 1978 returned it to its 'true' spirit, that of New Democracy, premised upon class alliance (united front) and development of the forces of production as the primary goals.⁵

The landmark 1981 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China,' which comprised the Party's decidedly mixed verdict on the Maoist period, did not finish its second sentence before it mentioned New Democracy, going on to argue that it was one of Mao's major achievements. But leading Party ideologues Feng Wenpin and Hu Qiaomu were quick to contend that China was certainly not returning to New Democracy, partly because it had been so closely associated with the Chairman, and partly to assert that structural reform was forward- rather than backward-looking.⁶

But structural reform was, of course, politically contentious. In 1999, no less a figure than Hu Sheng—a long-standing revolutionary, Chair of the Seventh and Eighth National Committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, member of the Twelfth Party Central Committee, and President of the Academy of Social Sciences—weighed in:

A reexamination of Mao Zedong's theory of New Democracy and his integrated theory of correctly handling the relationship between capitalism and socialism under Chinese historical conditions and with Marxist principles will be of great help to us in correctly understanding Deng Xiaoping Theory, the theories of reform and opening up, and the primary stage of socialism and relevant policies.⁷

He backed up his argument with Mao's own words: 'There will be a need, for a fairly long period after the victory of the revolution, to make use of the positive qualities of urban and rural capitalism as far as possible, in the interest of developing the national economy.'⁸

New Democracy and the Chongqing Model

The most politically intriguing effort to resuscitate New Democracy came in 2011, as the Hu/Wen government was winding down and China was in the run-up to the accession of the new leadership. Zhang Musheng is a prominent Party intellectual whose father, Li Yingji, was a secretary to Zhou Enlai and Dong Biwu during the Maoist era. The publication of his book *Transforming Our Cultural Perspective on History* attracted the attention of no less a figure than General Liu Yuan, the son of Liu Shaoqi, who

wrote a foreword to it and brought five senior military officers to the April 2011 book launch.⁹ Zhang was a supporter of Bo Xilai and his so-called ‘Chongqing Model,’ both eventually crushed by Xi Jinping.

What Liu Yuan and Zhang Musheng considered to be the Chongqing Model is similar to the Socialist New Democracy Movement of the early 1950s in three main ways: rural land reforms that aim to please peasants; an urban socialist welfare economy with a strong presence of state-owned enterprises that claim to protect the interests of workers; and a moral and authoritarian government that takes a strong stance against corruption.¹⁰

Zhang’s stunning position is worth quoting at length:

Only the CCP can save China; only New Democracy can save the CCP.

If China hopes to roll with the globalisation trend of ‘democracy,’ I’m afraid it will be like drawing a tiger and ending up with the likeness of a dog, not getting at all what we expected. Rather than bringing in a stone that might shatter the jade [i.e., result in chaos], why don’t we just have confidence and just use our native-born New Democracy, which CCP member Mao Zedong raised and Liu Shaoqi put into practice?

There will be constitutionalism, there will be different parties within the Party, and opening up and freedom of public opinion, including freedom and independence of thought, can all ultimately be resolved within a single party.

If we had trade unions and farmer’s associations, even under the leadership of the CCP, and their anti-corruption and balancing mechanisms went further in using the law to check the ruling Party itself, unlike today where everything is bound up together—could [the Party] not develop in this direction [toward greater democracy]? I believe it is entirely possible. We could surely proceed slowly, step by step. What Hong Kong and Singapore have accomplished, the CCP can surely accomplish.

If the CCP does not recover its leadership and control as principally a representative of workers and farmers, then there is no way out for you [the Party] whatsoever, and no legitimacy. So you cannot regard them (the workers and farmers) as [weak and] disadvantaged groups. Today, what kind of farmers are our farmers? On average they have 13.5 years of schooling, and for workers it goes without saying [that this is even higher]. Go back to the past, go back to the era of Mao, and they all belong to what you would call the intellectuals. So these masses aren’t such fools [as you might imagine]. We are talking about 800 million mobile phones sending out short messages, and 460 million notebook computers exchanging ideas.

There's no way of comparing this to your so-called staging demonstrations, airing views and writing big-character posters, or to the great networking—it is so much freer than it was at that time.¹¹

Zhang offers an extraordinary vision in which the Party maintains its monopoly but opens itself up to vigorous, public debate and greater press freedom. It locates itself squarely within the educational and communicative advances of the twenty-first century, mindful, unusually and most significantly, that these belong not just to middle-class urbanites but also to farmers and workers. It would, indeed, comprise a new kind of democracy never seen in history, but inspired by Mao's theory and practice of New Democracy. With the fall of Bo Xilai a year later, and the rise of the increasingly hard-line Xi Jinping, Zhang's ideas went nowhere. Yet with such powerful supporters as Liu Yuan, his trial balloon, and New Democracy, may yet float again. Chinese politicians play the long game, and such a development would not be the first profound political innovation by the CCP.

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