

Democratic Practice in Vietnam Some Fundamental Achievements and New Requirements

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Abstract: One of the basic goals, which the Communist Party of Vietnam always pursues in our revolution generally and Renovation particularly, is to perform democratic practice and promote the people's mastery over all aspects of social life. Based on general assessments of the major achievements in democratic practice in the economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres for 30 years of Doi moi, the author presents in this paper some suggestions and interpretations of principled requirements for the purpose of getting more extensive and effective practice of democracy, aiming at contributing a part towards actualization of democracy and enhancement of the driving role of democracy in social development of our country at present.

Key words: Democratic Practice; Vietnam; 30 years of Doi moi.

To summarize the achievements over 30 years of the process of national comprehensive renovation (Doi moi) from 1986 to 2016, the Political Report submitted by the Executive Board of the 11th Central Committee to the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party gives a general assessment that we have gained historically significant achievements for our socialist building and national protection [5, p.65], in which socialist democracy has been more and more promoted and developed. Those achievements have laid an important foundation for further renovation and development in the coming years; they have demonstrated the sound and creative guidelines of the Communist Party; and, they have shown that our road towards socialism is completely appropriate with the

practical situation in Vietnam and the tendency of development in history.

1. Some fundamental achievements in democratic practice

Regarding to democratic practice, a lot of positive results have been gained during the process of national comprehensive renovation under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, contributing an important part towards historically significant achievements for our national development. Making an assessment of democratic practice, the Political Report submitted by the Executive Board of the 11th Central Committee to the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party

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highlighted: “The Communist Party and the State of Vietnam have continued to promulgate a lot of guidelines, policies, and laws to bring socialist democracy into play and ensure the implementation of the people’s mastery. Human rights as well as basic rights and duties of citizens have been specified more concretely in the 2013 Constitution and the newly-revised and promulgated legal system. Human and citizen rights in the political, civil, economic, cultural, and social spheres have been recognized, respected, protected, and guaranteed according to the Constitution and laws; citizen rights have been attached closely to social duties and responsibilities (...) The people’s mastery has been strengthened better in various aspects of social life via direct democracy and representative democracy, especially in the political and economic spheres. Authorities from the Party committees and local governments have paid more attention to the people’s opinions, getting more contacts and dialogues, and highly appreciating all the opinions raised by the people” [5, pp.166-167].

Great achievements have been gained in democratic practice for all spheres of social life, as described below:

Democratic practice in the economic sphere:

Democracy was actually formed, after market economy was implemented in our country, as the nature of market economy was to socialize all material and knowledge resources in society in order to produce properties and create interest relationships, social relationships, and political relationships in sequence from the low to the high levels.

To make it favorable for people to practice their mastery over the national economy, it is firstly necessary to deal with the most fundamental issue, which is the ownership of the very people. The socialist-oriented market economy set up by the Communist Party and the State is composed of different types of ownership, including: public ownership (in which the State represents the owner); State ownership, collective ownership, and individual ownership, etc. Herein, the public ownership, the State ownership and the collective ownership play the fundamental role in the national economy. Based on those types of ownership, various organizations of production and trade are established under the management and regulation of the State. The State economy, however, plays the key role in driving development of the entire national economy, which helps to improve the national economic foundation and promote the rights and mastery of economic organizations.

In addition to affirmation of the key role played by the State economy, the Party and the State also highly appreciate the role of other economic constituents (sectors). They all are placed in an organic relationship as a whole; it is impossible to separate them from the State economy in any stages of development; and, they are the very entities of the socialist-oriented market economy. Development of all economic sectors and various types of production and trade also means development of economic actors for the sake of improving the mastery of economic actors over the entire economy.

Economic actors (constituents) are all equal to each other and before the law, regardless of type of ownership. The State has provided favorable conditions for all economic constituents and all social members so that they can gather talents and material resources as well as develop and apply their own creativeness and management ability in organizing productive and trading activities to produce more properties for individuals and society. This helps to develop individual economy, collective economy, and national economy, which are fundamental conditions for the people's socio-economic mastery. At the same time, the State has completed the Enterprise Law to carry out equality among all economic constituents. This is an effective method to encourage and enhance the economic mastery of economic constituents.

Democratic practice in the political sphere:

Firstly, democracy is shown more obviously in the Party activities. From the 6th to the 12th national congress, based on the guideline on renovation of thinking, organization, and personnel, the Party put forward the renovation of leadership manner towards democracy, emphasizing some necessary points, such as: it is essential to improve working style to keep a close eye on practical reality and get precise information properly; there must be supervisory mechanisms; local officials must get in-depth understanding of the local situation; management institutions must use effectively the power of centralized leadership and carry out management activities consistently; it is important to strengthen the collective leadership,

develop democratic activities, study local creative experience, and listen to opinions from people; for important issues particularly, it is necessary to have discussions for collective decision-making; leaders must know how to listen to opposite opinions carefully [2, pp.470-473].

In general, the democracy-oriented leadership of the Party in the period of Doi moi has resulted in a lot of significant achievements, for example: the Party has intensified the democratization of the leadership mode; it has attached more importance to institutionalization of resolutions, law-building and ordinance-making to be implemented by the whole people. This has contributed a part towards reduction of the Poor-Bah style of work and imposition. The Party has highly appreciated the regulation-based and process-based performance of duties and tasks among the Party's and the State's institutions [1, p.109].

To make a remark on the democratic practice inside the Party, the Summary Report on Theoretical and Practical Issues over 30 years of Doi moi (1986 – 2016) emphasizes some points, as below: “In terms of awareness, the Party has realized more clearly that democracy inside the Party plays a decisive role in development of democracy in all organizations and activities of the political system; it is closely attached to democratization of the entire social life; democracy will result in social consensus and social consensus will create the power of great national unity [4, p.140]”.

After 30 years of Doi moi, the Party has been aware more profoundly of the importance of political system renovation.

It has been identified to aim at performing democracy and promoting the people's mastery over the operational mechanism of the political system, in which: "the Party undertakes the leadership; the State undertakes the management; and the people undertake the mastery". At the same time, the Party has realized the need of carrying out comprehensive renovation, completing the political system in all aspects, such as functions, organization, operational mechanism, officials, and running modes of political organizations. The functions of the Socialist Rule of Law generally and the Parliament, the Government and judicial institutions have been specified more clearly. The law-abiding sense has been considered more prominent for social management as well as the State organization and activities. Furthermore, the role and position of the Parliament – the top representative institution of the people and the most powerful institution of the State – have been specifically defined. It undertakes some major functions, including: (1) to perform the constitutional and legislative power; (2) to make decisions about important issues of the country; and (3) to supervise the State activities [4, pp.140-143]. Especially, "democracy has been improved a lot inside the Party and in activities of the people's elective institutions. More importance has been given to protection of legitimate interests and rights of citizens and solution to violation of democratic rights"[4, p.147].

Democratic practice in socio-cultural sphere:

In Doi moi, the Party and the State set up a guideline on cultural development and management appropriately so that not only the Party's political orientation can be kept

but the people's freedom and democracy can be also ensured in cultural creative activities and enjoyment of cultural values. Requirements and content of the socialist democracy in the cultural sector have been step-by-step institutionalized by laws and ordinances to be implemented in practice. The right to take part in cultural life have been guaranteed for all people.

Promulgation of cultural policies has been actively promoted. In the context of market economy and international integration, appropriate cultural policies will play a crucial role not only in accelerating cultural development but also in providing favorable conditions for democratic practice in the cultural sector.

For the past years, a lot of culture-related economic policies have been promulgated, of which the policies on investment and resource development were really significant as an effective lever. In the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party, it is highlighted: "it is necessary to make a vigorous step in socio-cultural development, increasing the State investments as well as mobilizing social resources" [3, p.124]. Together with economic growth, the budget provided for the cultural sector has been, therefore, considerably higher for the past few years. Apart from the budget provided by the Central government, local governments have given some budget to cultural activities. The cultural investment policy shows the State's investment in two cultural areas, including: (1) Investment in building cultural institutions, cultural centers, and libraries; and, (2) Investment in promoting development of arts and cultural industry.

In addition to the policy on investment in cultural means, a lot of policies on investment in cultural activities have been promulgated and implemented, aiming at following purposes: to encourage people to take part in cultural development in both aspects, including cultural creation and cultural enjoyment; to enable professional artists to play well the key role in creating new cultural values; and, to provide favorable conditions for preservation and development of national traditional culture in combination with acquisition of the world cultural quintessence. As a result, a wide network of universities, colleges, and research institutes have continually provided training for those who will work in the cultural sector. More attention and investments have been also paid to cultural study. Many research works have been carried out effectively.

Cultural policies for the economic sector have gradually strengthened culture in economic activities. Economic targets and measures have been built in relation to cultural ones, aiming at taking care of human, heightening moral standards in production and trading, and attaching economic growth to social progress and justice.

Policies on cultural socialization have step-by-step empowered various entities to perform the management and operational powers, which were inherently kept by the Central government. Consequently, implementation of the policies on cultural socialization has mobilized a lot of resources for cultural activities as well as cultural organization and management, which partly affirms the equality of people in participating in cultural activities and

performing interests in the cultural sector. Local people at the grass-roots level are not only those, who set up cultural institutions, but they are also those, who benefit from cultural activities; they get more power to take part in cultural creative activities. Furthermore, cultural socialization has also made a contribution towards enhancing the people's responsibility for preserving and developing our traditional cultural values.

It is necessary to affirm that significant and positive achievements have been gained in democratic practice for the past years. In some local areas and some fields, however, the people's mastery still remains violated; the authoritarian and bureaucratic behavior hasn't been yet eradicated, causing troubles for people; corruption and waste haven't been dealt with completely, etc.. In the Political Report of the Executive Board of the 11th Central Committee submitted to the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party, it is clearly stated: "The awareness of democracy still remains limited among some Party members, State officials and common people. The separation and even opposition between democracy and law/legal disciplines can be seen in many places. The people's mastery is violated in some fields and local areas. Democratic practice is sometimes performed by formalism. It is sometimes exploited to drive a wedge and make disturbances, causing negative impacts on national security and social order" [5, p.168]. Those shortcomings stemmed from various reasons and they must be realized correctly and dealt with properly and effectively.

It can be said that democratic practice is an inevitable tendency of development for the coming time in the context of our country and the world as well. It requires the Communist Party of Vietnam, which is the only ruling party in our country, to have breakthroughs and sound policies to implement further the socialist democracy, because it is a target as well as an important dynamic for social development.

2. Some new requirements

According to the consistent viewpoint of the Communist Party, democracy is both a target and a dynamic for social development. To practice democracy more and more widely and effectively, it is necessary to grasp thoroughly following principled requirements:

Firstly, it is necessary to keep consistently the Marxist – Leninist viewpoints and Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy and democratic practice.

Democracy is a popular value as well as an aspiration and a goal of the progressive mankind. In the context of the world general tendency, therefore, the Party and the State should pay crucial attention to democracy and should realize fully its contents. At the same time, it is essential to implement gradually democratic activities to achieve the target of democracy in social life.

The Communist Party of Vietnam should grasp fully the sound and scientific approach to democracy and democratic practice on the basis of the Marxist – Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought. Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy and particularly on democratic practice is profoundly and practically significant for performance of democracy in all aspects of

social life in our country at present. It not only consists of the mankind cultural values, including Marxist-Leninism and our traditional values, but it is also based on the specific situation of our history. Talking about the importance of democratic values in social life, Ho Chi Minh generalized that democracy was the passkey to deal with every work. To promote the values and significance of Ho Chi Minh's thought on democratic practice, it is necessary to do further research and apply creatively his thought on democratic practice in the current context.

Secondly, it is essential to pay special attention to both direct democracy and representative democracy.

Direct democracy and representative democracy are the two indispensable types in democratic practice, of which direct democracy is the most important and it plays the decisive role in actualization of the people's democratic rights. This type of democracy creates a lot of opportunities for people to take part in the State and social activities. At the same time, it is an effective mechanism for people to perform their own political rights. In the current context, direct democracy is the one that shows directly and most precisely the will of people.

Accordingly, in democratic practice for improvement of the people's mastery and democratic rights in our country, the Party and the State should strengthen practice of the people's direct democracy, in addition to implementation of representative democracy. Full practice of the people's direct democracy will make representative democracy more significant and contribute

an important part towards building a society of modernity and sustainable development.

Thirdly, it is essential to keep consistently the principled viewpoint that democratic practice can be done successfully in the context that the Communist Party is the only ruling party in our country. This can be proved by following facts. The Communist Party of Vietnam is a pioneering force of labor people and the whole nation; it is a faithful representative of working class and country and it pursues the goal of making our country independent, powerful, wealthy, democratic, just, and civilized. The role, prestige, and leadership capacity of the Communist Party have been shown convincingly in the revolution for national liberation, the resistance wars, and the process of national defense and socialist development. To make democracy really play its role as a dynamic for social development in the new context, however, the Party needs to re-organize the political system, setting up appropriate political institutions and mechanisms for democratic practice in order to ensure that democracy will be performed more and more effectively.

The Party should innovate comprehensively the mode of leadership according to the principle of democratic centralism. At the same time, the Party needs to enhance its knowledge capacity, political skill, and revolutionary ethics; it must be really immaculate and powerful; it has to be consistent in realizing that people are the very foundation and the owner of the country and they keep the mastery.

Fourthly, it is necessary to intensify and improve the Socialist Rule of Law of the people, for the people, and by the people.

One of the reasons why there are still shortcomings and difficulties in implementation democracy or democracy still remains formalistic or too excessive in some areas is that we haven't yet built completely the Rule of Law. Besides, the institutionalization of the Party's guidelines on democracy is carried out too slowly and improperly. It is, therefore, necessary to accelerate the work of building and completing the Socialist Rule of Law of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The State should institutionalize and guarantee the people's mastery by laws. Apart from the institutionalization of democratic rights, the Party and the State should make, promulgate and implement mechanisms for supervision and inspection of democratic practice.

People perform their direct mastery in form of self-governance and instruction for both direct democracy and representative democracy. Democracy must be attached closely to social justice. Democratic promotion must go together with maintenance of disciplines and legal systems. To improve the supervisory and social critical role for better democratic practice, it is essential to innovate further the ways to organize and conduct activities of the Fatherland Front and other mass organizations as well.

Fifthly, it is necessary to study the world experience in democratic practice.

Democracy is a popular value of mankind. In reality, all countries in the

world have been trying to implement democracy at different levels, depending on the specific awareness and political system of each country. To achieve social progress in the context of globalization and comprehensive international integration, Vietnam can and should learn lessons from experience of other countries in democratic practice, selecting positive values and appropriate points to be applied in implementation of democracy, maintenance of political stability, and creation of dynamic for sustainable development. At the same time, the lessons will help us to avoid shortcomings in democratic practice.

In conclusion, for the coming time, the Communist Party of Vietnam needs to continue develop socialist democracy, ensuring that all the State powers belong to the people. All the Party's guidelines and the State's policies and laws must be built on the basis of aspirations, legitimate interests, and opinions of the people. Democracy must be implemented fully and seriously in all aspects of social life. People must be guaranteed to take part in every stage of the decision-making process involved with their interests and life; they have the right to raise ideas, make discussions, and supervise the process of implementation. This is the best way to carry out democratic practice so that it can be seen as an important goal and an effective dynamic for social development.

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