

The Prehistory of the Marxist Theory of Socialist Governance: Marx, Engels, and the Soviet Union

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Abstract: In examining the early history of the theory of socialist governance, we may distinguish between two stages. The first stage comes before a Communist revolution and before the actual practice of constructing socialism. This is the period in which Marx and Engels expressed their preliminary thoughts, in terms of basic principles rather than blueprints. The first part of this article examines what Marx and especially Engels had to say concerning the principles of socialist governance: 1) public power continues but loses its ‘political character’; 2) governance entails the administration of things and the management of the processes of production for the sake of the true interests of society; 3) the many organs of governance would not be separated from society but stand in the midst of society; 4) this reality may be seen as a dialectical transformation of ‘baseline’ communism. The second stage comes after a Communist revolution and during the long and often difficult task of constructing socialism. This initial part of this stage happened in the Soviet Union, which was the first socialist country in human history to develop some aspects of socialist governance: 1) the two stages of socialism and communism; 2) the dialectical relation between socialist democracy and the proletarian dictatorship; 3) a quantitatively and qualitatively higher form of democracy as socialist democracy; 4) the leadership of the Communist Party in socialist governance. All of these developments may be seen as a ‘prehistory’, or early history, since the developments in China comprise the fullest history of socialist governance. However, this is the topic of another study.

Keywords: socialist governance; Karl Marx; Friedrich Engels; Soviet Union; prehistory

The development of the Marxist theory of socialist governance now has a history of more than 170 years. We may distinguish two major stages in this development: initial theories before a Communist revolution; theories that developed in light of actual practice after a Communist revolution and during the long task of constructing socialism. This distinction applies to the structure of this article: the first part deals with the theories of Marx and – especially – Engels. Knowing full well that they did not have any direct experience of socialist governance and thus scientific evidence, they restricted their thoughts on socialist governance to basic principles rather than detailed elaborations. The second part analyses developments in the Soviet Union, after the October Revolution. Here we find the direct experience of constructing a socialist system of governance for the first time in human history. Theory arose from practice, albeit in light of the specific conditions of Russia and then the Soviet Union. In order to focus the analysis of what is a large topic, the following material will deal with

socialist democracy as the main topic.¹ By this means, we may also consider topics such as the proletarian dictatorship, democratic centralism, and the leadership of the Communist Party. Further, I will not deal with developments in China, since this is the topic of separate study (Boer 2021).²

Engels and Marx

It was primarily Engels who began to work out the rudimentary framework of what socialist democracy might mean, although he was always clear that neither he nor Marx could not foresee what the reality might be.³ Engels's important research that has a bearing on socialist governance took place in the 1880s and early 1890s. During this time, he prepared a series of earlier manuscripts by Marx for publication and dug deep into European and particularly German history to produce the outlines – often in notes and unpublished texts – concerning the state (Engels 1882a; 1882b; 1884b). My concern is how this research relates to socialist democracy. The context for this work was a moderating or 'rightist' tendency in the large German Social-Democratic Party, of which the elected delegates in the Reichstag (German parliament) sought to retreat from the need for revolution and distanced themselves from any notion of the proletarian dictatorship. Here we see the beginning of a process of elevating Marx's depiction of the Paris Commune (Marx 1871) as an almost utopian image of socialist democracy and putting aside the proletarian dictatorship – this deviation that continues to bedevil Western Marxism. Engels would have none of it, dusting off articles and unpublished texts by Marx where the dictatorship of the proletariat was mentioned, as well as writing introductions to some of those texts (Marx 1875a; Engels 1891b; 1891a; 1895). The crucial move came in the introduction to the third edition of Marx's *The Civil War in France*, where Engels writes: 'do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (Engels 1891b, 191; see also 1890, 63). The commune is the proletarian dictatorship – this is a distinct step beyond Marx, who did not have the energy to think through the problem. In this text, Engels argues that the Paris Commune did in fact begin the process of lopping off more and more pieces of the capitalist state, although the commune failed in the end since it did not go far enough.

This equation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with communist democracy is the first significant principle that may be drawn from Engels's works. In time, it would come to have profound implications for what came to be known as democratic centralism. Let me put it this way: in the Manifesto, both Engels and Marx stipulate that strong centralising moves are needed after the seizure of the power through a proletarian revolution. These include the centralisation of and monopoly over

1 Since there is no pure and abstract form of 'democracy as such' (Jiang and Zhao 2010, 4; Engels 1884a, 234; Lenin 1919d, 464), we need to distinguish between various historical forms: baseline or 'primitive' democracy; ancient Greek 'slave-owner democracy' (Cai 2011, 144); capitalist or liberal democracy, and its derivative forms in countries previously colonised by Europe, such as illiberal, colonial, and military democracies. Socialist democracy is qualitatively distinct from these other forms.

2 Some of the research contained in this article was initially undertaken in relation to the first part of Chapter Nine in my *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics – A Guide for Foreigners* (Boer 2021).

3 Marx made a few initial moves in relation to the Paris commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat, but he left the relation between the two unresolved (Boer 2019).

communication, transport, and credit in a national bank, the abolition of private property in land and inheritance, the control and expansion of agriculture and industry as the instruments of production owned by the state, and the 'equal liability' of all adults to labour (Marx and Engels 1848, 505–6). This centralised control over the means of production is explicitly identified a couple of years later as the dictatorship of the proletariat (Marx and Engels 1850, 387–88). At the same time, the exercise of governance after a proletarian revolution would be based on decentralising democratic measures. Governance would take place through a 'working, not a parliamentary, body' that is to be 'executive and legislative at the same time'. These political forms were to be based on universal suffrage and recall, and would be replicated across the land, even in 'the smallest country hamlet', with local bodies administering 'their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town'. They would also elect delegates to participate in the national body, but the point is that governance would be 'restored to the responsible agents of society' (Marx 1871, 139–41). I have quoted here from the well-known pages concerning the Paris Commune in Marx's *The Civil War in France*, which are so often cited as a model for socialist democratic governance. But it was precisely this text for which Engels wrote the introduction mentioned earlier, where he took a step beyond Marx and identified the commune with the proletarian dictatorship. In doing so, he makes an implicitly dialectical point: socialist governance would be both centralising and democratic, both repressive against the remnants of the bourgeois dictatorship and a free association of workers as the vast majority. In short, democratic centralism.

A number of further philosophical principles, arising from Engels's later works, are relevant for understanding socialist governance: 1) public power continues but loses its 'political character'; 2) governance entails the administration of things and the management of the processes of production for the sake of the true interests of society; 3) the many organs of governance would not be separated from society but stand in the midst of society; 4) this reality may be seen as a dialectical transformation, an *Aufhebung* (扬弃) of baseline communism.⁴

Already in the Manifesto, both Engels and Marx specified that in the process of socialist construction 'public power⁵ will lose its political character' (Marx and Engels 1848, 505). To explain: the state as it had become known is defined by Engels as a 'separated' power set over against society. This form of the state would not continue, but a 'public power' would continue. What type of public power? This power and its 'public functions will lose their political character' (Engels 1873b, 425). For both Engels and Marx, 'political character' means the reality of class struggle and its manifestation in the state (Marx and Engels 1848, 505). Thus, if public power loses its political character, it ceases to be a manifestation and instrument of class struggle and coercion. The implications are far-reaching: without political character based on class struggle, antagonistic struggle between different political parties would no longer exist, so much so that 'elections have nothing of today's political character' (Marx 1875b, 519–20). In other words, elections themselves – seen by those saturated in the Western liberal tradition as the very definition of democracy – would cease to be politicised. And if this applies to elections, then it also applies to all other forms of governance under socialism.

4 See also the useful study by Jia Jianfang (2014, 3–6).

5 The German term used here is *Gewalt*, with the senses of power and force.

The remaining three principles indicate how a depoliticised public power may work. To begin with, the matters of life and the economy can be managed for the benefit of society (Marx and Engels 1872, 121; see also Wang and Wei 2017, 10). No longer functioning as ‘political footballs’ that can be tossed from one political party to another, with the one constantly seeking to undo the policies of the other, policies in all areas can be enacted in terms of ‘watching over the true interests of society’ (Engels 1873b, 425). As the Chinese translation of this text puts it, the purpose is to safeguard social interests and benefits – ‘维护真正的社会利益 *weihu zhenzheng de shehui liyi*’ (Engels 1873a, 338).⁶ Further, instead of antagonism and conflict between state and society, the organs of governance ‘stand in the midst of society’ (Engels 1892, 275). The quotation comes from Engels’s detailed study of the comprehensive pre-state governing roles in *The Origin of the Family*, with their democratic councils, elected positions, and significant administrative functions. But the point here is that governance and society are seen as cooperative rather than conflict-ridden, consultative rather than antagonistic (Liu W. 2002). But how are these pre-state forms of baseline democracy relevant for socialist democracy? The clearest answer may be found in ‘The Mark’, a study that sought to appeal to German peasants by outlining the history of the ‘Mark-association’, with its common ownership of the means of production and its democratic assemblies. The point, however, is that the Communist movement does not seek to restore such a practice, for this would not be possible. Instead – and here Engels directly addresses the rural workers – by a ‘rebirth of the mark, not in its old, outdated form, but in a rejuvenated form’ that entails all of the latest technological improvements administered by the community itself (Engels 1882c, 456). In other words, this baseline communism and its democratic practices would require a thorough dialectical transformation (*Aufhebung* – 扬弃) in the new society.

In summing up, let me address the implications of these early and undeveloped thoughts by Engels and Marx. I have already indicated the implicit dialectical point concerning democratic centralism, so here I add that governing functions continue under socialism (a ‘public power’); these functions are depoliticised and stand in the midst of society, which entails the importance of cooperation and consultation in democratic processes, instead of antagonism and class conflict; and to gain a sense of how socialist democracy might work, Engels argues that one component would entail an *Aufhebung* (扬弃) of baseline democracy. The latter would eventually become one of the inspirations for ‘base-level [基层 *jiceng*]’ or grassroots consultative democracy.

The Experience of the Soviet Union

In contrast to Engels and Marx, it was Lenin and then Stalin who developed the initial framework of a theory of socialist democracy on the basis of actual practice. Since no one had tried socialism before at a state level, they were seeking a ‘correct road to the unknown’ (Yermakov 1975, 107). Or, as Lenin put it: ‘A state more democratic, in the true sense of the word, one more closely connected with the working and exploited people, has never yet existed’ (Lenin 1919a, 433). But they continually sought insights and principles from the texts of Engels and Marx.

6 Or, as another Chinese term puts it, to ‘serve the community [共同体服务 *gongtongti fuwu*]’ (Boer and Zang 2019).

Lenin and the 'Highest Form of Democracy'

Lenin occupies a unique position, both 'before October' and 'after October', struggling for a proletarian revolution and engaged in the early construction of socialism after a successful revolution. His reflections on socialist democracy may also been in terms of this distinction, although his experience of actual socialist democracy was limited by the few years left to him. Chinese researchers tend to distinguish between the more idealistic expectations Lenin had for socialist democracy before the October revolution and the sober modifications made in light of the immense difficulties of constructing socialism (Rong and Lai 2000, 16–18; Liu S. and Lu 2004; Cai 2011; Yan 2014). Further, Lenin's thoughts on socialist democracy were very much a work in progress, seeking to find the best approach in light of rapidly changing circumstances.

Democracy has three main and overlapping senses in Lenin's texts. First, it is capitalist or bourgeois democracy and is seen as part and parcel of the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution', which was agreed to have emerged in Russia between the 1905 revolution and the February revolution of 1917. Of more interest is the second meaning of democracy, which was commonly connected with the broader socialist project and has a distinct class and thus revolutionary character. More generally, the loan word 'democracy' tended to be associated with the labouring masses of workers and peasants, especially during the revolutionary period from 1905 to 1917. Democracy became synonymous with the range of socialist parties, while those of the bourgeoisie (Kadets) and the old aristocracy (Octobrists and others) were anti-democratic (Kolonitskii 2004). Using 'democracy' in this sense, Lenin advocated a coalition with other socialist parties in the initial phases of the proletarian revolution, arguing that the democratic and socialist struggles – as class based – are inseparably connected in the political struggle (Lenin 1897, 328–33; see also 1902, 421–35; 1905a, 187). During the tumultuous year of 1917, such democracy was embodied in the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies – hence the slogan 'all power to the Soviets'. Needless to say, the Bolsheviks should take the vanguard role in leading such a coalition of revolutionary-democratic parties in completing the democratic revolution, since true revolutionary democracy should lead to a socialist revolution and should not be seduced by the compromises entailed in 'bourgeois democratic phrases' (Lenin 1905b; 1917a, 360–64).

The third sense of democracy is of most interest: 'democracy' is itself a socialist project, although now in terms of full, complete, and consistent democratisation that would lead to its own demise. Thus, socialist democracy in Lenin's hands has a minimum and a maximum sense: at the minimum level, it designates all socialist parties and their struggle against the old aristocracy and especially the bourgeoisie with its form of capitalist democracy; in its maximum sense, proletarian or socialist democracy means the democracy advocated by Communists. The latter is my concern, but what did socialist democracy come to mean after the proletarian revolution?

The answer is not provided by Lenin in a neat summary, for he made his points mostly in response to developments on the ground and in the context of often sharp debates,⁷ so I draw the

⁷ That said, we do find occasional fuller and programmatic statements, such as the one found in the draft program of the Russian Communist Party from early 1919 (Lenin 1919c, 105–12). Even here, we find a distinct emphasis on 'first steps', on the need to take time in transforming the whole system.

following points from moments in his writings. To begin with, socialist democracy is quantitatively and qualitatively distinct (Cai 2011, 144). In terms of quantity, socialist democracy is the rule by and expresses the will of the rural and urban workers, who are the vast majority that had been exploited by and thereby excluded from the benefits of capitalist democracy (Lenin 1919c, 106–7). Thus, socialist democracy is partisan and openly so, for the sake of the majority. As Lenin observed after the October Revolution: “Liberties” and democracy *not* for all, but *for* the working and exploited masses, to emancipate them from exploitation; ruthless suppression of exploiters’ (Lenin 1918a, 155).

Further, socialist democracy is qualitatively distinct, for it is the ‘highest form of democracy’ – as Soviet or proletarian democracy (Lenin 1919f, 308; 1919c, 105–12) – in which the working class and other workers are the masters of the country. The distinct formulation for this qualitative difference appears clearly in the exegesis of Marx and especially Engels that is found in *The State and Revolution* (Lenin 1917b; see also 1919e, 99–101). Here Lenin deploys two terms that develop implications found in Marx and Engels: the proletarian state; and a distinct stage of socialism in which this state arises. The proletarian state is by definition the dictatorship of the proletariat, which means the highest form of democracy (Wen and Huang 1998). Clearly, this is a development of Engels’s point that the proletarian dictatorship is identical with the commune. Lenin observes: ‘The dictatorship of the proletariat alone can emancipate humanity from the oppression of capital, from the lies, falsehood and hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy – democracy *for the rich* – and establish democracy *for the poor*, that is, make the blessings of democracy *really* accessible to the workers and poor peasants’ (Lenin 1919b, 370).⁸

In 1904-1905, a new principle with profound ramifications for the global Communist movement appeared: the dialectical concept of democratic centralism (Li W. 2010; Ma 2014, 208–9; Li Z. and Wang 2018). As we saw earlier, the concept itself is implicit in the centralising and democratic emphases of proletarian power as outlined by Engels and Marx, but it was not explicitly articulated as a distinct principle. For Lenin and the Bolsheviks, democratic centralism was initially concerned with intra-Party structures, in terms of full freedom to criticise so as to maintain unity of action: ‘The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full *freedom to criticise*, so long as this does not disturb the unity *of a definite action*; it rules out *all* criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the *unity* of an action decided on by the Party’ (Lenin 1906c, 443; see also 1906a, 163; 1906b, 314; Harding 2009, Vol. 2, 172-79). However, the major step was to apply democratic centralism to the new state as a whole, initially in terms of nationalities and autonomous regions, and then in relation to economic developments and the governmental structure (Lenin 1917b, 453; see also 1913, 45–51; 1918b, 207–9). Herein lies a problem that would take some time – well beyond Lenin – to resolve: the Bolsheviks assumed that democratic centralism could simply be extended from its principal deployment in intra-Party governance to governing the country as a whole. They did not realise that such a move required significant institutional transformations to make it work for country-wide governance.

8 See also: ‘During this period, the state must inevitably be a state that is democratic *in a new way* (for the proletariat and the propertyless in general) and dictatorial *in a new way* (against the bourgeoisie)’ (Lenin 1917b, 417).

Finally, the form of socialist democracy envisaged by Lenin does not happen in an instant, immediately after a proletarian revolution. As Chinese scholars emphasise (Cai 2011, 144), it is a long term project, connected with the eventual dying away of the state: 'victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy' (Lenin 1916, 74). But Lenin goes a step further, invoking the dialectical argument that since democracy is based on class struggle even in a proletarian state, it will disappear with the realisation of communism. In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin engages closely with Engels's famous text from the third edition of *Anti-Dühring* (1894, 268–71) to argue that a proletarian state – which would destroy and replace the preceding capitalist state – is the 'most complete form of democracy' and as such would over a long period of time die away. In other words, democracy as embodied in such a proletarian state would, with that form of the state, eventually wither or die away: 'Communism alone is capable of providing really complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away of its own accord' (Lenin 1917b, 468). In this process, democracy would become not a goal for which one must strive but an everyday habit of freedom (Lenin 1917b, 467, 479; 1918c, 242).

To sum up: while Lenin did not have all of the material from Marx and especially Engels at hand (since some of Engels's notes and drafts had not yet been published), his exegesis of relevant texts both develops some of the implications and goes a step further. Democratic centralism is a clear case of developing implications, while Lenin also took to heart Engels's identification of the proletarian dictatorship with the commune to argue that the dictatorship of the proletariat – embodied in the soviets – was highest stage of democracy achieved thus far. Lenin went a distinct step further by arguing that Marx's initial phase of communism was the stage of socialism. During this long period, there would be a need for a proletarian state that embodied democratic centralism and the higher stage of democracy through the dictatorship of the proletariat. What has happened to Engels's arguments for the organs of governance standing in the midst of society and the *Aufhebung* of baseline democracy? It would seem that Lenin saw these developments as part of the final stage of communism, when even socialist democracy would eventually die away, along with classes and the state of which it was an inescapable part.

On the Leadership of the Communist Party

The very newness of these concepts and their practice took some time to gain traction, especially in light of Western polemic against the new Soviet model and the West's inability to understand how Lenin's nascent dialectical formulations were beginning to work in practice. It fell to Stalin's long tenure to consolidate socialist democracy in light of Russian conditions. Given Stalin's immersion in the writings of Lenin, as well as those of Marx and Engels, it should be no surprise that there is significant common ground and continuity: the quantitative and qualitative difference of socialist democracy, so much so that such democracy is the 'most all-embracing and most democratic state organisation of all possible state organisations' (Stalin 1924a, 124; see also 1924c, 268–69); the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry as socialist democracy, to the point that Stalin coined the

term 'democratic dictatorship', which would have resonance in China (Stalin 1927, 256);⁹ and the assumption of a distinct stage of socialism with its socialist state form and qualitatively superior socialist democracy.

However, Stalin went further on the question of the leadership of the Communist Party. To this question Stalin devoted considerable energy, developing a complex dialectic of 'from below' and 'from above', and of the need for an organic connection between the Party and the masses, while constantly guarding against separation or divorce. In his key text, 'The Foundations of Leninism', Stalin draws from Lenin's thought six theses concerning the nature of the Communist Party, which is: 1) an advanced detachment of the working class; 2) an organised detachment; 3) the highest form of class organisation of the proletariat; 4) an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat; 5) the embodiment of the unity of will that is incompatible with factions; 6) strong precisely it purges opportunist elements (Stalin 1924a, 175–93). Of these theses, I would like to emphasise the idea that the Party is a 'detachment' of the working class. The Party is inescapably part of the working class, 'closely bound up with it by all the fibres of its being', existing only through this 'bond' and the 'moral and political credit' granted by the masses. In relation to the dictatorship of the proletariat, Stalin stresses once again that the Party is not an end to itself, not a self-sufficient force. By contrast, it is a 'weapon' or 'instrument in the hands of the proletariat', a tool that seeks to achieve the proletarian dictatorship and expand it when achieved (Stalin 1924a, 187). In this light, socialist democracy means for Stalin not the exercise of multiple parties or factions, but rather the close and organic bond between the Party and the workers, peasants, and – from the 1930s – communist intellectuals. This emphasis lays a hard task upon the Party, which must always ensure prestige, respect, and 'moral capital' among the non-Party masses (Stalin 1924b, 327). Without such a connection any 'democracy' is worthless and the Party is doomed: 'The Party is part of the class; it exists for the class, not for itself' (Stalin 1924d, 238). The nature of the leadership of a Communist Party in the context of a socialist democracy was by no means solved by Stalin, but his main contribution was to indicate the profound importance of this question.

To sum up: Stalin's distinct contribution concerns the leadership of the Communist Party, which would become an abiding features of socialist democracy wherever it has been practised. Only through the Party's leadership can socialist democracy function; only through such a leadership could socio-economic well-being be ensured, as well as preferential policies for minority nationalities, universal education in socialism, and much more.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

The history of socialist governance would still have a long way to go, especially when we look to developments in China. While this is the topic of another study, I would like to address two matters. The first concerns how Chinese researchers assess the Soviet experience. On the one side are the those characteristics specific to the Soviet Union due to its own situation, while on the other side are common themes that carry through and indeed provided inspiration for China's own path. The former

⁹ This 'genuine democracy' is the power of the 'majority over the minority', by which he means the 'dictatorship of the lower classes' (Stalin 1918, 37–38; see also 1937, 307–8).

include the restriction to one political party, to the exclusion of all others, as the representative of rural and urban workers, as well as the structure of the Soviet state that constitutionally allowed self-determination and secession by Soviet states and autonomous regions. The common themes include the qualitative and quantitative difference of socialist democracy, democratic centralism, the leadership of the Communist Party, and the implicit development of direct and indirect democracy (Ren 1995; Wen and Huang 1998; Cai 2011; Li M. and Liu 2011; Ouyang 2019). Obviously, it is the latter from which Chinese researchers draw for the sake of developing socialist democracy in light of Chinese conditions.

The second matter concerns the Chinese experience. Since this is the topic for another study, I restrict my comments to a summary of the main points. These include the three categories developed by Mao Zedong: new democracy, democratic dictatorship, and democratic centralism. Perhaps the most significant is the dialectical category of democratic centralism, for this would become the defining feature of socialist democracy in China. It would fall to Deng Xiaoping and those who followed to clarify exactly what democratic centralism would mean for country-wide governance. Deng Xiaping began the process by stressing the separation of the Communist Party and governance of the country, was taken further with Jiang Zemin's articulation of the components of the socialist democratic system, and Hu Jintao's emphasis on the need for 'statutory processes [法定程序 *fading chengxu*]' so that the proposals of the Communist Party become the will of the country's governing structures. However, they still did not identify these developments with democratic centralism, preferring to use that term for intra-Party governance.

The breakthrough comes with Xi Jinping, who clearly identifies democratic centralism as the definition of both the overall socialist political system with its components and the statutory processes needed for relations between the Communist Party and the country's government. To begin with, Xi also emphasises the need to improve even further the CPC's indirect leadership through the legal or statutory procedures of rule of law governance (Xi 2012, 142; 2015, 17; 2019, 3). When the Party's policies become state laws, 'the implementation of the law is the implementation of the Party's will, and the implementation of the party's policies is to act in accordance with the law' (Xi 2015, 18). All of this entails that the organs of state power are independent, proactive, and responsible in terms of adhering to the constitution and relevant laws. Now we come the explicit connection with democratic centralism, which is predicated on the fact that the 'authority of both Party and state' are distinct (Xi 2015, 20; 2017, 28). This entails the need to 'exercise state power through the people's congresses, ensure that decision-making power, executive power and oversight power function independently but are coordinated with each other, ensure that government agencies exercise their power and perform their duties in accordance with statutory mandates and procedures [法定权限和程序 *fading quanxian he chengxu*]' (Xi 2012, 139; see also 2014, 290). A little later in the same text, Xi specifies what such statutory procedures mean for turning the party's will into government decisions and statutes. Here he speaks of 'foundational [基本 *jiben*]' way of 'exercising power according to law [依法执政 *yifa zhizheng*]' and 'governing the country according to law [依法治国 *yifa zhiguo*]' (Xi 2012, 142). All of these clarify the definition of democratic centralism in the context of country-wide governance.

These developments would come towards the end of a long process of developing socialist governance. A final question: how do these developments relate to the longer history that I have addressed in this article? Xi Jinping's observation is pertinent:

Actually, how to govern a socialist society, a completely new society, has not been clearly addressed by world socialism so far. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had no practical experience in the comprehensive governance of a socialist country, as their theories about a future society were mostly predictive. Vladimir Lenin, who passed away a few years after the October Revolution (1917) in Russia, was thus unable to explore this question in depth. The Soviet Union tackled this question and gained some experience, but it made serious mistakes and failed to resolve the problem. Our Party has worked on the same question steadily ever since it came to national power, and, in spite of serious setbacks, has accumulated rich experience and achieved great success in improving our governance system and enhancing our governance capacity. The success has been particularly resounding since we adopted the policy of reform and opening-up. Enjoying political stability, economic growth, social harmony and unity of nationalities, today's China poses a striking contrast to many regions and countries that suffer constant chaos. This shows that our national governance system and capacity are on the whole quite sound and suited to our national conditions and development needs (Xi 2013, 91).

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