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Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Historical Destiny of Socialism

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Tremendous changes have taken place in the history of mankind during the twentieth century. In the first half of the century socialism shocked the world with its great successes over large areas of the earth. However, in the final years of the century its setbacks also astounded the world, especially its failure in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These great changes raised the question of the future and destiny of socialism.

In view of the ecstatic response of Western hostile forces to the "grand failure of communism," and the pessimism of those who once believed in socialism, Deng Xiaoping said categorically, "After a long time, socialism will necessarily supersede capitalism. This is an irreversible general trend of historical development.....Some countries have suffered major setbacks, and socialism appears to have been weakened. But the people have been tempered by the setbacks and have drawn lessons from them, and that will make socialism develop in a healthier direction."[\[i\]](#) This conclusion has been borne out by the successful practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics in China and will be further borne out in the coming century by socialist practice throughout the world, including that in China.

I. Socialism Is a Historical Process With Twist and Turns in Its Development

Dialectical materialism tells us that things develop with a combination of progress and reverses. The general trend is towards progress and development, but the road is full of twists and turns. This is the case in the natural world and also in social life. Every new social system undergoes numerous difficulties during its birth and development. Capitalism was finally substituted for feudalism after 48 years of struggle against the restoration of feudalism in Britain, and 86 years of repeated trails of strength in France. It took two to

three hundred years for capitalism as a whole to grow from its infancy to a mature stage amidst continuous economic and political crises. This was the case in the development of capitalism, in which a new form of exploitation replaced the old, let alone the socialist movement that will destroy all systems of exploitation. It is entirely impractical to expect socialism to enjoy a favorable wind all the way and encounter no resistance.

Socialism has experienced many setbacks and low ebbs, but the general trend towards socialism replacing capitalism has never changed. During the more than 150 years since the appearance of the theory of scientific socialism, it has developed from the conception of revolutionary teachers into the guiding principle of the workers' movement all over the world, from theory into practice, and from the practice in one country into that in many countries, presenting a constantly growing dynamic movement. It is inevitable that there will be local reverses and temporary low tides or even reverses during this process. Marxists who keep a clear head with regard to the development law of human society do not feel puzzled by these outward phenomena, but unswervingly believe in the final victory of socialism and communism, and face the harsh realities with high morale, calmly taking up the gauntlet.

In 1848 during the Paris Commune uprising, Karl Marx scientifically predicted that, "whatever therefore its fate in Paris, it will make *le tour du monde*."^[ii] More than forty years later, the victory of the October Revolution in Russia confirmed Marx's brilliant foresight. When the first socialist country in the world faced grave crises due to armed intervention from fourteen imperialist states, in addition to domestic rebellion, Lenin firmly pointed out that, "Only a proletarian socialist revolution can lead humanity out of the impasse which imperialism and imperialist wars have created. Whatever difficulties the revolution may have to encounter, whatever possible temporary setbacks or waves of counter-revolution it may have to contend with, the final victory of the proletariat is inevitable."^[iii] The revolutionary road followed by the Chinese people was even more difficult and convoluted. In the 28 years before the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese democratic revolution suffered repeated setbacks and failures. On 12 April 1927, Jiang Jieshi staged a bloody coup d'etat against the revolution and threw the Chinese people into bloodshed. But the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese people were neither cowed, conquered nor exterminated. They picked themselves up, wiped off the blood, buried their fallen comrades and went into battle again. Furthermore, they learned to use armed revolution against armed counterrevolution and went to the countryside to build rural base areas. In the beginning, in the face of a very powerful enemy, some people asked: "*How long will the red flag fly?*" With foresight comrade Mao Zedong pointed out that, "A single spark can start a

prairie fire." But the prairie fire also experienced many ups and downs and, particularly the last days of the land revolution, Wang Ming's "Left error led to the loss of 90 per cent of the Party and revolutionary forcers in the base areas and an almost complete loss in the Guomindang-controlled areas. However, after the Red Army arrived in northern Shaanxi, the CPC summed up its experiences and lessons learned and went on to defeat all its enemies and win the final victory of the democratic revolution.

The road to socialist construction was equally uneven. In addition to minor upheavals, there were two events of major significance; the three-years Great Leap Forward beginning in 1958, and the ten-year "cultural revolution" beginning in 1966. These errors caused enormous losses and led to grave crises in China. However, after the Third Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC we became more mature and initiated a new phase of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics. History is a mirror and tells us that no matter how difficult the situation, and whatever setbacks the revolution may experience, it will win in the end because it follows the law and direction of historical development.

Violent changes took place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 90s. The communist parties lost their ruling position, socialism was abandoned, and the world socialist movement suffered its greatest setback this century. Hostile forces in the West were excited and asserted categorically that Marxism and socialism were bankrupt. The future and destiny were pregnant with grim possibilities and some people became pessimistic. Confronted by local failure and temporary setbacks, Comrade Deng Xiaoping solemnly stated with the foresight of a great statesman, "Don't panic, don't think that Marxism has disappeared, that it's not useful any more and that it has been defeated. Nothing of the sort!"^[iv] When socialism was at a low ebb across the world it radiated vigor and dynamism in China. China's economy has been developing rapidly and in a healthy manner, the living conditions of the people have been improving and the overall capacity of the country has been strengthened. All these indisputable achievements have been highly appreciated by all those who harbor no prejudice against China. The great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping theory is not only a pioneering undertaking in China but also of world significance. Deng Xiaoping pointed out that if we can achieve the strategic goal of reaching the level of moderately developed countries by the middle of the next century, "we shall not only have blazed a new path for the peoples of the Third World, who represent three quarters of world's population, but also - and is even more important - we shall have demonstrated to mankind that socialism is the only path and that it is superior to capitalism."^[v]

Complex objective and subjective reasons account for the twist and turns in the development of socialism. First, the long-term existence of class struggle both at home and abroad. "The tree desires stillness but the wind will not cease." Class struggle exists independent of man's will. Where there is a struggle there will inevitably be fluctuations, and high and low tides, victory and defeat, and progress and setbacks are just normal phenomena and are not unexpected. Second, the socialist system is a completely new social system in the history of mankind and its development has to undergo a long historical process from inexperience to experience, from imperfect to perfect, from immature to mature. It is hard to completely avoid mistakes, twists and reverses during this process. We can try to arrive at a correct understanding by following the pattern, "practice, knowledge, and then back to practice, knowledge," constantly summing up our experiences and moving step by step from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. Third, if the party and government leadership of a socialist country cannot earnestly correct their political errors or effectively combat corruption within their ranks, the situation will become complex and grave, and major reverses or even great historical retrogression will follow. The first two are objective in nature, while the third is subjective. If no major problems occur with regard to the leadership, the wheel of history will not be turned back even though it is impossible to avoid minor setbacks. However, from a long-term perspective, no matter what twists and turns may take place, these only constitute a link in the whole chain of historical development, they do not, and cannot, after the general trend of historical development. This is just like the Yellow River: it has many turns and meanderings, but it nevertheless continues to flow into the eastern seas. In this regard we must pay attention to the following points: 1. Do not take the temporary setbacks as the end of point of historical development. On the contrary, we should observe things from the perspective of historical development and take the setbacks for what they reality are, a temporary phenomenon and a link in the chain in human history. We must be firm in our faith and conviction in the face of any difficulties and grasp the general trend of historical development. 2. We should earnestly summarize our experience and the lessons learned and try by every means to avoid losses that could be avoided. The pivotal point in this connection is to strengthen the building of the Party and maintain the correctness of leadership. 3. We are convinced that even in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries in which there have been great historical reverses, the broad masses and the true communists will re-select the socialist road after conscientious reflection - this process may be and painful, but undoubtedly things will develop in this direction - this is a historical law independent of man's will.

II. Summarizing the Historical Experience of Socialism in a Scientific Way

Engels pointed out that, "There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by one's mistakes, *durch Schaden klug werden*." [vi] Deng Xiaoping said, "In building socialism we have had both positive and negative experience, and they are equally useful to us." [vii] "The experience of successes is valuable, and so is the experience of mistakes and defeats. Formulating principles and policies in this way enables us to unify the thinking of the whole Party so as to achieve a new unity: unity formed on this basis is most reliable." [viii]

In summarizing our experience we must, first of all, have a correct approach, for different approaches lead to different, even opposite, conclusions.

We should abide by at least three principles when summarizing the historical experiences of socialism under the guidance of Marxist philosophy:

Firstly, emphasis should be given to the analysis of internal causes rather than the role of external causes. In this regard there are both positive and negative examples both in history and in the present. At the Zunyi Meeting in 1935 there was heated dispute over why the fifth counter-campaign against the enemy's "encirclement and suppression" had failed. Otto Braun (1901-1974), a German and the military adviser from the Communist International, made a speech at the meeting, Braun said the sole reason for the failure was that the enemy was too powerful. Such a conclusion was completely useless since in the initial period of a revolution the enemy is invariably more powerful. If we were doomed to failure because the enemy was more powerful then there would never be any hope of victory. Mao Zedong refuted Braun's argument at the meeting. Mao later conducted a philosophical analysis of this question. On pages 105-108 of Mao Zedong Zhexue ji (Collected Philosophical Notes of Mao Zedong) there is a lengthy discussion on this issue. These ideas were later incorporated into his exposition on the relationship between internal and external causes in the chapter "The Two World Outlooks" in on contradiction. Mao Zedong wrote in *Collected Philosophical Notes*, "The view that 'you can't blame the failure on the command because it was the decree of Heaven' is erroneous. The overwhelming power of the enemy was one of the reasons for the failure of the fifth counter-campaign against the 'encirclement and suppression,' but it was not the main reason. The main reason lay in the mistakes in the command, the cadre policy, the foreign policy and military adventurism. In a word, opportunism is responsible for the failure." [ix] He also pointed out in *On Contradiction* that, "In battle,

one army is victorious and the other is defeated: both the victory and the defeat are determined by internal causes." "External causes become operative through internal causes ." "In China in 1927, the defeat of the proletariat by the big bourgeoisie came about through the opportunism then to be found within the Chinese proletariat itself (inside the Chinese Communist Party). When we liquidated this opportunism, the Chinese revolution resumed its advance. Later, the Chinese revolution again suffered severe setbacks at the hands of the enemy, because adventurism had risen within our Party. When we liquidated this adventurism, our cause advanced once again."[\[x\]](#) It is thus clear that when we summarize experience emphasis should be placed on the analysis of the internal causes; the key issue is whether or not the Party has a correct political line. If a political party is to lead the revolution to victory it has to rely on its correct political line and consolidated organisation. Although the strategy of peaceful revolution of hostile forces a role to play, the fundamental cause of the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was to be found inside the Party, in the Party's political line, and in the Party's policies. The historical reason was the long-term ossified thinking and structure that made it impossible to bring the superiority of socialism into full play and caused dissatisfaction among the people. In some countries the enemy directly utilised such dissatisfaction and overthrew the socialist system, while in other countries the leadership were aware of the problems and attempted to find a solution and initiated reform. But they chose a Right opportunist line and the enemy made use of the opportunism and went from weak to strong, finally seizing power from either within or outside and bringing about the collapse of socialism. However, socialism stands lofty firm and has been developing vigorously in China. This demonstrates in a positive way that if the Communist Party pursues a Marxist line, any plotting by internal or external hostile forces towards peaceful evolution will fail. Following the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Deng Xiaoping said with foresight that the key link was to manage our own affairs well. He also pointed out in his talks during his tour to the southern provinces that, "if any problem arises in China, it will arise inside the Communist Party." "In the final analysis we must manage the Party affairs in such a way as to prevent trouble." First and foremost the Communist Party must have a correct political line. If we firmly hold to the basic line of "one central task, two basic points"[\[xi\]](#) and eliminate interference from Right and "Left" there will be no major disturbances; if problems do occur, they will be easy to resolve.

Secondly, in summarising our experience we should emphasize the content and causes of the errors rather than blaming certain individuals. This involves whether or not we uphold historical materialism. Of course, if there are errors in the Party line, the

leaders, the principal leader in particular, must bear the main responsibility. They should be unequivocally criticized for their mistakes And organisational measures should be taken if necessary. However, we should not put all the blame on individuals, nor should we give them all the credit. In discussing summarizing experience of the democratic revolution in "Our Study And Current Situation ," Mao Zedong said, "In dealing with questions of Party history we should lay the stress not on the responsibility of certain individual comrades but on the analysis of the circumstances in which the errors were committed, on the content of these errors and on their social, historical and ideological roots."[\[xii\]](#) Only in this way can we draw lessons in earnest and find a solution to the mistakes while examining these mistakes. Neither of the resolutions on certain historical questions in the history of the CPC placed too great an emphasis on the responsibility of individuals, but both stressed an analysis of the historical conditions under which the errors were committed, on the content and causes of these errors, and on how to correct them; this embodied the guiding principle of "achieving the twofold objective of clarity in ideology and unity among comrades" advocated by Mao Zedong.

The Soviet leaders did not adopt such an attitude towards Stalin. Over a period of 39 years, beginning with Nikita Khrushchev and going all the way to Mikhail Gorbachaev, they continued to curse Stalin, as if everything would have been all right had Stalin been completely discredited. At the same time, they paid little attention to, let alone conducting a penetrating and concrete analysis of, the historical environment and the ideological and institutional reasons for the mistakes made by Stalin. Needless to say, they did not draw any useful experience and lessons for the whole party and were thus unable to find a solution to these problems. On the contrary, in the great movement against Stalin the way was opened for opportunism to run wild.

Thirdly in summing up our experience we should treat all questions analytically, neither affirming nor negating everything.

During the Stalinist period, the Soviet Communist Party made serious mistakes in its political, economic, foreign and religious policies and policies on ethnic affairs. These mistakes caused great damage to the socialist system of the Soviet Union, and had a very influence on other socialist countries. However, we should adopt a realistic and practical attitude and should not think that in the Soviet Union under Stalin everything went wrong and Stalin was wrong in everything. Otherwise how can we explain why the Soviet economy once had rapid growth, how it withstood the trials of World War II and defeated Fascist Germany, and how an originally backward Russia became a superpower vying with Americas in only a few decades? Negating everything could only lead to the negation of the

Soviet Communist Party, the negation of socialism and the negation of Marxism. We should also conduct concrete analyses of the Soviet model, that is, the over-concentrated economic and political system established in the 1930s. On the one hand, this system did have drawbacks that had to be corrected; on the other hand, we must admit that it had its roots in history. In war time and faced by the threat of war the highly concentrated system played a vital role.

Our party did not adopt the metaphysical approach that negates everything in summarizing historical experiences, including the experiences and lessons of the 'cultural revolution,' The "Resolution" points out, on the one hand, that the "cultural revolution" was "an internal disorder that was wrongly started by the leader, was made use of by the counterrevolutionary clique and brought about serious disasters to the Party, the state and the people of all nationalities." On the other, it declares, "during this period none of the Party, the people's power, the people's army and the whole society changed its color, "while indicating the serious mistakes made by Mao Zedong in his later years the "Resolution" says, "So far as his whole life is concerned, his contributions to the Chinese revolutions are far greater than his errors. His contributions are primary and his errors are secondary." Thus, while pointing out that the original socialist structure had serious drawbacks and that it was imperative to carry out reform, we stressed that we must keep to the basic socialist system. The reform is self-improvement of socialism, and under no circumstance should we turn correction of "Left" mistakes into negation of Marxism and socialism. Just as Deng Xiaoping said, we must see two sides of a problem; if we see only one side we will make mistakes. Only when we appraise our work from the perspective that not everything is either completely positive or completely negative can we scientifically sum up historical experiences.

III. We Must Adhere to Dialectical Materialism And Historical Materialism in Constructing Socialism

Deng Xiaoping pointed out that, "The experience of the last 20 years has taught us one very important principle: to build socialism we must adhere to Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism or, as Comrade Mao Zedong put it, in everything we do we must seek truth from facts – in other words, we must proceed from reality."[\[xiii\]](#) This is a brilliant summation of the historical experience of socialism. Seeking truth from facts is the quintessence of Marxism-Leninism, the quintessence of Mao Zedong Thought and the quintessence of Deng Xiaoping theory.

Marxism is scientific because it is always based on objective realities. Engles said, "To make a science a socialism, it had first to

be placed upon a real basis.”^[xiv] Marx and Engels were wiser than the Utopian socialist, not only in that they portrayed a set of more elaborate and detailed ideal pictures of socialism than the latter, but also in that they created historical materialism, discovered in the history of labour the key to the mystery of man’s social development, and revealed the general law of the development of human society. Guided by this general law, they then investigated the law governing contradictions in capitalist society and established the theory of surplus value, by means of which they revealed the secrets of capitalist exploitation of workers and aroused the main force for burying capitalism – the proletariat. Engels wrote in “The German Ideology” 150 years ago, “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.”^[xv] That is to say, they did not begin to design an ideal society using wishful thinking and abstract principles of reason and justice, but always proceeded from reality and tried to discover a new world by criticizing the old, and looked for solutions by criticizing current conditions.

Guided by dialectical materialism and historical materialism, Marx and Engels changed socialism from a Utopian to a scientific theory. However, during the process of its realisation, the theory of scientific socialism would have produced only empty fantasies if it had been divorced from the guidance of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. In the past, regardless of the actual level of productive forces, we sought pure, unadulterated socialism in readjusting the relations of production and were over-anxious for quick results in developing productive forces. We also persisted in “taking class struggle as the key link” even when class struggle was no longer the principal contradiction under the new historical conditions. All these were reflections of socialist fantasies, which led to gross mistakes in the political line and policy decisions. The Third Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC was a great historical turning point in China’s socialist cause. This change began with the rectification of the ideological line. Without the great debate over the criteria of truth and the reestablishment of the ideological line of emancipating the mind and seeking truth facts, it would have been impossible to correct the previous “Left” mistakes, shift the focus of work to economic construction, and introduce a complete new set of policies of reform and opening-up. This clearly demonstrates that a correct ideological line is of decisive importance for a ruling party directing socialist construction. This is the case in China, as it is in other socialist countries.

It is true that the reasons for the violent changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are very complex and vary with different countries, but in the final analysis the ideological of these countries went wrong. For a relatively long period of time dogmatism and

personality cults were rampant. They made the “Left” mistake of magnifying the extent of class struggle and produced a rigid socialist model, with the result that the superiority of socialism could not be brought into full play. When the reform was initiated they then went to the other extreme and made “Rightist” mistakes. For example, ideologically Marxism was treated as dogma, but subsequently Marxism was denied its leading role. Politically, they exaggerated class struggle, but then denied the existence of class struggle and trumpeted the so-called “socialism with a human face.” They had deprived the people of their right to democracy, but then opposed the leadership of the Communist Party under the cloak of “political pluralism” and practiced a “multi-party system.” Economically, they pursued a policy of pure public ownership, but then privatised everything. All these factors demonstrate that the root cause of the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was the wrong ideological line, just as Mao Zedong pointed out, “All big political mistakes are rooted in their deviation from dialectical materialism.”[\[xvi\]](#)

From the historical experience we have realised that:

First, in constructing socialism we must proceed from reality and persist in integrating Marxism with the specific conditions.

The theory of socialism created by Marx and Engels reveals the historical inevitability of the substitution of socialism for capitalism, and the basic laws to be followed in accomplishing this substitution. However, it does not provide every country with a ready answer to its problems. In leading the people towards the construction of socialism, the proletarian party in each country must proceed from its national conditions and search for a socialist road with its own characteristics. There is no fixed model of socialism. The fundamental lesson learnt from the practice of socialism in the past, particularly the Soviet experience and model, is not to make a dogma out of Marxism. Mao Zedong was aware of this and tried to break away from this model and blaze a path of his own, but failed for various reasons. It was only after the Third Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC that the Chinese Communists headed by Deng Xiaoping raised the clarion call of “building socialism with Chinese characteristics,” and opened up a new road, under the guidance of the ideological line of emancipating the mind the seeing truth from facts. Deng Xiaoping said, “We have repeatedly declared that we shall adhere to Marxism and keep to the socialist road. But by Marxism we mean Marxism that is integrated with Chinese conditions, and by socialism we mean a socialism that is tailored to Chinese conditions and has a specifically Chinese character.”[\[xvii\]](#) He added, “After a successful revolution each country must build socialism according to its own conditions. There are not and cannot be fixed models.”[\[xviii\]](#) This is a scientific summation of historical

experiences in socialist construction at home and abroad and has universal significance. Breaking away from ideological rigidity and following one's road hinges on a scientific understanding of the national conditions. One of the most important questions involved making a sober estimate of the stage socialism has reached in a particular country. A common mistake in the international communist movement is to overestimate the maturity of socialism in one's own country, which results in the error of overstepping historical conditions. After a long period of practice and exploration, China began to have a clear understanding of its national conditions in the primary stage of socialism, found its correct position in the long process of socialist development and formulated the basic line of "one central task, two basic points" and a full set of principles and policies.

Second, the theory of scientific socialism must develop with the development of practice and science.

Tremendous changes have taken place over the more than one hundred years since the appearance of the theory of scientific socialism, and especially in recent decades the violence and depth of these changes have been beyond man's imagination. Deng Xiaoping said, "The World changes every day, and modern science and technology in particular develop rapidly. A year today is the equivalent of several decades, a century or even a longer period in ancient times. Anyone who fails to carry Marxism forward with new thinking and a new view point is not a true Marxist."[\[xix\]](#) We cannot expect Marx to provide a ready solution to the problems arising a hundred years or more after his death. A true Marxist, while adhering to the cardinal principles of Marxism, must advance new theories to solve new problems in accordance with the changing times and new situations and tasks. Deng Xiaoping theory, as Marxism in contemporary China, did not denounce the basic tenets of Marxism, but offered many new propositions which were strange to Marxism yet conformed to current realities, for example: Revolution means the emancipation of productive forces, as does reform, reform is the Second revolution in China; Science and technology are productive forces and the primary productive forces, economic development must rely on science, technology and education; A planned economy does not equate with socialism, a market economy does not equate with capitalism, and a market economy can be practiced under socialism; The modern world is an open world, China cannot develop without the rest of the world, and opening to the outside world is one of China's basic national policies. Deng also observed the world from a Marxist perspective and made correct analyses of the epochal characteristics of our times and the general international situation, the successes and failures of other socialist countries, the gains and losses of the developing countries during their development drive, and the configuration and

contradictions of the growth of the developed countries. On the basis of these analyses Deng Xiaoping made a series of a scientific judgments. In short, Deng Xiaoping theory is creative Marxism and his great vitality. On the solid basis of new practice, it inherited the fine tradition of Marxism, broke with outmoded conventions and opened up a new realm of Marxism.

IV. The Most Important Thing Is to Make Clear What Socialism Is and How It is to be Constructed

The key to adhering to Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism or, in other words, adhering to the ideological line of seeking truth from facts, is to make clear what socialism is and how it is to be constructed. This is a question of prime importance confronting socialism in contemporary times. After summing up the historical experience of the victories and setbacks of socialism in China, and learning from the practices in other socialist countries. Deng Xiaoping gave a scientific answer to this question, thereby raising the understanding of socialism to a new level.

Firstly, neither poverty nor slow development is socialism, the fundamental task of socialism is to develop productive forces.

Marx and Engels pointed out in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that after seizing political power and wresting capital from the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must “increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.”^[xx] As a matter of fact, socialism in all countries is built on the foundation of less developed productive forces, and poverty is its unfavorable starting point. The fundamental task in practicing socialism should therefore be to eradicate poverty. However, for a very long time we ignored the most important task and took class struggle as the key link in all our work. Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four”^[xxi] even fallaciously put forward the slogan: “Poor socialism is better than prosperous capitalism.” This not only obscured the fundamental task of socialism, but also discredited its image. In view of these mistaken ideas Deng Xiaoping pointed out that, “The fundamental task for the socialist stage is to develop the productive forces. The superiority of the socialist system is demonstrated, in the final analysis, by faster and greater development of those forces than under the capitalist system. As they develop, the people’s material and cultural life will constantly improve.”^[xxii] In order to fulfil this fundamental task in all the work of the Party and the state we must always take economic construction as the pivot. Deng Xiaoping emphasized that, “Since our modernisation program covers many fields, it calls for an overall balance and we cannot stress one to the neglect of the others. But when all is said and done, economic development is the pivot. Any

deviation from this pivotal task endangers our material base. All other tasks must revolve around the pivot and must absolutely not interfere with or upset it.”[\[xxiii\]](#) The key to the development of productive forces and the realisation of modernisation is science and education. Comrade Deng Xiaoping repeatedly stressed that, “The key to achieving modernisation is the development of science and technology. And unless we pay special attention to education, it will be impossible to develop science and technology. Empty talk will get our modernisation nowhere; we must have knowledge and trained personnel.”[\[xxiv\]](#) Deng Xiaoping watched the rapid development of modern science and technology and the resultant tremendous social changes closely, and, based on his profound understanding of modern productive forces, proposed in clear terms that, “Science and technology constitute a primary productive force.”[\[xxv\]](#)

Secondly, neither egalitarianism nor polarization are socialism – the ultimate goal of socialism is common prosperity. However, common prosperity does not mean prosperity for all at the same time; some people and some areas should be allowed to get rich first.

In view of the long-standing egalitarian conceptions and policies, Deng Xiaoping emphasized that we should first break free of egalitarianism and allow some areas, some enterprises and some workers and farmers to get rich first. He pointed out that, “We keep to the socialist road in order to attain the ultimate goal of common prosperity, but it is impossible for all regions to develop at the same pace. We were used to egalitarianism, with everyone ‘eating from the same big pot.’ In fact, that practice meant common backwardness and poverty, which caused us much suffering. The reform is designed, first and foremost, to break with egalitarianism, with the practice of having everyone ‘eating from the same big pot.’ It seems to me that we are taking the right path.”[\[xxvi\]](#) This major policy recognises the difference between areas, enterprise and people, requires of the people honest labour and legal operations, takes common prosperity as the ultimate goal, and embodies the principle of giving priority of efficiency with due consideration to equity. Encouraging some areas and people to get rich first is aimed at pushing more and more people onto the road to becoming rich and towards the goal of common prosperity. Deng Xiaoping pointed out that, “The greatest superiority of socialism is that it enables all the people to prosper, and common prosperity is the essence of socialism. If polarization occurred, things would be different. The contradictions between various ethnic groups, regions and classes would become sharper and accordingly, the contradictions between the central and local authorities would also be intensified. That would lead to disturbances.”[\[xxvii\]](#) The great difference between people’s incomes during the process of allowing some people to get rich first should be tackled conscientiously and needs careful and skilful handling. Legal high incomes should be allowed and

protected, but at the same time necessary regulatory measures must be imposed. Sudden huge profits acquired illegally must be disposed of according to law. In short, in handling the relationship between getting rich first, getting rich later and common prosperity, we must take into account the overall situation and in no circumstances adopt the “Leftist” policy of robbing the rich to give to the poor. The important thing is to bring every positive factor into play and do everything possible to develop our economy and increase the aggregate national value of production, while at the same time introducing regulatory distribution and tax policies to ensure social equity and the realisation of the ultimate goal of common prosperity.

Thirdly, a planned economy does not necessarily mean practicing socialism and a market economy does not necessarily mean practicing capitalism, a market economy can be practiced under socialism.

For a long time in the past, both the Marxist and the Western bourgeois economist considered a planned economy to be the essence of socialism and a market economy as the basic feature of capitalism. This conception shackled the people. Deng Xiaoping resolutely refuted this view. He repeatedly emphasized that, “There is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy.”[\[xxviii\]](#) We must understand theoretically that the difference between capitalism and socialism is not a market economy as opposed to a planned economy. Socialism has regulation by market forces, and capitalism has control through planning.”[\[xxix\]](#) “Planning and regulation by the market are both means of controlling economic activity, and the market can also serve socialism.”[\[xxx\]](#) Deng Xiaoping’s advocacy of practicing a market economy under socialism was evidence that he always looked at things from the perspective of the development of productive forces. The essence of economic restructuring is market reorientation. One of the drawbacks of the traditional planned economy was its exclusion of and restrictions on market mechanisms, as Deng Xiaoping pointed out, “One way in which socialism is superior to capitalism is that under socialism the people of the whole country can work as one and concentrate their strength on key projects. A shortcoming of socialism is that the market is not put to best use and the economy is too rigid.”[\[xxxi\]](#) By reform we mean invigorating the economy, putting the market to best use, and having an orientation towards the market. Deng Xiaoping scientifically pointed out the compatibility of socialism and a market economy, and thereby laid the solid theoretical foundation for establishing the socialist market economy in China.

Fourthly, the essence of socialism is liberation and development of productive forces, elimination of exploitation and polarization, and the ultimate achievement of prosperity for all.

Based on his understanding of the development of productive forces as the fundamental task of socialism, common prosperity as the ultimate goal and a market economy as a means of socialist economic construction. Deng Xiaoping gradually came to have a firm grasp of the essence of socialism. As early as May 1980 he raised the question of “the essence of socialism.” He pointed out that, “Socialism is a very good term. However, if we do not do a good job of it, if we do not have a comprehensive understanding of it and adopt correct policies, its essence will not be given full play.”[\[xxxii\]](#) He later further expounded the essence of socialism from the two aspects of invigorating the economy and common prosperity. He said, “An invigorated domestic economy will help promote socialism without affecting its essence.”[\[xxxiii\]](#) “The greatest superiority of socialism is that it enables all the people, and common prosperity is the essence of socialism.”[\[xxxiv\]](#) In his discussion aimed at clarifying the confusions felt by some over the questions of socialism or capitalism during his inspection of the southern province at the beginning of 1992, Deng Xiaoping epitomised the essence of socialism. “The essence of socialism is liberation and development of the productive forces, elimination of exploitation and polarization and the ultimate achievement of prosperity for all.”[\[xxxv\]](#) This inference enriched and developed the Marxist theory of socialism, and brought to light the inherent relationships between the various specific features of socialism, pointed out the direction of development and the primary task of socialism, and expounded its main functions and values, thus raising our understanding of socialism to a new level. This inference unified productive forces and the relations of production, the development and emancipation of productive forces, and the goals and methods required, thereby overcoming the earlier limitations of a biased emphasis on relations of production and on the ultimate goal of communism to the neglect of the emancipation of productive forces and the practical means of achieving these goals. This inference also cast aside the traditional socialist economic theory that a planned economy was the basic feature of the socialist economic system, which had been demonstrated to be wrong in practice, and helped the further deepening of our understanding of socialism.

Fifthly, without democracy there would be no socialism or socialist modernisation, and democracy is an important political feature of socialism.

In view of the wanton, violation of democracy and the legal system during the “cultural revolution,” Deng Xiaoping pointed out that, “Without democracy there can be no socialism and no socialist modernisation.”[\[xxxvi\]](#) Focusing on the malfeasant ways the “cultural revolution” was operated, he added, “It is true that errors we made in the past were partly attributable to the way of thinking and style of work of some leaders. But they were even more attributable to the

problems in our organisational and working system. If these systems are sound, they can place restraints on the actions of bad people; if they are unsound, they may hamper the efforts of good people or indeed, in certain cases, may push them in the wrong direction." I do not mean that the individuals concerned should not bear their share of responsibility, but rather that the problems in the leadership and organisational systems are more fundamental, widespread and long-lasting, and that they have a greater effect on the overall interests of our country. This is a question that has a close bearing on whether our Party and state will change political color and should therefore command the attention of the entire Party."[\[xxxvii\]](#) Deng therefore maintained that "Democracy has to be institutionalised and written into law, so as to make sure that institutions and laws do not change whenever the leadership changes, or whenever the leaders change their views or shift the focus of their attention."[\[xxxviii\]](#) "Alongside the expansion of our productive forces, we should also reform and improve our socialist economic and political structures, build a highly-developed socialist democracy and perfect the socialist legal system."[\[xxxix\]](#) By improving the legal system we mean that in every aspect of national political, economic and social life, and at every link of democracy and dictatorship, there should be laws to follow, that these laws will be observed and strictly enforced, and law-breakers prosecuted.

Sixthly, there must be a high level of ideological and ethical progress, which is a feature of socialist ideology and culture.

Deng Xiaoping pointed out as early as 1979 that, "While working for a socialist civilization which is materially advanced, we should build one which is culturally and ideologically advanced by raising the scientific and cultural level of the whole nation and promoting a rich and diversified cultural life inspired of high ideal."[\[xl\]](#) Developing socialist ideological and ethical progress is not an issue that involved only a local area, but is a matter of overall importance for building socialism. In terms of the basic theory of socialism, the socialist society will be one in which there is all-round economic, political and cultural development. Ideological and ethical progress is an important cultural feature of a socialist society and one aspect of the superiority of socialism over capitalism. In terms of the goals of modernization established by the Party's basic line, economic development, political democracy and ideological and ethical progress form an organic whole. Ideological and ethical progress is not only an integral part of the general objective, but also an ideological guarantee for providing the whole modernization drive with motive force, intellectual support and a correct direction. Deng Xiaoping therefore emphasized that we must firmly grasp two links at the same time, that is, achieving material progress and simultaneously fostering ideological and ethical progress.

Seventhly, we must construct socialism through reform and opening-up and the policy of reform and opening-up has a most important bearing on the destiny of the nation.

Engels said in his letter to Otto von Boenigk, "To my mind, the so-called socialist society, is not anything immutable. Like all other social formations, it should be conceived in a state of constant flux and change."[\[xli\]](#) Stalin believed that in socialist society the relations of production and productive forces, the superstructure and the economic base were "perfectly in harmony," and that moral and political unity was the motive force for the development of socialist society. Ideas that denied the existence in socialist society of contradictions between productive forces and the relations of production, and between the economic base and the superstructure, inevitably led to the denial of the need for reform of socialism, and thus ossified the economic and political systems. In contrast, Deng Xiaoping attached primary importance to reform and opening-up and saw them as the most important aspects in practice and the most noticeable features in the new era. He emphasized that China must carry out a policy of reform: "There is no other solution for us."[\[xlii\]](#) "Economy reform is the only way to develop productive forces."[\[xliii\]](#) "Reform is China's second revolution."[\[xliv\]](#) He also proposed criteria for judging specific policies and measures. He said, "The chief criterion for making that judgement should be whether it promotes the growth of the productive forces in a socialist society, increases the overall strength of the socialist state and raises living standards."[\[xlv\]](#) Opening-up is also reform. Deng Xiaoping pointed out that the world now is open, and China's development cannot be achieved without the rest of the world. He elaborated on the great importance of reform and opening-up for the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and said, "If we want socialism to achieve superiority over capitalism, we should not hesitate to draw on the achievements of all cultures and to learn from all other countries, including the developed capitalist countries, all advanced methods and operation and techniques of management that reflect the laws governing modern socialized production."[\[xlvi\]](#) Deng saw opening to the outside world as a vital link in attaining the grand goal of socialist modernization in China. He pointed out during a discussion on quadrupling the GNP by the end of the century and longer-term objectives that, "we shall not be able to reach this new target without the policy of opening to the outside world.....If we don't open to the outside world, it will be difficult to quadruple the GNP and even more difficult to make further progress after that. Foreigners worry that our open policy might change. I have said that it will not change. I have told them that our first target covers the period between now and the end of the century and that we have a second target to attain within another 30 to 50 years, may be longer, but say 50 years - in which the open policy will remain

indispensable."[\[xlvi\]](#) Under his leadership and guidance the CPC formulated the basic principles and policies of opening to the outside world, and arrangements for China's opening to the outside world in an all-round way have subsequently been made.

Eighthly, in building socialism it is essential to uphold and improve the leadership of the CPC.

One of the important lessons learned from the dramatic changes that took place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is that the leadership of the Communist Party should not be discarded. In the new period of socialist construction, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly stressed the importance of strengthening the Party's leadership. He said, "In the final analysis, without party leadership, it would be impossible to achieve anything in contemporary China."[\[xlviii\]](#) The great achievements in China since the reform and opening-up were all scored under the leadership of the Communist Party. "China and China's drive for socialist modernization" he said, "must be led by the Communist Party. This is an unshakable principle."[\[xlix\]](#) At the same time, he also stressed that in order to strengthen the Party's leadership it is necessary first to improve it. Under new conditions and confronted by the new tasks, the Party should study new situations and problems in a spirit of reform, and improve its methods and style of work and its ways of conducting activities. Deng Xiaoping pointed out that, "In order to uphold Party leadership, we must strive to improve it."[\[l\]](#) "To improve Party leadership, it is necessary to improve its present state and the system under which it functions, in addition to making changes in the Party's organisation."[\[li\]](#) In accordance with the new historical conditions. Deng Xiaoping proposed the objective of building the party: "Our Party will become a militant Marxist party, a powerful central force leading the people throughout the country in their efforts to build a socialist society that is advanced materially and ethically."[\[lii\]](#)

In short, the realization of socialism and communism is the greatest and most glorious cause, but also complex and arduous task. We can only blaze a path towards socialism and communism while struggling against various hostile forces and overcoming a variety of difficulties and obstacles. In view of the pessimism felt towards revolution by some people during the period of peaceful development of capitalism, in 1913, Lenin wrote an article titled the "*Historical Destiny of Marxist Doctrine*." In this article he analysed the development of Marxism since the appearance of *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and pointed out that each of the great periods of world history had brought a new understanding and triumphs for Marxism. He also predicted, "A still greater triumph awaits Marxism, as the doctrine of the proletariat, in the coming period of history."[\[liii\]](#) Later historical developments demonstrated the correctness of this prediction. Today, when the world socialist

movement is at a low ebb, the vigorous development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the East will surely bring about the rejuvenation of the socialist cause throughout the world. Under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping theory we will constantly show to the world through our practice that socialism has great vitality and an infinitely brighter future.

Translated by Jiang Yajuan and Zhang Hongyan from *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, 2000, no. 1

Revised by Yu Sheng and Su Xuetao

NOTES

[i] Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994), vol. III, p.370

[ii] Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1974), p. 174

[iii] Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), vol. 29, p. 103

[iv] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 370

[v] Ibid., pp. 222-223

[vi] K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983). Vol. 3, p. 482

[vii] Op. Cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 143

[viii] Ibid., p. 232

[ix] Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong zhhexue puzhu ji* (Collected Philosophical Notes of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Central Literature Press, 1988), pp. 106-107

[x] Mao Zedong, *Selected Works* (Beijing: Foreign Languages press, 1964), vol. 1, p. 315.

[xi] The central task is economic development, the two basic points are adherence to the `Four Cardinal Principles (keeping to the socialist road, upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought) and implementation of the reform and opening-up policy.

[xii] Op. cit., Mao Zedong, vol. III, p. 164

[xiii] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 164

[xiv] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow:

Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), vol. II, p. 128

[xv] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), vol. 5, p. 49

[xvi] Mao Zedong, *Collected Philosophical Notes*, pp. 311-312

[xvii] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 73

[xviii] Ibid., p. 285

[xix] Ibid., p. 284

[xx] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 59

[xxi] The "Gang of Four" refers to the conspiratorial clique during the "cultural revolution" headed by Jiang Qing (a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPC). The leading members were Zhang Chunqiao (a standing member of the Politburo of the Central Committee and Vice Premier of the State Council), Wang Hongwen (Vice Chairman of the Central Committee), and Yao Wenyan (a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee).

[xxii] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 73

[xxiii] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. II. P. 235

[xxiv] Ibid., Deng Xiaoping, vol. II, p. 53

[xxv] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 269

[xxvi] Ibid., p. 158

[xxvii] Ibid., p. 351

[xxviii] Ibid., p. 151

[xxix] Ibid., p. 351

[xxx] Ibid., p. 354

[xxxi] Ibid., p. 26

[xxxii] Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works* (Chinese edition) (Beijing: the People's Publishing House, 1993), vol. II, p. 313

[xxxiii] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 139

[xxxiv] Ibid., p. 351

[xxxv] Ibid., p. 361

[xxxvi] Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. II, p. 176

[xxxvii] Ibid., p. 316

[xxxviii] Ibid., pp.157-158

[xxxix] Ibid., p. 201

[xl] Ibid.

[\[xli\]](#) K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983, vol. 3, p. 485

[\[xlii\]](#) Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p. 235

[\[xliii\]](#) Ibid., p. 142

[\[xliv\]](#) Ibid., p.119

[\[xlv\]](#) Ibid., p. 360

[\[xlvi\]](#) Ibid., pp. 361-362

[\[xlvii\]](#) Ibid., p.96

[\[xlviii\]](#) Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. II. P. 251

[\[xlix\]](#) Ibid., p. 253

[\[l\]](#) Ibid.

[\[li\]](#) Ibid., pp. 254-255

[\[lii\]](#) Op.cit., Deng Xiaoping, vol. III, p.50

[\[liii\]](#) Op.cit., Lenin, vol. 18, p.585.