

THE CHANGES IN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT AND SOME EMPIRICAL RESULTS AFTER 20 YEARS OF RENEWALS

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1. Democracy in the discussion of Communist Party on the targets of renewals

In the revolution leadership, Communist Party of Vietnam always listed out big aims and targets for a long term as a strategic solution; at the same time, there are necessary to have short term targets as solutions to current issues. Discussing about targets, there are some considered as general targets which are used for whole revolution period, but some are for only one field as economy, culture, science, technology, security so on. The purpose of “having a prosperous people, strong country, democracy, fairness and civilization”, mentioned in legal documents of Communist Party, belong to the general target and for whole period until the country finishes its transition period and successfully build up a socialism.

Above targets are set up through studies and researches which have been done since the 6th Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee in 1986.

Legal documents of 6th Committee did not clarify this target. Democracy and fairness, however, were stressed in the policy of promoting the group ownership of labor and implementing the social fairness based on the practical conditions [3, 222, 226].

In 1991, the 7th CPV Central Committee approved the proposal on “Building country in the transition period to Socialism” in which the general target was to implement a prosperous people, strong country in a socialism pathway. Besides, the Proposal also offered an overview about the next socio – economic model which Vietnam should achieve once the transition completed. Until 1996, the 8th CPV Central Committee added two more targets about industrialization and modernization with the conclusion as “a prosperous people, strong country, fairness and civilization”. There were many opinions about the essence of adding “democracy” in the conclusion because it is both motivation

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and target of socialism. However, there were some ideas of not put this word in because they were afraid of Western people might use democracy to interrupt due to low level knowledge of public. This could lead to the political instability when mentioning about democracy too early. It was a delay in the addition of democracy in documents due to no agreement. However, Politburo issued Directive No. 30 – CT/TW on *Building and Implementing Grassroot Democratic Regulations* (1998) after some riot which affected to the Grassroot Democracy.

In 2001, the 9th CPV Central Committee was a perfect time to announce an independent statement with the big support: “The general target is the national democracy tied with socialism, with a prosperous people, strong country, fairness, democracy and civilization”. The 10th CPV Central Committee rewrote the target as “a prosperous people, strong country, fairness, democracy and civilization” in 2006. The general target was considered as a flag to gather whole public without differentiating social classes, religions, Vietnamese people inside or outside of country, those for or against the Revolution in the past, and Communist or Non - Communist. All will have the same benefits when implementing the general target of having “a prosperous people, strong country, fairness, democracy and civilization”. And for communists and those who support for Socialism, the only way to implement the above target is the pathway of building Socialism.

The 11th CPV Central Committee (2011) decided to re – arrange the targets in legal documents. “Democracy” was written in front of “fairness and civilization” because “democracy” is the pre conditions of “fairness” and “civilization”. Democracy is the determining factor to achieve fairness and civilization and it reflects how a country is strong and prosperous. The country will be strong and have fairness once democracy successfully reaches its real meaning as all eligible citizens participate equally.

2. Democratic Implementation: Theory and Practice

“*Democracy*” is the most sensitive target in the general target of development and renewals. It is necessary to have the mutal definition, clarify the concept and operating mechanism of socialism even there are still some conflicts and any difference from other countries? Also how to mechinizing the democracy promotion and implementation in Vietnam current social conditions?

While waiting for further clarification, following issues were pointed out during the reseaches and studies on theory and practice:

- The economic ans social ownership of citizens is ensured through the Regulation on “people know, people discuss, people do, people check” whis is being implemented in communes and towns. This is the direct democracy but this method is quite superficial in practice. “People satisfied” should be added in to achieve the real democracy.

- Completing and effectively operating the law – governed socialist state truly of people, by the people and for the people. This is a democratic model which operates through representatives of citizen such as National Assembly (legislature), government and local authority (law enforcement agencies), procuracy and court (judicial authority). In fact, there is still lack of the synchronization and collaboration between these three bodies.

- The Grassroot Democratic Regulations is about "people know, people discuss, people do, people check". It also regulates what people could know, could join in and could discuss. There are some opinions about the over democracy in a segment of public. It is the awareness of the democracy with its own limit in which public cannot violate. It is the relationship between governmental officials with public, as well as state with citizen. There is a two – sided limitation: It is the surplus in disciplines but shortage in democracy; On the other hand, it seems having too much democracy but lacking of discipline.

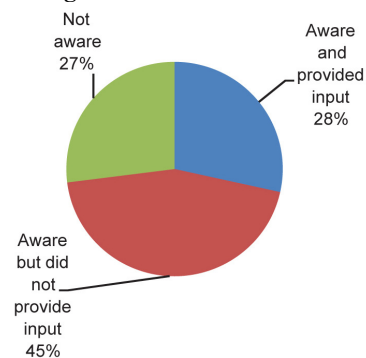
- Some provinces had done surveys on democracy target to get the multi – dimensional evaluation from public. This target has been done quite well in recent years. Old citizen and veterans evaluated the current democracy is balanced, else it might be in over – democratic status and make the country lack of discipline.

There are some positive signs of improving and effectively implementing democracy: Government no longer

decides by themselves on significant issues of nation and citizen. Public now has impacts on the decisions, for example, they join in reviewing projects as the high speed railway, forest for rent, bauxite exploration so on. Public and social organizations now even sue governmental offices if they are violated the citizen rights. A Hochiminh officer sued the transportation sector for affecting his business by blockhouse. Bình Chánh province's people sued electricity industry or Quảng Nam's people sued the hydropower for flood dischargement. Most recent lawsuit is the Procucracy of Buôn Ma Thuột city apologized for a wrong sentence of cheating to appropriation of property.

However, the low level of public's knowledge has become a barrier against the practice of people know, people discuss, and people check. In fact, public do not totally trust in their own ability to join in these issues. In general, public is still afraid of stating or commenting on governmental officials' inappropriate actions.

Public's Participation in Making Decisions and Supervising The Local Infrastructures



Source: World Bank (2009), *Vietnam Development Report 2010 – Modern Institutions*, page 5.

Below figure is the result of survey on public's participation in making decisions and supervising the local infrastructures:

Almost half of answers were they understood but did not give any comments (45%), and 27% of them did not understand at all. This rate shows that two third of people, who joined in the survey, did not take the survey seriously. Only 28% of people commented and it seems so hard to receive feedback from public because most of them understood the issue but stayed silent.

There was another survey on raising opinions to organizations or individuals who are in charged of a social issues. The result ^(*) give the very low rate of people who commented to relevant organizations or individuals as national assembly's representatives, delegates of people assembly, judicial officials, media and press, social and political organizations, etc. The percentage of public who gave their opinion through national assembly representative is also very low, only 2.3% while it is 12.4% for those who raised their own opinions through delegates of people assembly. Not up to one fourth commented or discussed any idea with People Committee at all levels. One remarkable point for media and press is there is only 1.8% of people raised viewpoints to this

^(*) The data and perspectives discussed in the article has been compiled from the survey results, evaluation of 5 renewal goals of the State level project *Growth Theory of Vietnam in Hochiminh times and its application in the early of the 21st century*, held by The Central Theoretical Council in period 2008-2013.

department and 11% used to send their concerns through Communist Party's organizations. It seems to have barriers for people to raise or discuss about their concerns with related departments or individuals. Local officials also admitted that people fear of mentioning to governmental officials, as a result, they did not give any comments. As long as public do not willing to give their ideas to related organizations and individuals, the democracy will not be completely achieved. Moreover, once public is not ready, social issues of social management and development will not be properly solved.

There is up to 40% of those who never had any suggestions to any organizations or individuals. And among of them, 80% actually do not have any concerns while 6.1% do have concerns but did not know to raise with who. 6.4% thinks that their concerns will not be solved. A small group (2.9%) admitted that they fear of being suppressed or scandals. It is an open question for public supporting team (job) because people do not willing to say their ideas. Does it show that people do not trust much in the related departments or officials ability to have solution to these issues?^{*)}

Another result showed that 95.4% has voted in the last election by themselves while only 1.5% did not join in the election and 3.1% asked others to vote instead. Basically, public spent time on studying about the one they might vote for.

Above behaviours asks us to think about the situation in which officials and public have talks and discussions. It

proved that public cared of who will be voted by themselves. However, it also pointed out a fact that public is not ready to raise their opinions to related departments. The figure of 95.4% also pictures us the quite popular situation on press or internet about elections.

Once again, it is necessary to take a serious look about the ability of organizations and individuals to receive and response to public's opinions. As long as public do not have good evaluation, there is not real democracy.

Following is some opinions in the talks between officials and public:

- Must strongly implement the democracy because it is the foundation of social equality.
- Must create more freedom for press. Also, media need to have feedback to avoid the one way situation.
- Administrative procedures simplification is an important solution to implement democracy. The more complicated procedure is, the more trouble public has to face with.
- Require more communication between public and local authority as a method to improve grassroot democracy.

Local officials dicussed about the over – democratic situation in society when some people use democracy as an excuse for asking local authority to solve their issues. Puclic sometime do not respect governmental officials or regulations of the country.

Researchers have done the analysis from two perspectives. *Firstly*, if they are legal requirements from public so

officials should respect them instead of considering as “over – democratic” actions. Once these requirements are appropriate, they will be the positive signals of democracy implementation. Democracy impleemntation does not only include such things as giving, offering or listening to others. It is the ability to get, to perform the onwer rights, to speak or complain so that they can protect theri own people's rights. The “over – democratic” situtation could be the signals of a social life with public's higher knowledge as people acknowledge their benefits and obligations described in legal documents. Some officials did not work as their responsibilitities and negatively affect public's benefits so people would strongly show theri feedback. *Secondly*, in other words, if those behaviors are againts officials who are on duty so that behaviour is considered as violating the law. As a result, it should not be a signal of social life but is a mistake in the standard democracy. It is very difficult to determine whether a democratic society is with or without any official criticism. In order to achieve the democracy, it is necessary to expand the depth of democratization, especciall democracy in Communist Party [2].

Diversification of social organizations will help to gather more feedback from public. According to professional people, this progress will increase the participation of public in social and political activities as well as fulfill the response through representative offices. The diversification of non – profit social organizations not only reflects the

expectation of public, but also supports solutions which are useful and benefits for the country, for nation, and even for leaders and management.

Today, people tend to more willingly to join in activities, therefore, there are more organizations or communities established. Consequently, it asked for a higher capability of social management. The current management does not facilitate individuals and groups to establish and operating as organizations in Vietnam. Local management realized this problem but solution is not efficient. In order to create a free space for democratic society, the improvement in mechanism which is related to organization establishment is required.

Following is about the regulations on "People know, people discuss, people do, people check". In practice, there are many limitations for provinces when most of projects or social activities only give information for public. People can only discuss or do in projects relating to build cultural centers or road making... People checking is not implemented much in most of provinces. There are some comments on implementing this slogan at all level but not completely, especially the part of checking by people. People is actually allowed to check but do not know what the checking is for. For instance, if checking whether a road is built as the technical standard agreed in the contract, the checker is required to have knowledge and ability to supervise whole process. But it is very difficult to operate like above example cause the lack of capabilities is a reality. The

method should be processed in different way. For example, we would accept any people who has better ability to check and stand for public. It does not need to limit only people located in that specific region if they do not have ability. Therefore, democracy implementation requires the changes in both approaching method and operating ways as well as human factor. Besides, some managers think that public cannot check all projects because of incapability and this will waste time and negatively impacts those who are on duties.

Domestic press do not have the real freedom when they cannot give a strong criticism to society. According to professional, a low trusted society is unhealthy. Press needs more freedom to create a better ventilation and exchange information to reflect society's thoughts. When discussing about freedom in speech, one question is about what is against the freedom? Are they technology or official/ unofficial and tangible/intangible regulations? The technical limitation can be improved but those regulations, especially unofficial and intangible ones, are real barriers against the freedom of speech.

3. Issues of the innovative thinking – theory and practice of democracy implementation

Innovative thinking is a long and complicated progress and it becomes harder when applying the innovative thinking in policies and practice. After 15 years of renewals (1986-2001), new democratic values have finally been in the Resolution of Vietnam Communist

Party. There is a gap between rationalists, leaders, managements, and the determination of resolution with life practice. As a result, the expectation of the democracy implementation and its implementation in social life require the empirical evidence and to be accepted by public – direct beneficiary.

The practice of grassroots democracy implementation in the renewals has given some following suggestions:

Behaviors are diversified and depend on how social management look at it and how democratic social life is regulated? People has freedom and are not suppressed so people is clearly the owner of country. In new times, the requirement of releasing human ability and promoting the creativity have become urgent due to the fast growth of science and technology. For human growth and creativity promotion, society needs to have open, exciting and straightforward discussions. New viewpoints of a democratic life mean that increasing the communication, even they are criticism to managers or leaders. Communication and arguments will promote the open, transparent and responsible of all roles in society.

It is hard for a society to achieve the completed democracy when there is none or with only few of official responses. It will not be a real democratic life as long as public do not have trust in government's listening to their comments. Improve the impacts of those comments by public on local authority and promote the participation

of public are necessary to achieve the democracy. But barriers, for example, low level of knowledge, have become the concern on letting public join in such processes as checking or supervising. There are many ways to promote the democracy such as increasing the responsibilities of leaders or management in explaining issues to public, more authorization to lower level of management and improving public's and management's knowledge as one of the vital methods. This could be done through increasing quality of education and training together with resource empowerment.

According to local and center researchers, it is essential to improve the power of social life. Public's participation will help to protect both public and management's comments and ideas. Organizations as NGOs, NPOs also take part in solving poverty, sponsor weak groups as well as protect the public rights.

The ability of governmental offices, staffer and groups in receiving responses and feedback from public should be reconsidered when public is not ready to show their opinions yet.

Although scientific research works have tried to analyze and evaluate social phenomena and events but the critical scientific is not enough and still limited to sensitive issues. It seems to be a delay of social science and did not contribute much to social reformation if people still have to worry about issues related to Communist Party's political ideology.

The current issue is: Discussions on how to effectively and possibly democratize are required. It could be the increase of supervising role of National Assembly and such questions as What is power extent of National Assembly and what is power extent of public? How to increase the quality of report done by Vietnamese – Fatherland Front and social groups?

However all public should not only wait for changes from government because there is no leader willingly resign from their roles. Democracy will be achieved through fighting but not breaking the social order and stability. It is the question which we are trying to look for the answer because it is unacceptable to stay inside a fake stability which slows down the building of new democracy. Improving the communication between public and local authority is one of ways to promote the real grassroot democracy. Press should have more freedom and they should be able to criticize by themselves to avoid the one way situation. Simplifying administrative procedures is also an important method. Facilitating for organizations, groups, NGOs, NPOs, private organizations to show up and participate in the social life □

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