

Zheng Bijin

(State Creative and Development Strategic Study Seminar; Vice President, Central Party School)

THE MASS LINE IN THE NEW STAGE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

27 June 2017

*[The slogan for the mass line, dating from the Mao period, is “From the masses, to the masses.” The idea was that the Party would consult the “masses” to find out their desires and discontents, then formulate an appropriate policy, and then conduct propaganda to convince those masses of the correctness of the policy formulated. “Masses” refers to ordinary people, but more technically to those who are not cadres, that is, in leadership positions. This document takes note that China’s rapid economic development has brought about social changes requiring a new approach: that the masses of today are not the masses of a generation ago. The author, echoing the ever more exalted leader Xi Jinping, is fond of general references to “the people,” considered as a unified, undifferentiated bloc that accepts Party leadership, and the author does not, as others might, refer back to the Maoist notion of “contradictions among the people,” that is, differences of condition, interest, and outlook among those who are ruled—a concept that perhaps has considerably more relevance today than it did in pre-reform times. Thus, the author notes that “intellectuals” (those with some education, whose work demands more technical and interpersonal ability than it does physical strength and stamina) have become ever more influential in the “working class,” whereas peasants have increasingly become part of the great migrant stream living precarious, semi-legal*

*lives in the cities. These two groups obviously have great differences of interest, and the Party is hard-put to formulate policies that satisfy both. The newer emphasis is to identify a more complex, more greatly differentiated system of interests among the general population, although the original version certainly did not neglect the tensions among the desires of the ruled.*

*The author also notes, implicitly, that the internet, while allowing greater scope for communication in society, also complicates issues of social control. He worries in effect that a completely free internet will become a tool for China's enemies (implicitly, the Americans) to subvert the political system, and so argues for the need for the Party to "manage the internet well for the people."*

*The mass line has a certain democratic tinge to it, but it is clearly a technique for the rulers to impose their will on society, not a channel for the articulation of demands in society against the rulers. The final section of this document expatiates on the need for internal discipline within the Party, so that it remains both connected with what is going on in the wider world and sufficiently cohesive to maintain its overall control.]*

**The Party is leading the people in opening a new stage of reform and opening.**

We are very near the 96<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China [July 1]. This year the CPC will convene its 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress. This will summarize the great practice and creative theories in governing the country and rationalizing government since the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, under the leadership of the Party Center with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core. It will go a step further in upholding the principle of "keeping the people at the center," mobilizing the entire Party and the people of the entire country not to forget their original aspirations, to continue to advance in

order to realize the fighting goal of “two centuries” (两个一百年),<sup>1</sup> fighting for the China dream of the great revival of the Chinese nation.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress the CPC has stood on the verge of a new historical beginning, putting strenuous effort into regulating the Party, the country, and the army, including active participation in global governance, leading the Chinese people in opening a new stage in the era of reform and opening.

This new stage has rich substance in economic, political, cultural, social, and environmental construction. This includes without the slightest doubt some “hard logic” in order to propel the productivity of the Chinese people to unprecedentedly high levels of development and creativity. It must be said that giving prominence to this productivity, to this unprecedentedly high level of development and productivity by the Chinese people, is the firmest foundation for the realization of the Chinese dream. It is by this that we must measure our work, examine shortcomings, and promote all aspects of developing the enterprise of socialist development with Chinese characteristics. This is what is called the “standard of productivity.” As Comrade Xi Jinping has clearly pointed out, “The basic task of socialism is to liberate and develop productivity. In the all-around deepening of reform, the key strategic decision in solving all of our country’s problems is in persisting in developing productivity.” He also pointed out, “Make whether or not something promotes economic development and whether or not it is truly felt by the popular masses as a gain as the standard for evaluating reform and opening.”

---

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to goals set out in Xi Jinping’s speech to the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress. The first century refers to that following the founding of the Party—1921-2012; the second to that following the founding of the state—1949-2049.

Marxism puts the greatest stress on productivity; but in productivity, it is man that is the most vital, most active factor. In the long practice of revolution and construction, the CPC has developed this basic concept into a rich and concrete content permeating all work, under the name of the “mass line.” It is from this decision that in the theory and practice of the CPC the standard of productivity and the mass line are not two different things, but are intimately related in an indivisible ideological weapon and work line.

Please look at the new developments obtained by the Party in all different areas since the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress. If we trace them to their root, is there anything other than the intimate linkage of the standard of productivity with the mass line? On the one hand, Comrade Xi Jinping often stresses: “Examine all of our achievements: the most important thing is whether or not whether the people have obtained genuine benefits. Has there or has there not been a real improvement in the people’s lives?” On another hand, he has sharply pointed out at a work conference on education in the Party’s mass line: “Formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance, these ‘four winds,’ are a violation of our Party’s nature and directives; they are a hateful pain to the people, a reflection of our most severe problems; they are also a main source of the harm done to the relations between the Party cadres and the masses.” Ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, we have undertaken mass line educational activities in order to purify our work with the masses, providing the broad mass of Party members and cadres a profound education in the Marxist mass line, strengthening the Party’s self-awareness and determination in implementing the mass line. The Party’s governing basis has become even more stable. At the same time, productivity and creativity have developed, providing an ever newer capacity for economic and social development. Today our ability in the new conditions of

economic development thoroughly to carry through creative, cooperative, green, open, mutually beneficial development concepts, to suggest and implement proposals for structural reform, to smash through all obstacles to social and economic development, to be able to advance in conditions of stability, if we get to the root of it, all this depends on uniting the standard of productivity intimately with the mass line.

### **The mass line in the new stage and the “new masses”**

Today we talk about a “new stage,” a “standard for productivity in the new stage,” a “mass line for the new stage.” But there is a deeper question: that is, we need to talk clearly about how there has been a historical change in the “masses” themselves.

The facts are like this: in today’s new historical conditions, our Party not only faces the gigantic duty of reform and opening, but also faces the “masses of a new age” and a “new age of the masses.”

The facts are these: Ever since reform and opening, in the process of making gigantic strides in the task of socialism with Chinese conditions, going along with our tasks of modernization, especially the development of a socialist market economy have come broad and profound changes in the social structure.

First of all there is our class basis—there has been a huge change in the rank and file of China’s working class. Intellectuals have become an ever more important component of the working class. There have been rapid advances in the intellectualization of the working class. Several hundred millions of peasant workers have entered the ranks of the working class. The working class has grown rapidly in numbers. A great number of workers in state enterprises have transferred into private firms and the vitality of the multi-ownership economy has advanced. In response a working class suited to the

construction of socialist modernization is in the process of taking shape. It is because of this that the divergence of welfare demands within the working class is constantly widening. What is especially worthy of mention is the “Program on the Construction of Reform of the Ranks of Production Workers” recently stipulated and implemented by the Center. It contains special plans and arrangements concerning the prominent problems of the ranks of production workers. This is a historical first for our Party and state.

Next is the question of our broadest mass base—the ranks of China’s peasant class has undergone even greater changes. Given the disagreements concerning rural land ownership rights, contract rights, and management rights, along with the transformation of management rights in the course of reform, a great number of new peasants are caught between countryside and city, and there has been migration into all large cities. In the countryside there are a large number of great farming households and modern agricultural laborers. They have become the representatives of the advanced forces in the countryside and in agriculture. As for the several hundred million impoverished rural population, they are receiving the close welfare support of the Party while at the same time learning advanced agricultural techniques. In the future they will become an important force in building a modernized countryside and agriculture.

In addition, in the long-term process of reform and opening, there have been enormous transformations in all the new social strata, including those engaged in private enterprise. Their role in the modernization of China will become increasingly prominent. Especially following the swift and fierce emergence of the new economy of electronic commerce, a large cohort of young entrepreneurs are becoming a new generation of builders.

Given all of this, things are not only very different from the period before reform and opening; they are also very different from the early period of reform and opening. We can even say things are very different from five years ago. That is to say, that when we speak of the mass line, we must see that today the masses we face are the “masses of a new age.”

The new youth since the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s will create a “new masses for a new age.” Today they are the great army of our industrial production, of our agriculture, of our science and technology, of our education, of our education, of our culture, a great creative army, a great productive army on the network. In the next 10 or 20 years, from a productive force they will develop into the main force. They are not only fresh and lively, but are strongly independent in thought, full of creative spirit; they are the great productive force for bringing about the fighting goal of the “two centuries,” the China dream of the great renewal of the Chinese nation. They represent the future of China.

In terms of what we now face, this is the problem: We need to face the “new masses for a new age” the new youth of the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s. Are we capable of renovating our concept of the masses? Is our mass work able to advance with the times? There is no doubt that the answer is in the affirmative. The CPC is a Marxist governing party with a long experience of self-aware leadership of the masses and of advancing with the realities of the times. The Party’s mass line and mass line work is sure to develop in the course of new practice; it will surely become under the conditions of the new age a way to the reliable mobilization of the broadest masses, including the masses of the new youth, into a new vision, a new milestone, a new level, new learning, new structure.

In a word, we must learn how to do mass line work among the “masses of a new age” and in an “age of the new masses,” forming a mass line for the new stage.

**The mass line for a new stage and the “new weaponry.”**

The Chinese nation has come to a period of peaceful rise. It is also in the midst of an information revolution in which things are never the same from one day to the next. The internet has become a “new space” for the broad masses, especially the youthful masses, a space they are unwilling to leave. At the same time it has become a “new weapon” for the Party in implementing and carrying out the mass line. This is a major characteristic of the new stage in the mass line that is impossible to ignore.

The appearance of the internet was not only a profound revolution in the fields of science and technology, but also the embodiment of a new awareness in human civilization. It is a sign that human civilization has entered into a wholly new era. At the same time, the CPC, which holds power, clearly understands that in the internet there are “blue skies and clean air, a wholesome environment,” but also “filth and disease, a wretched environment,” those two aspects. This is the co-existence of opportunity and challenge. It is exactly for this reason that Comrade Xi Jinping has stressed that in internet work we must be sure to “place the people at the center,” which is to say we must uphold the mass line.”

First of all, the phrase “place the people at the center” indicates that China’s internet work has no other object [不姓别的: literally, “has no other surname”] but “the people.” But in the current international sphere whether the network will be an instrument of great power hegemony or an instrument of the people is a great question facing the world. Ever since the birth of the internet all the countries of the world have been exploring this path.



Some seek to control world public opinion; some even use the internet to interfere in the internal affairs of others, even using the internet as an instrument to overthrow others' sovereignty. In any case, all of this is a rejection of the internet's spirit of the age. The situation demands that we exercise a high degree of vigilance in building an internet with "the people at the center." We must sustain the internet as the great enterprise of the people; the network age is the age of the people. This is the world-view of us Chinese communists on the question of how to treat the development of the internet.

Therefore, the CPC's way of managing the internet is to manage it well for the people. The development of China's network work, speaking from the larger perspective, is to grasp the opportunity and march in step with the times and so bring about the great revival of the Chinese nation. From the smaller perspective, it is to enable an information service the people can use, do use, and use well, allowing the hundreds of millions of people successfully and with greater gains commonly to enjoy the use of the internet. It is especially because Comrade Xi Jinping is full of deep emotions for the broad people of the countryside that he particularly points out, "The weak point in our development of the base of the internet is the countryside." He demands "faster progress in the development of the internet in the rural areas; there should be an effective installation of internet access in the countryside." This shows China is solving the deficiencies in internet access in the countryside and also the world-wide problem of availability of bandwidth. From guidance concerning direction to concrete demands, everything is geared toward making the people happy. This is the value concept held by us Communists concerning the development of the internet.

Also, the internet is a great stage for social information, and also a great stage for public opinion. Hundreds of millions of netizens (网民) gain information from the net and exchange information. This is bound to have a great influence on their sources of knowledge, manner of thinking, and value concepts—especially on their ways of looking at the state, society, work, and manner of living. Moreover, just as Comrade Xi Jinping has said, the netizens for the most part are ordinary masses, coming from all four corners, each with his own experiences, concepts, and ways of thinking—a great and colorful variety. Among them there are bound to be this or that kind of perverse manner or evil talk and biased perspectives. So, then, how should this be treated? Comrade Xi Jinping has clearly pointed out: “Hyperspace is the spiritual garden of hundreds of millions of the popular masses;” “Netizens come from the common people; when the common people go on the net, public opinion also goes on the net.” Therefore, he demands that the leading cadres of Party and government organs at all levels must be good at using the internet to understand public opinion, mastering the ability to walk the mass line through the means of the internet. Most especially he stresses that there must be “more tolerance and patience” concerning the viewpoints and perspectives on the internet. “In order to achieve our goals, we must have a common mind, whether on the web or off it.” This is the internet mass line concept held by us Chinese Communists.

Finally, we must uphold the line of managing the internet with the people as the center. Not only is this for the sake of the people; we need as well to rely upon the people. Whether it is matter of developing the internet or of governing the internet, we must rely on the people. We must move from sole management of internet information to a condition of mutual cooperative governance. Comrade Xi Jinping has gone a step further

to point out: First, it is necessary to mobilize the activism of the people, including strengthening the commitment to and responsibility toward internet enterprises. Second, we must accept the supervision of the masses over the internet. Mass supervision and criticism, whether about Party and government work or about individual leading cadres, is not only a mild breeze and gentle rain, but also a matter of loyal words that grate upon the ears. This must be not merely welcomed but also sought out and absorbed.

**The role of the mass line in the new state in the self-strengthening of the CPC and of the new demands it places on the Party**

The most special characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the CPC. In order truly and effectively to strengthen, uphold, and implement Party leadership, it is necessary to follow the new thought and new strategy on ruling the state and rationalizing policy set out by the Party Center with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core. In each item of the work of socialism with Chinese characteristics, we must genuinely lead them broad masses of the people in common discussions, common creativity, common governance, common enjoyment.

Common discussion means that on all major issues of stable reform and development and on issues having to do with the actual direct interests of the masses, we must hold broad consultations within the people, earnestly striving for consensus.

Common construction means that the leadership must depend upon and link hands with the broad popular masses in building a pleasant and beautiful living environment for the people of all ethnicities.

Common creativity means we must encourage the broadest creativity and all manner of new ways of doing things. In order to do this we must provide a fine political environment and organizational environment, and conditions for public service.

Common governance means we must mobilize and depend upon the popular masses to unite the rule of law with the rule of virtue, effectively bring order to the state and society, effectively regulate the rivers, lakes, and seas, the atmosphere and the soil. At the same time, the Party and government and leading cadres at all levels must accept the supervision of the masses in a self-aware fashion.

Common enjoyment means participation by everyone, with everyone exerting effort, with everyone enjoying the same principles. The whole body of the people must have a sense of having gained in the process of development.

Going to the root of the matter, with the principle that everyone should participate, everyone should exert effort, everyone share in the enjoyment of the benefits, is the embodiment of the mass line in the new stage.

Having said all this, there is one point that must be stressed. The Party's mass line cannot be separated from the democratic centralism as the inner life of the Party. Ever since the Party's 18th Congress, a basic demand for the complete strict governance of the Party lies in closely linking the Party with the mass line, upholding and developing democratic centralism within the Party. Therefore, we must actively engage in criticism and self-criticism and at the same time be serious about Party discipline, upholding strict governance of the Party by means of law (including Party regulations and state laws pertaining to inner-Party affairs). Strengthening inner-Party supervision particularly means strengthening supervision over higher level cadres, upholding opposition to a

special privileges ideology and special privileges ideology, firmly opposing corruption. If we persist in this, we will definitely be able to purify the political atmosphere within the Party, truly build a political situation which is both centralized and democratic, with both discipline and freedom, with a united will and the opportunity for a comfortable and active individual life.

Getting to the root of things, on the one hand we must grasp an intimate relationship with the populist masses, giving prominence both to the mass line and democratic centralism, strengthening, embodying, and realizing them. In fact, at bottom within itself the mass line includes democratic centralism. The saying, “From the masses, to the masses,” this going back and forth, has as its central content nothing other than democratic centralism. Our Party has the experience of grasping with “two hands.” It is worth forever upholding this and ceaselessly developing it.

If we cast eyes on the world, in the international communist movement, the CPC has undergone a long period of revolutionary struggle to formulate the mass line. This is an unprecedentedly great creation. In the contemporary political stage, in the enterprise of building socialism with Chinese characteristics the CPC has upheld the mass line; it also has undertaken by new practice to more prominent heights; this is a creative and outstanding thing.

*People's Daily*, June 27 2017