



Historical Reflections on the Failure of Grassroots Governance in the Soviet Union

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Abstract. Through an in-depth investigation of the practice of grassroots governance in the Soviet Union, it can be found that there is a lack of leadership at the grassroots level, and party members lose their ideals and beliefs; There is a high degree of centralization of power and a lack of broad participation by the people; The cadre team is seriously corrupt and lacks governance capacity; Governance relies on administrative means, and people replace laws; The failure to improve people's lives, the increase in social contradictions, and the low effectiveness of governance have provided a profound wake-up call for the leadership of the Communist Party of China to carry out grassroots governance.

Keywords: grassroots governance; Soviet Union; Communist Party of China

1 Introduction

As the world's first socialist country, the Soviet Union opened a new chapter in the international communist movement. However, with the deepening of the practice of socialism in the Soviet Union, during the period of Gorbachev's administration, due to “the increasingly rigid Soviet system, the mistakes of the reform line, the influence of erroneous ideological trends, and the wrong decisions of the leaders”(Zhao Hong ,2023)[1], the collapse of the CPSU and the disintegration of the Soviet Union eventually led to the collapse of the CPSU and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which paid an irreparable heavy price and also had a huge impact on the world socialist movement. All along, the Communist Party of China has constantly summed up the historical lessons of the collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the party and the country, and has always taken this as a warning. Through an in-depth investigation of the Soviet Union's governance practice at the grassroots level, it is found that there are serious shortcomings such as the loss of party leadership, the rigidity of the governance system, and the lack of people's participation, and these mistakes and lessons provide a profound wake-up call for the leadership of the Communist Party of China to carry out grassroots governance.

2 The Party's Leadership is Lacking, and Ideals and Beliefs are Lost

The CPSU played an important and positive role in the period of socialist revolution and construction in the Soviet Union, and was the leading force and guarantee for the continuous achievement of new achievements in the cause of socialism in the Soviet Union. At first, the grass-roots party organizations also undertook the tasks of "recruiting party members and exercising supervision and administrative work" (Yang He, 2022)[2] throughout the process. However, during the period when Gorbachev was in power, in the face of the serious situation of the collapse of the grassroots party organizations of the CPSU and the long-term chaos in the political life of the party, not only did not take effective measures to solve the problem, but on the contrary, he implemented the wrong line of reform, began to preach the "theory of pluralism," and gradually denied the leading position of the CPSU.

2.1 The Constitution Denied the Ruling Position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

In 1990, the People's Congress of the Soviet Union amended Article 6 of the Constitution to ensure the leadership of the Party, defining the way for the CPSU to play its role as "managing state and social affairs through its own election as deputies to the Soviet of People's Deputies and their participation in other forms in formulating the policies of the Soviet state".(Liu Guangming ,2020)[3] With the abolition of the party's leading position in the fundamental law of the state, other political parties in the Soviet Union have sprung up in large numbers, and various political forces throughout the country, from the central to the grassroots level, have been mixed, resulting in a chaotic situation in which multiple parties struggle for power and multi-party co-governance, and the party organizations at all levels of the CPSU, from organs to social organizations, "have almost completely lost their organizational, leading, and vanguard roles." (Hu Zhongyue,2024)[4].

2.2 Party Members Lack Communist Beliefs

At the same time as the party's leading position was abolished, there was also a chaotic situation within the CPSU in which party members lost their ideals and beliefs and applied to withdraw from the party one after another, triggering a large number of "waves of resignation." According to incomplete statistics, "by July 1, 1991, the number of members of the CPSU had dropped from more than 19 million at the beginning of the reform to 15 million," (Wang Runhan ,2022)[5] and 870,000 people had quit the party in the capital city of Moscow alone. Party members are an important force in implementing the party's principles and lines and ensuring the party's operation, but also made it difficult for the CPSU to effectively implement its policies and concepts, and the existence of the CPSU party organizations has ceased to exist in many parts of the Soviet Union. It can be seen from this that during the Gorbachev period, both party

members and the masses lost trust in the CPSU, and the core role of the CPSU was gradually lost.

3 There is A High Degree of Centralization of Power and A Lack of Participation from the People

Excessive concentration of power was an important feature of the Soviet political system and its “general root cause”. The overly centralized system of power in the Soviet Union originated in the Lenin period and was formed during the Stalin period. This is mainly manifested in the concentration of state power in the CPSU, the power of the CPSU in turn in the central government, and the concentration of central power in individuals, forming a progressive and highly centralized system and mechanism.

3.1 State Power has Long been Concentrated in the Hands of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

First of all, all kinds of power in the state were concentrated in the hands of the CPSU. All along, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, as the sole ruling party, assumed the power to handle all state affairs, and the Soviet People's Congress, as a nominal organ of state power, was in fact a non-existent entity, and the votes conducted were completely dependent on the instructions of the Central Committee of the CPSU, and became a voting machine for implementing the party's decisions; many functions and powers that should belong to the government were also replaced by party organs; the state judicial organs were completely controlled by the party, and the top leading posts of the state were all held by party leaders, resulting in a chaotic situation in which the party was substituted for government. Secondly, there was an excessive concentration of power within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the supreme leadership.

3.2 The Communist Party of the Soviet Union Concentrated Power in the Hands of the Leaders

The Party's National Congress was supposed to be the highest organ of power within the Party, but since the time of Stalin, the functions and powers of the Secretariat of the Central Committee have been gradually strengthened, so that the supreme power within the Party has been continuously concentrated in the hands of the Secretariat of the Central Committee and the General Secretary. Finally, the central government was excessively centralized, the union republics and the grassroots governments had very little power, and the confederation system was in name only. Although the Soviet Union practiced the confederation system of the union republics, under the system of the integration of the party and government in the Soviet Union, the actual power of the union republics was controlled by the local CPSU party branches, which in turn obeyed the orders of the CPSU Central Committee, so the union republics and local governments had very little authority to make their own decisions and manage, and more obeyed and implemented the decisions of the CPSU Central Committee.

3.3 The Scope of Power of the Grassroots Government is Very Small

Under the system of high school concentration of power, the operation and management of the grassroots level are mainly completely dominated by the party and the government, and the leading cadres have become the "de facto masters of ownership"(David Coetzee and Fred Weir, 2008)[6] at the grassroots level, and the decision-making arrangements formulated depend more on the ideas and decisions of the leaders, and naturally they cannot realize the self-management of the people at the grassroots level.

4 Cadres are Seriously Corrupt and Their Governance Capacity is Insufficient

"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."(Zhou Yezhong, 2020)[7] The excessively centralized political system, coupled with the lack of effective supervision of power, will inevitably breed corruption in the ranks of cadres.

4.1 Officials Bought and Sold Positions, and Extravagance Prevailed

Corruption in the ranks of the Soviet cadres has been common since the time of Stalin, who established a complete system of cadre privileges, which led to the formation of a large number of bureaucratic privileges within the CPSU. During the Brezhnev period, corruption in the Soviet Union became more and more serious, because the Soviet Union practiced the cadre appointment system, and in order to extract power and interests, the phenomenon of buying and selling official positions appeared in the Soviet Union from top to bottom, and the organizational departments of the CPSU became the core organs of buying and selling official positions. As the supreme leader of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev took the lead in engaging in corruption, owning many luxury cars and villas, and cronyism, wantonly promoting officials close to him, and forming gangs. After Gorbachev came to power, in the face of the long-standing corruption, it was not only difficult to change this unhealthy trend, but even he himself was immersed in the infinite benefits brought by privileges.

4.2 Officials are Playing with Privileges and not Serving the People

In the last turbulent period of the Soviet Union, a large number of cadres and privileged strata did not think about how to serve the people, actively handle internal contradictions, and maintain social stability, but took the opportunity to exploit loopholes in the system, wantonly embezzle state-owned assets, and steal state resources. The direct consequence of the corruption of the contingent of Soviet cadres was that the leading cadres did not want to forge ahead, their thinking was lax, they reduced their study of new knowledge and new theories. Therefore, at the critical moment when the contradictions in Soviet society were acute, the trends of thought in society were chaotic, and the people were eager to improve their living conditions and receive material and spiritual comfort, the grassroots cadres in the Soviet Union exposed "problems such as a

weak sense of responsibility and incompetence," (Zuo Fengrong ,2013)[8] and were no longer able to listen to the voices of the people and no longer have the ability to meet the needs of the people.

5 The Mode of Governance is Single, and the Rule of Man Replaces the Rule of Law

As a country with a centralized system, the Soviet Union and the government were all-encompassing and all-encompassing, and they played the role of an all-powerful government in grassroots governance. The absolute dominance of the government in social governance determined that the Soviet Union mainly relied on administrative orders to regulate and control all aspects of society.

5.1 Economically, A Command-Planned Economy is Practiced

Economically, a command-planned economic system is implemented, the government is responsible for allocating resources and formulating the economic structure, agriculture is fully collectivized, and the market must obey the government. Politically, it is necessary to establish a strict hierarchical structure, implement a top-down cadre appointment system, and establish absolute obedience from the grassroots level to the leaders at the upper level. Moreover, the governance of administrative orders is often initiated by the top level of the state, ordering and exerting pressure from top to bottom, and the grassroots often only have the power to implement but not the right to decide, which is difficult to stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of the grassroots society to the greatest extent. When Gorbachev came to power, he also recognized that "the way of administrative orders that are managed is holding us back," (M. S. Gorbachev, 2003)[9] but he did not make fundamental changes to this way of governance.

5.2 Leaders Lack the Concept of the Rule of Law and Replace the Law with Power

In addition, another important effect of the executive order style of governance was that the rule of man prevailed over the rule of law in the Soviet Union. The practice of governing according to law is an important condition for a modern civilized country, but the Soviet Union is a country that lacks the rule of law, and the CPSU has not had the concept of the rule of law for a long time, and the phenomenon of using power to suppress the law and bending the law for personal gain has occurred from time to time. As de facto the center of state power, political parties and supreme leaders have supreme power over the supremacy of the law, the executive power is above the legislative power, and the leaders can arbitrarily amend the constitution according to their personal will, as exemplified by the article on the party's leadership in Article 6 of the constitution during the Gorbachev period.

6 Social Contradictions Have Increased, And Governance Has Been Ineffective

A striking feature of economic development in the Soviet period was that heavy industry and military industry were regarded as the top priority of development, and the whole country was concentrated to provide a steady stream of capital, manpower, and technical support for the development of these two industries; the primary task of agriculture was also to serve heavy industry and military industry, while light industry, which was closely related to the people's livelihood, was neglected for a long time.

6.1 There is a Lack of Livelihood Security for the People

Although this deformed economic development model had its own specific domestic and foreign practical factors at that time, the phenomenon caused by this in the long run was that the Soviet Union's military, science and technology, and heavy industry developed very strongly, and within a certain period of time it reached the point of confronting the United States in vying for world hegemony, but in sharp contrast to this, the Soviet Union had a shortage of consumer goods, and the common people did not get much benefit from the economy, and "there was a huge contrast between the people's livelihood and the strong national strength."(Liu Xueye,2023)[10].

6.2 Contradictions at the Grassroots Level have Deepened, and the people are Dissatisfied with the Government

The economic recession and the failure to meet the people's basic living needs have been reflected in society as a further aggravation of the contradictions in grassroots society, and the factors of social crisis have been increasing. At that time, the morality of Soviet society began to degenerate, drug addiction and crime continued to increase, and the phenomena of embezzlement, theft, and robbery became more and more serious. (M. S. Gorbachev,1987)[11] The failure to improve the social and people's livelihood and the continuous chaos in the social state fully demonstrated the failure of the Soviet Union's grassroots governance efforts, and also caused the masses to lose their sense of trust in the CPSU and their confidence in the future, and the CPSU was eventually abandoned by the people.

7 Conclusions

In his speech, General Secretary Xi Jinping repeatedly cited the example of the failure of socialist construction in the Soviet Union as an important warning, and asked the whole party to think deeply about "Why did the Soviet Union disintegrate? Why did the CPSU fall? "Thoroughly summarize the lessons of the failure of socialist construction in the Soviet Union and take them as a lesson from the past.(Xi Jinping,2021)[12] Some of his thoughts on grassroots governance are also profound lessons learned from the failure of grassroots governance in the Soviet Union. we should learn from the

important lessons of the high concentration of power and the lack of autonomy at the grassroots level in the Soviet Union, take the comprehensive deepening of the reform of the political system as the key area of reform, and take the deepening of the reform of "delegating power, delegating power, delegating power, and improving services" (Xi Jinping,2020)[13] as the breakthrough point to comprehensively break down the "institutional obstacles and structural contradictions" in contemporary China's governance, and encourage the development of various forms of grassroots autonomy under the leadership of the party.

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