

Practicing Grassroots Democracy in the Spirit of the 13th Party Congress's Resolution

Thi Ngo NGUYEN, PhD.

Abstract: *Our Party has always defined democracy as the objective and motivation for the country's growth during the process of leading the revolution. Democracy at grassroots units, in particular, is a necessary condition for people to advance their mastery in all aspects of social life. The 13th Party Congress's Resolution emphasized the motto: "People know, people discuss, people execute, people supervise, people benefit". It shows that our Party is always innovative in thoughts and actions in order to be more responsive to the country's specific situation.*

Keywords: *democracy at grassroots units, the 13th Party Congress's Resolution, spirit.*

1. Some fundamental perspectives on democracy and practicing grassroots democracy

Along with the development of society and the scientific-technological revolution, the concept of democracy has increasingly encompassed many different forms, contents, and purposes. Democracy carries both the universal values of humanity as well as historical, national, and contemporary characteristics.

K. Marx pointed out the essence of democracy as a state system in which the people play a central role, and the participation of the people is the core factor determining their role as masters in a democratic state. Democracy is based on the laws of the social movement and development. The people are the foundation and the reason for the existence of the state. Based on the historical materialist standpoint, according to K. Marx, democracy is always associated with the movement and development of human history, and it is a product reflecting the nature of the social relations of humans, the most important of which is the economic relationship.

K. Marx and F. Engels believed that a truly genuine and achievable democratic system only exists in a socialist society, which is the democracy of the majority of the working people. In their work, *The German Ideology*,

K. Marx and F. Engels wrote: “In the framework of socialist society, the only society in which the unique and free development of individuals is not just a slogan - that development is determined by the relationship between individuals, expressed partly in economic prerequisites, partly in the inevitable unity of the free development of everyone, and ultimately in the universality of the activities of individuals, based on the existing productive forces”⁽¹⁾. It can be seen that the idea of democracy of K. Marx and F. Engels is expressed through their arguments in their work about the freedom and democracy of the people through the state under the socialist system.

According to V.I. Lenin, democracy is considered a class-based form of state, so the issue of state cannot be separated from the issue of class. As a state system directly related to a certain ruling class based on a dominant mode of production, democracy is always a class-based system, and there is never a purely democratic system for all classes. V.I. Lenin also believed: “Proletarian democracy is the domination of the majority over the minority, in the interest of the majority”⁽²⁾, which is the result of the struggle of humanity for progress and civilization throughout history. This multi-dimensional and multi-meaning nature has made democracy always a topical issue that attracts great attention in both theoretical and practical aspects.

Inheriting the ideas of Marxism-Leninism on democracy, Ho Chi Minh's democratic ideas are expressed very concretely. The “master” of democracy is the people, the masses, the comrades. In the process of building the country, Ho Chi Minh affirmed that our state is “of the people, by the people, for the people”. From the outset, he defined the task of serving the country and serving the people. State officials must be servants of the people, close to the people, trust the people, and “Ours is the state of the majority of the people...”⁽³⁾, “The people are the masters who hold political power. They elect representatives to exercise that power on their behalf. That is democracy”⁽⁴⁾. Ho Chi Minh demonstrated political mettle and confidence in the strength of the people in building a democratic state, a state of the people, by the people, for the people.

Therefore, democracy is the right to rule of the people, and the people play the central and decisive role in determining their right to rule in a society through the state. The people have the right and obligation to participate in and supervise the common work of the state, and to exercise their right to control the destiny of their own country. Democracy has a class nature

and exists and develops according to the laws of social movement and development.

In the revolutionary process of history, the Communist Party of Vietnam has inherited and developed Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's Thought on democracy, in accordance with the specific historical situation and conditions of Vietnam. The socialist democratic society that we are building is an advanced and humane democratic society for all working people, reflecting the people's right to mastery in all areas of social life. Before 1986, the term "socialist democracy" was rarely used in the Party's documents. At the 6th Party Congress in 1986, the term "*socialist democracy*" was first used when discussing "expanding *socialist democracy*, raising people's awareness of respecting the law, and strengthening social discipline"⁽⁵⁾. In particular, in the Platform for National Construction During the Transitional Period to Socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011), the Party's understanding of democracy in Vietnam took a significant step forward when it affirmed that "*socialist democracy* is the essence of our regime, both the goal and the driving force for national development. Building and gradually perfecting a socialist democratic society ensures that democracy is implemented in practice at all levels and in all areas. Democracy is closely linked to discipline and must be institutionalized by the law, which is guaranteed by the law..."⁽⁶⁾. In 2016, at the 12th Party Congress, the term "*socialist democracy*" was included in the Congress's theme for the first time, and a separate section on democracy was dedicated to the Party's document, titled "*Promoting Socialist democracy, Ensuring People's Right to Mastery*"⁽⁷⁾, emphasizing that the development and promotion of democracy must be associated with the promotion of the people's right to mastery. This reflects the Party's deep and comprehensive understanding not only of the nature of the socialist democratic society but also of the significant role of democracy in it. Without promoting democracy and the people's right to mastery, there would be no socialism. Based on the reality and the country's and the world's development trends, the Political Report at the 13th Party Congress (2021) has proposed a development orientation for the country for the period 2021-2030, in which our Party continues to emphasize "the widespread practice and promotion of socialist democracy; people's mastery and subjectivity; strengthening and enhancing people's trust, and fostering social consensus"⁽⁸⁾.

In the process of implementing democracy, the grassroots level plays an extremely important role. When we talk about the grassroots level, we are referring to the role of people as subjects and the form of organizing community activities, social relationships. The grassroots level is the most direct level of reality, reflecting the consciousness and capacity of the people to be masters through both representative democracy and direct democracy, and it is also the first place to face the pressing demands of the people or the conflicts in daily life. Although the grassroots level is the lowest level, it is the first and most direct level with the role of laying the foundation for building a democratic regime for the entire political system, it is the deepest layer and the most important address to implement the Party's guidelines, policies, and laws; it is where political and social organizations need to propagate, mobilize the Party's line and policies to make the people understand, trust and implement community social activities. Therefore, *grassroots democracy is to promote the people's right to self-determination in the grassroots level in communes, wards, and towns. People exercise their right to self-determination in all aspects of social life. Grassroots democracy is implemented under the principle of "people know, people discuss, people execute, people inspect, people supervise, and people benefit" in accordance with the regulation and law of the State.*

During his lifetime, President Ho Chi Minh always attached great importance to the issue of *practicing democracy* with the aim of making everyone enjoy freedom. Practicing democracy is to promote democracy increasingly more correctly, fully and substantially. Ho Chi Minh emphasized that: "...make the people know how to enjoy the right to self-determination, know how to use their democratic rights, dare to speak, dare to do"⁽⁹⁾. Ho Chi Minh also believed that democracy is the universal key in solving problems and grievances in society, and democracy can only be implemented substantially to create the driving force for the development of society. He emphasized: "...practicing democracy is the universal key that can solve all difficulties"⁽¹⁰⁾.

To effectively implement democracy, the practice of democracy at the grassroots level, in communes, wards, townships, is an important factor. The practice of grassroots democracy is based on adhering to the content, objectives, tasks, and specific regulations of democracy at the grassroots level. In the process of leading the country's renovation, our Party has had

new ideas and directions, which also serve as the basis for “building and implementing democracy regulations at the grassroots level”. Implementing grassroots democracy is a progressive viewpoint and a new understanding of our Party regarding democracy. The practice of democracy is not a general issue but must be specific, regulated, and implemented at each level for each subject to practice democracy according to the principle of “people know, people discuss, people execute, people check”. The Politburo issued Directive No. 30-CT/TW on February 18, 1998, “On building and implementing democracy regulations at the grassroots level”. The regulations on democracy at the grassroots level have stipulated issues related to people’s lives, activities, and relationships of the Party committees, governments, the Fatherland Front, and social organizations.

The practice of grassroots democracy is the process of implementing people’s ownership rights through specific contents, forms, and methods of democracy implementation at the grassroots level in communes, wards, and townships, which is associated with implementing democracy regulations at the grassroots level; promoting democracy and emphasizing the responsibility of the people, which is closely linked to the implementation of discipline, morality, and social order. The practice of grassroots democracy enhances the effectiveness of people’s strength, mobilizes and stimulates people’s creativity and innovation to contribute to the cause of building and protecting the country. At the same time, it also reflects the development of our Party’s theoretical thinking and practical awareness of the role of implementing democracy at the grassroots level.

2. Assessment of the current state of grassroots democracy practice in recent years

*** Basic achievements**

After more than 35 years of renovation under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, our country is in the period of increasingly strong development towards socialism, and the socialist democratic system has also undergone fundamental changes, operating under the motto “The Party leads, the State manages, and the people govern”. In this regard, grassroots democracy practice has also achieved some basic achievements, including as follows:

In the economic field, our Party and State have set forth guidelines and orientations for developing a socialist-oriented market economy.

Emphasis has been placed on promoting the participation of multiple economic sectors, including private enterprises. Accordingly, people have the right to participate in economic activities, to freely develop their businesses, to have the right to control their own labor and production, and to develop individual and household economies. People have the right to contribute opinions in building guidelines, policies, and strategies for economic and social development of the Party and State from the central to grassroots levels; to participate in managing and supervising the economic development activities of the State and enterprises. *People benefit* the fruits of their labor in a fair manner, and all labor-related regimes and policies are transparent and publicly available. Our Party and State also have policies to support families with difficult circumstances to develop their economy and escape poverty. Through these efforts, people have trust and consensus in the Party and State, and exercise their active and positive ownership in economic development. At the same time, people actively participate in supervising and denouncing corrupt behaviors, abuses of power to appropriate assets, and minimizing corruption, embezzlement, and waste in agencies, organizations, and enterprises.

In the political field, the people's right to master and effectively implement their power is increasingly being realized. The documents of the 13th National Party Congress emphasize: "The central task of renewing the political system is to continue to build and perfect the socialist law-governed state of Vietnam, which is of the people, by the people, and for the people under the Party leadership"⁽¹¹⁾. The people have the right to participate in the election and to elect representatives with sufficient capacity and qualifications to the people's councils at all levels. The grassroots democracy regulations are effectively implemented, and the Law on Democracy Implementation at the commune, ward, and town levels has achieved many important results. People have understood their legal rights and obligations in participating in building and supervising the activities of the state in general and local authorities in particular. Through the Fatherland Front and political-social organizations, the legitimate rights and interests of the people are ensured and complaints and denunciations of the people are handled in a timely and appropriate manner, while also promoting the role of social supervision and criticism. The National Assembly's activities are increasingly effective, enhancing the high level of democracy; strengthening questioning activities

and answering questions from people in National Assembly sessions through the program “People ask, ministers answer”; and enhancing listening to the opinions and contributions of the people on draft laws and Party and State policies.

Democratic activities within the Party in Party organizations and grassroots cells have also achieved important results, contributing to building the Party transparent and strong in political, ideological, and organizational foundation. Encouraging Party members to contribute their opinions, respecting the independent thinking and creativity of individual Party members to mobilize and promote the creative intelligence of all Party members in grassroots cells and throughout the Party. At Party congresses at all levels, Party members have the right to discuss and debate the Party’s work and have the right to vote based on respecting individual decisions, without imposing or directing. Strengthening democracy, self-criticism, and criticism within the Party.

In the field of culture and ideology, people are increasingly enjoying their democratic rights: freedom of the press, information, and speech, being able to express their opinions on cultural and ideological issues, and the right to contribute to building the cultural life of their community. People have the right to participate in and monitor the implementation of social policies, including poverty reduction, disaster relief, etc. Thanks to the exercise of people’s right to mastery, the spiritual and cultural life of the people has been improved, and they actively participate in social activities, creating conditions for people to enjoy the achievements of traditional cultural values and preserving the cultural heritage of their communities while absorbing the quintessence of human culture.

After more than 30 years of renovation, our Party, State, and people have achieved important achievements in building a socialist democratic society, practicing and promoting grassroots democracy. The people’s right to mastery is increasingly elevated in deciding major and crucial issues of the country. Democracy in all areas of social life must uphold the role of people as the subject, with the most important being the right to “*know*”. Accordingly, people need to know all policies, development orientations, economic, social, cultural, and political plans. “*Knowing*” is the fundamental condition for people *to participate in discussions, contribute opinions to build and move forward, to monitor and supervise the implementation of*

policies, and to enjoy the achievements. Therefore, the right to “know” is the most important and fundamental right to exercise other rights of the people in a democratic system. Through this, people become more aware and understand their rights and responsibilities, respect, ensure, and protect human rights, and link citizenship rights with obligations and responsibilities to society.

*** Limitations and weaknesses**

Along with the achievements, there are also some limitations and weaknesses in grassroots democracy practice, including as follows:

The limitations and weaknesses in implementing grassroots democracy are most clearly manifested in the failure to promote the role of people as the subject of democracy. The disclosure of information, plans, and orientations at the local level is not complete, which does not create conditions for people to access information, or in other words, the exercise of the “*right to know*” is not effective. As a result, the role and responsibility of people in participating in discussions, contributing opinions, checking, and supervising local issues are still limited. For example, in some localities, in implementing land policies, compensation, resettlement, and land acquisition, violations of democracy still occur, causing dissatisfaction and numerous complaints, and not providing a reasonable solution for the people.

The grassroots political system is not yet unified, and some Party’s guidelines, policies, and laws have not really reached the people. People still do not fully understand their rights and responsibilities in implementing the grassroots democratic regime. Administrative procedures are still cumbersome and difficult for people, and resolving people’s requests has not been quick or satisfactory.

The awareness of Party committees, grassroots organizations, cadres, and Party members about democracy and the practice of grassroots democracy is not yet sufficient. The people’s right to self-determination in some localities is still violated, and the implementation of democracy is still formalistic, separated from regulations and laws. Representative democracy and direct democracy still have many expressions that lack substance and have not played their roles well. The principles of democratic centralism, criticism, and self-criticism within the Party have not achieved high results.

The Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations have not played a good role in supervising and providing social criticism in implementing

grassroots democracy, leading to the ineffective resolution of people's difficulties and questions, affecting the effectiveness of implementing grassroots democracy. The clear responsibility of the heads of organizations and grassroots units has not been distinguished, leading to the passing on of responsibility, competition for credit, and blaming others for faults.

4. Some directions and solutions to enhance grassroots democracy practice under the spirit of the Resolution of the 13th Party Congress

*** Regarding directions**

The documents of the 13th Party Congress of Vietnam affirmed: "Continue to concretize and perfect the democratic practice regime according to the spirit of the Resolution on building the country during the transitional period to socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011) and the 2013 Constitution, ensuring that all State power belongs to the people. Implement direct democracy and representative democracy effectively, especially at the grassroots level. Implement well the principle of *"The people know, the people discuss, the people execute, the people inspect, the people supervise, the people benefit"*⁽¹²⁾. At the 13th Party Congress, our Party added the phrases "people supervise, people benefit" to the principle of promoting democracy, especially grassroots democracy. This shows that our Party has made progress in its theoretical thinking by identifying the people as the subject of the democratic practice process, constantly expanding and promoting the people's ownership rights, attracting people to participate in social management and ensuring their legitimate interests in both legal and practical aspects.

*** Solutions to improve the quality of grassroots democracy practice**

To improve the quality of grassroots democracy practice, it is necessary to focus on the following solutions:

Firstly, strengthen the leadership role of Party committees, local authorities, officials, and Party members at the grassroots level to improve the quality of grassroots democratic practice. The 13th Party Congress emphasized: "Party committees, Party organizations, and organizations in the political system, Party members, officials, civil servants, and public employees set examples in practicing democracy, obeying the law, and promoting social ethics"⁽¹³⁾. Effectively promote the leadership and guidance of organizations, propaganda, and mobilization of the people to participate in grassroots democratic practice. Implement well the mechanisms and policies that ensure the people's rights and interests, aiming at their benefits.

It is necessary to operate openly the Party's lines, policies, and directions, ensuring transparency and providing information to the people so that they have the right to participate in feedback, discussion, and resolution of related issues, gathering the people's strength to contribute to building the grassroots level.

The pool of cadres, Party members, and civil servants play an important role in effectively implementing the Party's and State's guidelines and policies, while also having a significant impact on the exercise of people's sovereignty. This requires them to constantly uphold moral qualities, professional skills, and expertise in carrying out the Party's and State's guidelines, policies, and principles. Each cadre, Party member, and civil servant must promote the spirit of self-awareness, responsibility, set an example in mobilizing and engaging with the people, listening to their opinions, encouraging and motivating them to participate in the grassroots democratic process.

Secondly, it is essential to enhance the role of the Fatherland Front and other mass organizations. They should fully utilize their position and role in carrying out functions such as social oversight, monitoring, and criticism concerning issues related to people's right to mastery. Political and social organizations representing people's interests, demonstrating their benefits, being elected by the people, and serving as a channel for citizens to effectively exercise their right to mastery.

Thirdly, it is necessary to raise people's awareness and enhance their role as the subject of grassroots democracy. People's knowledge and understanding are fundamental conditions for ensuring the practice of grassroots democracy. At the 13th National Party Congress, our Party affirmed the "people's subject role, the central position of the people in the country's development strategy, in the entire process of building and defending the Fatherland"⁽¹⁴⁾. As direct participants in the grassroots democratic process, citizens must understand their rights and responsibilities, enhance their knowledge, and have a clear grasp of the legal provisions regarding the implementation of democracy. Failure to understand their rights and responsibilities would lead to ineffective exercise of democracy, resulting in people losing their rights and responsibilities, thus affecting the quality of the grassroots democratic process.

Finally, the development of information technology and mass media is one of the essential conditions for ensuring the practice of grassroots democracy.

Nowadays, the development of information technology and mass media has a significant impact on the social life of the people: the internet, social media, and mass media (television, newspapers, radio). The application of information technology in agencies and organizations facilitates the people in receiving information quickly, openly, and transparently. At the same time, it also provides conditions for people to exercise their rights to participate in decision-making processes, to express their opinions and contributions to authorities in a faster and more timely manner. This is also the basis for people to exercise their rights to monitor and supervise the implementation of grassroots democracy through more effective information channels.

It can be said that in the Resolution of the 13th National Party Congress, our Party has renewed its perception, theoretical thinking, and practical application of *socialist democracy*, with a focus on grassroots democracy. The Party emphasizes the role of the subject and the core of the people, promotes the right to participate in decision-making and the legitimate interests of laborers, emphasizes citizenship responsibilities, and maintains social discipline. This affirms the democratic nature of our State./.

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