

# Marx and Engels' Thoughts of Clean Government

Xue Min, Yingkai Sun

Institute of Marxism, Dalian Maritime University, Dalian, Liaoning Province, China

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**Abstract:** Clean government is a lofty political goal pursued by human society throughout the ages. In the process where Marx and Engels founded and developed the theory of proletarian liberation and conceived a beautiful and ideal society for mankind, Marx and Engels deeply discussed the problem of clean government and formed the basic thought of clean government. About clean government the foundation is the public system, the political guarantee is democratic politics, the manifestation is fairness and justice, the basic measure is to establish a cheap government, and the basic method is political openness. Marx and Engels' thoughts of clean government has laid an ideological and theoretical foundation for the construction of clean government in Marxist political parties and socialist countries, and has important theoretical value and practical significance for the current construction of anti-corruption in China.

Clean government —— a fair and clear politics —— is a lofty political goal pursued by human society throughout the ages. In the process where Marx and Engels founded and developed the theory of proletarian liberation and conceived a beautiful and ideal society for mankind, Marx and Engels deeply discussed the problem of clean government and formed the basic thoughts of clean government. These thoughts still have extremely important guiding significance and give people profound enlightenment.

## 1. The foundation of Clean Government is Public Ownership

The essence of clean government is not to seek personal gains with public power, and the opposite is corruption. Marx and Engels believe that corruption is essentially the product of the exploitation system and class, and is accompanied by the emergence of private ownership of means of production. Only by implementing the public ownership system can we curb corruption and injustice, which is the foundation of a clean government.

First, the economic foundation of clean government is public ownership of means of production. Under the capitalist system, the means of production are owned by the capitalist class, and then capitalists usurp the fruits of labour of the majority by occupying the means of production”, The internal tendency of the capitalist system was given room for full development, and all the ugliness of the capitalist system ran rampant without hindrance”<sup>[1](p120)</sup>. Under the system of private ownership of the means of production, “Corruption and widespread theft are more widespread—— and draw from the riches of prosperity enormous dividends”<sup>[1](p5)</sup>. In a capitalist society with private ownership of the means of production, “the power of government, cloaked from head to toe in splendor, has sunk into the sludge, the complete corruption of the state machinery itself, and the decay of the whole social apparatus that thrives under its rule”<sup>[1](120)</sup>.

Public ownership of the means of production is the most advanced form of ownership to meet the objective needs of socialized large-scale production. The means of production are owned by the people, eliminating the economic root of corruption. Public ownership has a great power to curb corruption, but the release of the power to curb corruption must be based on the development of productivity.

Second, the political foundation of clean government is the socialist system. Capitalism's “Political power is just a means to realize economic interests”<sup>[2](p250)</sup>. In order to pursue greater profit space, capitalists extend their black hands to the state power and seek greater economic interests through controlling politics. As a result, capitalist countries have become hotbeds of

corruption, “The state power, which appears to be above the society, is in fact the ugliest thing in this society, the hotbed of all the corruption in this society”<sup>[1](p54)</sup>.

Only the socialist system can change the rotten state of society. The socialist political system “will give back to the social organism all the power hitherto snatched by the parasitic tumor of the state, which feeds on society and hinders its free development”. The socialist state led by the proletariat “Is the real opposite of the empire itself, that is, the state power, that is, the centralized administrative power”<sup>[1](p57-58)</sup>. The superiority of socialist system brings hope and possibility to clean government.

Third, the ideological basis of clean government is socialist ideology. The values of capitalist private ownership society are the ideological root of corruption. The ideology of capitalism is that everything is linked with the material interests of individuals, while the collective interests, national interests, people’s interests and national interests are all thrown out of the cloud, leading to the rampant selfishness of the whole society and its money-worship ideological trend. This social ideology will inevitably lead to corruption.

Socialist society is a socialist ideology characterized by serving the people and collectivism, which is the ideological basis of clean government. Under the guidance of the Marxist scientific world outlook, the collective spirit of the proletariat is sublimated into a self-conscious and scientific moral system. Such values and interests are the foundation of the incorruptible consciousness.

## **2. The Political Guarantee of Clean Government is Democracy**

Democratic politics is the fundamental solution to eliminate corruption phenomenon breeding soil and to overcome power alienation, and the political guarantee of a clean government. Democratic politics is the “natural enemy” of corruption. Effective democratic political system is the most powerful “opponent” of corruption. Democracy must be used to weave a net against corruption.

First, democracies. Capitalist democracy is illusory, the vast majority of exploited people only gain civil rights, but do not hold the public power of society. The exploiting classes use their control of public power to gain control of society and seek personal gains through abuse of power, “over time, these institutions — the head of them is state power — have changed from the servants of society to the masters of society in pursuit of their own special interests”<sup>[1](p12)</sup>. Then, “State power is nothing but a parasitic tumor on the body of the nation”<sup>[1](56-57)</sup>.

Only socialism can achieve true democracy and remove the soil that breeds corruption. The socialist system ensures the democracy of the proletariat, so that citizens really have their own political power and eliminate corruption through democratic means. Marx, drawing on the experience of the Paris Commune, pointed out that the proletarian state was a new democracy. Because “the commune — it is the society that takes back the power of the state, transforming it from a force that dominates and suppresses the society into a force that gives life to the society itself”<sup>[1](95)</sup>. Only by establishing a democratic republic under the leadership of the proletariat can the public power be returned to the people, the alienation of power be contained and a clean country be built.

Second, democratic elections. Although democratic election is not omnipotent, it is an effective means of supervision by the masses. In a capitalist society, the bourgeoisie, through the restriction of property qualifications, turn election into a privilege to serve his own class, which is convenient for seeking personal gains and corruption, “By limiting the right to vote and the property qualification to be elected, they make the principle of election the exclusive property of the class”<sup>[3](648)</sup>.

Only the socialist country led by the proletariat can realize the real universal suffrage system, realize the real democracy in the election, so as to prevent the abuse of power and other corrupt acts. Socialism is that the people are the masters of the country, but it is impossible to realize the direct management of the country by all the individuals of people. Therefore, the power to manage the country is entrusted to the outstanding representatives of the people who can best realize the will

and wishes of the people, and the people's representatives are produced through the form of election, and then the public servants of the people are elected by the representatives. If the deputies and public servants elected by the people fail to exercise power in accordance with the will and wishes of the people, or go against the will of the people or even harm the interests of the people, and corruption occurs, the people may recall them at any time.

Third, democratic supervision. The exercise of public power by party and state officials must be supervised and restricted by the masses. As a political behavior, corruption is attached to certain power and deviates from the will of the power trustor. In order to win more votes and become the ruling party, the bourgeois parties pay attention to the voice of the people and act in accordance with public opinion. After becoming the ruling party, they regard their own will as the people's will in practice, and even impose their own will on the people. The authority and compulsion of the state accelerate the process of power transformation. "These institutions, the most of which is the organ of state power, have changed from public servants to masters of society in pursuit of their own special interests"<sup>[4]</sup>

Any public power that is not supervised and restricted is bound to be abused and lead to corruption. So, socialist countries also need democratic oversight. Only by ensuring that public servants fulfill their duties to realize the will and aspirations of the people, and ensuring that public officials correctly exercise the power entrusted by the people, can the power holders not abuse their power, not seek personal gains from their power and not become the "masters" of the people.

### **3. The Expression Form of Clean Government is Fairness and Justice**

Fairness and justice means that everyone in the society has equal rights and opportunities for survival and development. "It is the freedom, morality, rationality and welfare——human fraternity of everyone achieved through universal solidarity"<sup>[5](508)</sup>. In essence, corruption is the abuse of public power and private or individual appropriation of public resources, which directly destroys social fairness and justice.

First, there is no real equity and justice in a capitalist society with private ownership of means of production. Because the citizens of capitalist society, "Only a very small part of whose desire to pursue happiness can be satisfied by the concept of rights, but the vast majority of material means to achieve. And since capitalist production is concerned with leaving the great majority of equal rights with only what is most necessary to eke out a living. So capitalism does not necessarily pay more respect, if any, to the equal right of the majority to pursue happiness than slavery or serfdom did"<sup>[2](239)</sup>.

Second, cash transactions, commercial crimes, fraud, bribery and other acts in capitalist society seriously affect social fairness and justice. Cash transactions, as Carlyle put it, are increasingly the only bond of society. The number of crimes is increasing year by year. Bourgeois crime, formerly practiced only in secret, becomes more rampant. Business is becoming increasingly fraudulent. Bribery becomes the first lever of social power replaces violence and oppression, so does money replace swords"<sup>[1](723)</sup>. This ugly corrupt behavior of the bourgeoisie cause that there is no longer fairness and justice in the whole society.

Third, fairness and justice in socialist society promote clean government. Fairness and justice in socialist society is the basic criterion to coordinate the relationship between all social strata, an important source of social cohesion, centripetal force and appeal, and a form of clean government, "True freedom and true equality can only be achieved under the communist system. And such a system is what justice demands"<sup>[1](582)</sup>.

Fourth, clean government in socialist society promotes social fairness and justice. The honest outlook on world, life value and the correct outlook on power, status, and interests, of Communists who serve the people whole-heartedly, make the whole society more fair and just. "Strive for simple moral and ethical rules that personal relationships should follow"<sup>[3](307)</sup>.

#### **4. The Basic Measure of Clean Government is to Establish a Cheap Government**

Marx seriously summarized the basic experience of the Paris Commune revolution, the first proletarian regime, deeply revealed the reactionary nature of the bourgeois bureaucratic state, and put forward the idea of establishing a cheap government for the construction of the future proletarian state regime, so as to prevent the state and state organs from becoming social masters by social servants.

There are two ways to create cheap government: one is to save money, another is to reduce the salaries of civil servants.

First, save national expenses. From the root it puts an end to the waste of a huge amount of national products, and prevents corruption. “Ban the unproductive activities and misconducts of state parasites, and root out feeding state, the monster, on a huge amount of national products”<sup>[1](98)</sup>.

Second, lower the salaries of civil servants. Staff members perform actual administrative functions, whether local or national, and receive workers' salaries only. Abolish high salary, gender equality and equal pay for equal work, and guarantee the real income of workers and the life of low-paid people. In this way, “It can be relied on to prevent people from pursuing promotion to make a fortune”<sup>[3](376)</sup>.

Third, all classes benefit from cheap government. Cheap government makes “a huge immediate benefit to farmers”<sup>[1 62]</sup>. Ordinary workers become masters of the state, “For the first time they dare to violate the prerogatives of their 'natural elders', and perform their work humbly, honestly, and effectively under conditions of unprecedented hardship”<sup>[6](60)</sup>.

#### **5. The Basic Method of Clean Government is Political Openness**

Political openness means that in the course of the exercise of state power, except under special circumstances prescribed by law, it must be made public in accordance with legal procedures, so that state affairs and activities can be informed, followed and supervised by the people.

First, politics in capitalist countries is secretive and closed. “The universal spirit of bureaucracy is a secret, a mystery. The secrecy is kept by the hierarchical organization within the bureaucracy and by the closed nature of the union outside. Thus, to make public the spirit of the state and its intentions is to sell its secrets to the bureaucracy”<sup>[6](302)</sup>.

Second, the essence of political openness is the openness of power operation process. In a socialist country, the people are the masters of the state and the subject of power. The power held by public officials is entrusted by the people, and such power should be open to the people and subject to their supervision consciously, “Publish what they say and do, and let the public know all their shortcomings”<sup>[1](65)</sup>.

Third, political openness effectively prevents corruption. Openness of government affairs can safeguard the people's right to know, to participate, and to supervise, and is an effective way to prevent corruption. The orderlies who serve the people are elected, work under public supervision, and can be dismissed at any time, “Their work openly and honestly under the most difficult and complicated circumstances, being paid as little as a few pounds for Milton's Paradise Lost. They do their work with integrity, without self-righteousness, without being buried in bureaucratic offices, and without being ashamed to admit mistakes and bravely correct them”<sup>[1](97)</sup>.

Marx and Engels put forward the thought of clean government with its profound connotation thought-provoking, which still has extremely important realistic enlightenment.

1) Superior System, Advanced Thoughts, and Build a Clean and Honest Country.

The political system of socialist public ownership has the advantage of clean government. Under the leadership of the proletariat, the means of production belong to the masses of the people, and the monopolistic accumulation of wealth and the use of privileges for personal gain are strictly controlled. Marxist thought has advanced nature and purity. Lenin pointed out that further strengthening cultural construction is an important factor that can effectively prevent the emergence of bureaucracy, “Now the focus has changed to peaceful 'cultural' organization”<sup>[7 773]</sup>. Comrade MAO Zedong summed up serving the people wholeheartedly as the sole purpose of the Party, and

launched a large-scale nationwide campaign against corruption, waste and bureaucracy. The superior political system and advanced guiding ideology provide the basic conditions for the construction of a clean and honest country.

#### 2) Democratic Politics, Rule of Law, and Improve the System of Clean Government.

Socialist democracy, rule of law as a basic strategy, and improve the system of clean government. Strengthening and promoting democratic politics is an important guarantee for the continuous development of clean government, ensuring that the people are masters of the country, allowing the broad masses of people to fully express their will and voice, and truly realizing their aspirations and interests. Adhere to the organic unity of the party's leadership, the people being the masters of the country and the rule of law. Implement the basic strategy of governing the country according to law and gradually bring the construction of a clean and honest government into the track of legalization. In light of the new situation in the development of the socialist market economy and the new situation in the fight against corruption, relevant laws shall be amended and enacted in a timely manner to prevent and punish corruption, and codes of conduct and ethics for leading officials to conduct political affairs in a clean manner shall be put forward and clearly stipulated.

#### 3) Fairness and Justice, Harmonious Society, and Create a Culture of Clean Government

Fairness and justice at the civilized level, harmony in core values, and a clean and honest culture. Fairness and justice is an important yardstick of social civilization and progress, as well as an important basis and basic premise of constructing socialist harmonious society. Incorruptibility is the foundation of justice, and incorruptibility is the cornerstone of justice. There is no justice without clean government, and there is no justice without clean government. "Harmony" is the core value orientation of socialism. It guides the public to act and think largely in the way of promoting tendencies, unifying mind and weakening the sense of power. It guides people to view and handle conflicts of interests and problems with correct values. It makes the concept of honesty be deeply rooted in the people, and builds a clean and honest culture of integrity and honor in the whole society by mobilizing and giving full play to the function of harmonious culture.

#### 4) Reduce Bureaucracy, Increase Efficiency, and Build Cheap Government

Reduce administrative bodies, improve government efficiency, build a cheap government, and reform the bloated government bureaucracy. The huge government will greatly increase the total salary, office expenses, administrative expenses and supervision costs of the government. The more bloated administrative agencies are, the more sinecure, idlers, and leisure during working hours there are, and then the harder it is to show results. Improve the work efficiency of the government, further improve economic benefits, so that the government can obtain a good image in the minds of the people. Government reform aimed at a cheap government will be actively pursued, "The corrupting effect of high salaries not only effects the regime... also affects the masses of workers and peasants, which is indisputable".

#### 5) Open Government Affairs, Involve the People and Strengthen Oversight Over Clean Government

The openness of government affairs is the openness of power operation process, making power operation transparent, giving the right to know and the right to supervise to the masses, can enhance the publicity and transparency of power, can prevent the occurrence of corruption from the source. The eyes of the masses are sharp-eyed. Ensuring that they have the right to know, participate in, discuss and supervise the administration of state affairs, examine the operation of public power with their keen insight, and expose and prosecute corruption in a timely manner, will put enormous pressure and deterrence on those who have power. "All those who have power are prone to abuse it. This is an immutable lesson"[11 154]. Unchecked and unsupervised power is bound to lead to corruption.

Some thoughts of Marx and Engels on clean government have laid a theoretical foundation for the construction of Marxist political parties, especially the construction of marxist ruling party. History has proved that clean government is directly related to the ruling position of the ruling party, public opinions, the success or failure of the country.

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