

LUO LONGJI: WHAT KIND OF POLITICAL SYSTEM DO WE WANT?

Luo Longji (1896–1965), a Western-trained educator and journalist, wrote this criticism of Sun Yat-sen’s doctrine of political tutelage shortly after his return to China after studying at the University of Wisconsin, at the London School of Economics under Harold Laski, and for the doctorate at Columbia University (1928). He later served as editor of influential newspapers in North China, became a leader of the left-wing Democratic League, and was active politically under the Communists. He suffered condemnation as a “rightist,” however, during the “Hundred Flowers” campaign in 1957. Luo’s objections to party tutelage would also have applied to Mao’s “party dictatorship.”

By the time Luo wrote this article, communism already offered an important political alternative to the Nationalists, and Marxist doctrines, such as the withering away of the state, had become a part of his intellectual frame of reference.

We may sincerely say that we do not advocate any high-sounding theory of eliminating the state. We recognize that “to abolish the state through the party” is a blind alley in the twentieth century. In the present world the only road we can take is to maintain the state. *But in taking this road, we want to have the kind of state we cherish and the kind of governmental system we can support. . . .*

Let us first discuss with those who talk of “saving” and “reconstructing” the state the following problems: (1) What is the nature of the state? (2) What is the purpose of the state? (3) What should be the strategy for the reconstruction of the state?

Frankly, in the entire *Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen*, no mention has ever been made about such fundamental problems of political philosophy as the nature of the state and the purpose of the state. What concerned Dr. Sun most

was the strategy for “national salvation” and “national reconstruction.”⁴ His weakness — which at the same time was his strength — lay in the fact that in the selection of a strategy his main concern was the attainment of his objectives, not the evaluation of the means. Because he paid no attention to the purpose of the state, he often took “national salvation” or “national reconstruction” for that purpose. Because he was concerned with the end rather than the means, often in the matter of strategy he took a road that was opposed to the nature and purpose of the state. *The strategy of “party above the state” is an illustration. . . .*

The great trouble of China today is that, on the one hand, the Communists consider the state an instrument of class war and, on the other, those who cry for “national salvation” and “national reconstruction” regard the state as the ultimate purpose itself. For those who consider the state as an end, the people exist for the sake of the state rather than the state for the sake of the people. They do not ask what benefits the state offers the people but maintain that “national salvation” and “love for the state” are the unconditional duties of the people. And they do not hesitate to employ those weighty words of “national salvation” and “national reconstruction” to silence the people. Thus the people may not be aided in time of famine and calamity, but burdensome taxes must be collected; local peace may not be maintained, but civil war must be fought. Because the state is an end, people become the means for “national salvation” and “national reconstruction.” And so the state need not protect the life and property of the people, who become the slaves of the “principle of national salvation”; nor need it support freedom of thought, for schools should become propaganda agencies for the “principle of national salvation.” In short, as soon as the banner of “national salvation” and “national reconstruction” is hoisted, all burdensome taxes and levies and all fighting and wars receive new significance. The people can only surrender unconditionally. . . .

When the party is placed above the state, the state becomes the instrument of the party rather than the instrument of the entire people for the attainment of the common purpose. . . . Let us examine whether or not the system of “party above the state” can achieve the purpose of the state.

The political systems of other countries today are founded on two different principles: dictatorship and democracy. Dictatorship refers to the political system under which the political power of the state is held by one person, one

4. Sun Yat-sen had argued the need for nationalism on the grounds that the Chinese had hitherto lacked a conception of nationhood and had known only loyalty to family or to dynastic state. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, however, he spoke of “state and nation” in almost one breath. The character for state and nation being the same in Chinese, these slogans also had the meaning of “the state’s salvation” and “the state’s reconstruction.” The emotional appeal of nationalism was used, in this case, for the strengthening of the state.

party, or one class. Democracy refers to the political system under which political power resides in the people as a whole and *all citizens of age can participate directly or indirectly in politics on an equal basis*. The system of “party above the state” or “party authority above state authority” is certainly a dictatorship rather than a democracy.

We must emphatically declare here that we are *absolutely opposed to dictatorship, whether it be dictatorship by one person, one party, or one class*. Our reason is very simple: *dictatorship is not the method whereby the purpose of the state can be achieved*. Let us explain briefly as follows:

First, the state is the instrument of the people for the attainment of their common purpose through mutual constraint and cooperation. Its function is to protect the rights of the people. We believe that the rights of the people are secure only to the extent that the people themselves have the opportunity to protect them. In the present society, man’s public spirit has not developed to such a perfection that we can entrust entirely our political rights to a person, a group, or a class and depend upon him or it to be the guardian of our rights. In practical politics, *he who loses political power will lose all protection of his rights*. . . .

Second, . . . The function of the state is to tend and develop the people. In a dictatorship the function of tending and developing is lost. Take, for instance, the cultivation and development of the thought of the people. A dictatorship, whether enlightened or dark, will consider freedom of thought its greatest enemy. The first task it sets itself is to reshape the mind of the people in a single mold by a so-called thought-unification movement. . . . After oppression and persecution under a dictatorship, the people’s thought necessarily becomes timid, passive, dependent, senile, and the people themselves may even become pieces of thoughtless machinery.

Third, the state is the instrument of the entire people for the attainment of the common purpose of happiness for all through mutual restraint and cooperation. In order to achieve this purpose the state must furnish the people with an environment of peace, tranquillity, order, and justice. A dictator, be it an individual, a party, or a class, occupies a special position in national politics. This fundamentally rejects political equality as well as justice. The special position of the dictator inevitably incurs the indignation and hatred of the people for their governors, and indignation and hatred are the source of all revolutions. In a society of recurrent revolutions, peace, tranquillity, and order are naturally not to be found. . . .

The Nationalists themselves recognized the inherent evils of dictatorship, but they use such words as *temporary* and *transitional* to cover the system. The word *temporary* or *transitional* often designates the so-called period of political tutelage. . . .

We believe that the saying “The more you learn, the more there is to learn”

applies equally to politics as to other callings. Man seeks experience and progress in politics unceasingly because there is no limit to them. If the people must have reached a certain ideal stage before they can participate in political activities, then the British and the Americans should also be under political tutelage now. To obtain experience from trial and error, to effect progress from experience — this is the political method of the British and Americans, and this also is the reason why we are opposed to political tutelage. If political tutelage is ever necessary, we believe the rulers — the present tutors — are more urgently in need of training than the people.

[“Women yao shenmayang de zhengzhi zhidu?” in *Xin yue* 2,
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