

## THE GENERAL ELECTION SYSTEM OF THE PARIS COMMUNE

[Following is a translation of an article by Liu Hui-ming (刘惠明 1914) in the Chinese-language periodical, Hung-ch'i (Red Flag), Peiping, No. 11, 21 August 1966, pages 36-37]

Ninety-five years ago, the French worker class, with a powerful revolutionary spirit, smashed the bourgeois government machine, and created the first proletarian dictatorship -- the Paris Commune. It was an unprecedented undertaking in human history.

The Paris Commune fundamentally rejected all state political powers of the past and took a true opposite standpoint. The political powers of the past were all tools of the exploiting class to oppress the people. The Paris Commune turned the masters of society into its public servants. The Paris Commune was not a parliamentary organ, but a work structure in charge of both the legislative and the administrative.

To assure its own proletarian essence and the realization of the function of the proletarian dictatorship, the Paris Commune created and enforced the historically significant general election system.

The general election system of the Paris Commune was entirely opposite to the spurious democratic election system of the bourgeoisie.

The Paris Commune declared that all leaders were to be elected by the people. This was the most fundamental principle of the general election system. In No. 3 of the Commune Bulletin published at that time, it stated: "The election system should be compatible to all social functions. This principle is the soul of democracy... The administrative and legislative authorities are all elected." The public notice of the Central Committee of the Citizens' Self-defense Army stated: "The people have the right to elect all their own leaders."

The Paris Commune required strictly of those elected. It asked that those elected to undertake public duty must serve the people, and they must not be bourgeois style bureaucrats or politicians oppressing the people. Prior to the election of commune committee members, the Central Committee of the Citizens' Self-defense Army issued an appeal to the people: "Only those elected from among you who have <sup>shared</sup> hardships with you can serve you best. Do not trust those looking for fame or showing off... Do not trust those who cannot accomplish anything but only indulge in empty talk... Please elect those who are firm, elect those with determination and capability among the people, who are known for their sincerity and honesty."

The Paris Commune asked the elected commune committee members to be responsible to the people and to accept their supervision. During their term of office after election, the bourgeois parliamentary members are not subject to the control of the people who elected them, but usurp the power to ride herd over the people. On the contrary, the commune committee members must work among the masses, personally implement the laws passed, personally examine the result of the implementation in practical life, maintain a close contact with the people, listen carefully to their opinions, make work reports to the people, and carry out self-criticism. Many of the leaders of the Paris Commune at that time possessed such service spirit toward the people. Marx praised them by saying: "These service personnel perform their work under constant supervision... They openly and concretely do their work... Carrying out their activities in open view, they do not consider themselves as absolutely accurate, they are free from the dilatory tactics of bureaucraticism, and they are not ashamed to admit or correct their errors." ("First Draft of the Civil War of France," see Complete Works of Marx and Engels, volume 17, page 590, People's Publishing House. Slight variation in translation.)

The Paris Commune provided that the electors had the right to dismiss or change the elected at any time. In regard to the officials of bourgeois countries, the people basically had no power to dismiss or change them, while the Paris Commune fully guaranteed the power of the electors to exercise their right of dismissal. The Commune Bulletin, No. 3, stated: "The principle of dismissal gives the electors the means to correct errors... The power of dismissal must not be deprived at any time." When summarizing the commune experience, Engels pointed out: "For the purpose of preventing the loss of its newly gained control, the worker class must, on the one hand, wipe out the entire old machine which was used to oppress it all along, and, on the other hand, declare its right to dismiss or change all of the officials representing it without exception, in order to assure its own power over them." (Introduction to "the Civil War of France," op. cit., volume 2, page 227.)

The Paris Commune also provided that all the elected commune committee members, similar to all public service personnel, could

receive only/wages equivalent to those of the workers, and it abolished all the special privileges enjoyed by the parliament members and high officials of bourgeois countries. Engels said that it "effectively stopped the pursuit of promotion and wealth." (Ibid., page 228).

The general election system of the Paris Commune fully expressed the desire and demand of the vast worker class and other laboring people. With its introduction, the people could, according to their own free will, elect those most trusted by them to undertake public duties, represent their interests, and serve them.

The general election system of the Paris Commune won the enthusiastic support of the worker class and other laboring people.

The election of the Paris Commune was extremely dignified and solemn. On election day, the electors of the worker district were especially enthusiastic. With the joy of emancipation, they formed into groups, raised high the red flag, stuck the voting ticket in their hat, marched through the Bastille square, and came to the voting hall. It was the very first time for the laboring people to elect their own true representatives by voting. There was no policeman at the gate of the voting hall, nor the filthy campaign activities of the bourgeoisie. The election was free and democratic.

The committee members of the Paris Commune at that time were elected by the residents of the 20 districts of Paris according to the population. Generally, one member for every 20,000 population was elected, and the total number was 90. The worker class was especially active in attending the election. As a result, 86 persons were elected as committee members of the Paris Commune. A large group of new model public service personnel undertook the important work of the commune, and the majority of them were workers or publicly recognized representatives of the worker class.

Though the Paris Commune failed, it left many extremely valuable experiences gained by blood to the international proletariat. The general election system was one of its important experiences.

The general election system of the Paris Commune possesses a powerful vigor. It will intensify and develop with the proletarian revolutionary movement, and become more forceful and perfect.

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