

# Exposing human rights myth

Deng Xiaoping and others showed how Western powers' weapons of ideology too often have harmed non-Western societies

A popular belief in the United States is that the country has been an advocate of human rights since day one.

The US Bill of Rights of 1789 was thought to have been derived from early political documents as far back as Great Britain's Magna Carta of 1215, England's Bill of Rights of 1689, and the Virginia Declaration of Rights submitted by George Mason in 1776.



Wen Yang

And many assume that the UN Charter of 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 were based on the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear, listed by US president Franklin D. Roosevelt in his 1941 annual message to Congress, and the Atlantic Charter signed in August of that year.

And yet, while current pursuits of human rights are so often associated with US history and the liberalist tradition of Britain and the US, the truth is something very different.

In the late 1980s, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, while picking apart Western "human rights politics", pointed out: Countries engaging in power politics are not qualified to preach about human rights. How many people's human rights have they trampled in history? How many Chinese people's human rights have they trampled since the First Opium War (1839-42)?

Deng's comment hit the bull's-eye on this issue: the "human rights" of Western powers have been obtained at the cost of rights of non-Western societies.

More importantly, when nations of the world talked about forming the UN some 70 years ago, it was small countries like Cuba, not the mighty US, that initiated the establishment of a universal standard for human rights.

At that time, Western powers, led

by the US and the United Kingdom, intended to impose the criteria of "18th century-style European human rights" on the whole world. But Cuba and many other small countries insisted instead on a set of universal human rights without racial, cultural or skin color differentiation — because the "ethnocentric" human rights standards pursued by Western powers would have caused inevitable harm, especially for the peoples of relatively weak and small nations.

Cuba, Chile and Panama became the first member states to introduce a bill requesting human rights be added to the UN Charter, at a San Francisco meeting back in 1945. In the final draft of the UN Charter, seven expressions relevant to human rights were submitted by the three Latin American delegations, which were also authors of many articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

It is safe to say that without the persistence of these countries, the "four freedoms" advocated by Roosevelt would most likely have

been adopted as the sole "universal human rights", thus missing such concerns as "basic human rights", "equal rights" and "social progress". The latter involves raising living standards, ensuring sufficient employment, and improving conditions for socioeconomic development.

At the 1948 UN meeting in Paris, member states were largely divided into two rival camps over salary-related labor rights proposed by Cuba. Delegations supporting Cuba included Poland, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Argentina, while all "North Atlantic" nations except Denmark, including the US, opposed it.

In the final versions of the UN Charter and UDHR, UN member states agreed to disagree, resulting in "one right, two expressions" at certain points. Such differences remained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, published by the UN in 1966.

Since the end of the Cold War,

the US has been using human rights as a convenient excuse to betray those compromises and become increasingly obsessed with political rights. It even came up with the slogan "Human rights above state sovereignty" and used it to justify subversive activities in certain non-Western countries by pro-US opposition parties.

Facing repeated criticisms for human rights abuses, the US resigned its membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council on June 19 this year.

It is not hard to see how Western countries purposely modified the concept of human rights as well as freedom and democracy to pursue what are sometimes referred to as ideological (soft) wars. In other words, they have projected those politico-philosophical concepts into sharp weapons of ideology.

It is time to clear up the source and return to the basics of human rights.

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## Boost consumption, social spending

Looking ahead, high uncertainty and weaker global economic prospects may call for more stimulus in China

By ELITZA MILEVA

In China, GDP growth slowed to 6.5 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2018 from 6.8 percent in the first half. This moderation was mainly due to weaker investment and exports. Investment growth continues to decelerate as the economy transitions to a new growth path which is increasingly dependent on domestic consumption.

Weaker global trade momentum and trade policy tensions have weighed on exports. China's exports to the US which are subject to 25 percent tariffs have declined. Growth in exports subject to 10 percent tariffs has so far remained robust but is expected to slow too.

Financial markets have declined. The Shanghai Composite Index lost 20 percent and the renminbi fell by about 6 percent against the US dollar during 2018. Small net capital outflows were recorded in the third quarter, as foreign investors reduced sharply bond and stock purchases.

The outlook for the global economy has also weakened. The

recovery in international trade and investment is faltering. Trade tensions and financial market volatility have increased uncertainty.

In response to this challenging economic environment, the government announced a series of measures to support growth and boost investor confidence. This includes fiscal incentives for households and businesses, infrastructure investment, increased liquidity provision by the People's Bank of China, and guidance to ease the financing constraints of the private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises.

In 2018, the authorities also improved the investment climate, helping push China up the World Bank Doing Business rankings to 46th, advancing ahead of 30 countries it lagged behind in 2017. The government relaxed the restrictions on foreign ownership in financial services, automobile, ship and aircraft manufacturing. China lowered import tariffs significantly. It also reduced the time and cost of exports and imports by allowing businesses to submit regulatory documents, such as customs dec-

larations, at a single window platform and by eliminating administrative charges.

Looking ahead, high uncertainty and weaker global economic prospects may call for more stimulus in China. What fiscal instruments do policymakers have to bolster confidence and support the economy?

Historically, China relied on infrastructure investment by local governments to stimulate the economy. But, in recent years, such policies have brought lower growth returns and a growing debt burden. Higher public infrastructure spending could reduce the resources available to companies in more productive sectors. Policymakers are aware of these risks and have remained committed to reforming local government finance.

China has room to further lower business taxes. However, the effectiveness of any tax incentives in increasing investment will also depend on business confidence. To increase investment opportunities and lower costs, the authorities will need to improve regulatory transparency, strengthen intellectual property rights, and enforce fair

competition for private and State-owned enterprises.

To stimulate the economy, fiscal policy could focus on boosting household consumption. The Amended Individual Income Tax Law already reduces the tax burden of households. But China has the policy space to do more.

The government could shift spending from public infrastructure to health, education, and social protection. Over time, China has significantly reduced child and maternal mortality, curbed the incidence of infectious disease, and improved life expectancy. Basic education is now universal, and secondary schooling is almost universal. Pension coverage is relatively high for a country with China's income level. Despite improved access to public services, disparities between urban and rural residents and between richer and lower-income provinces have risen.

In healthcare and education, one option could be to raise public funding for hiring and retaining workers in rural areas and in provinces with limited resources.

Measures could also aim at reducing individual out-of-pocket health expenditures which remain high for the poor and for rural residents. Early childhood education and elderly care are fast becoming areas of high demand.

In social protection, the Dibao program, which guarantees a minimum income, needs more and better targeted resources to meet the basic needs of low-income families. Pension coverage among rural, migrant, and urban informal sector workers is relatively low and benefits are often inadequate to cover living costs.

Higher and better targeted social spending would create jobs, enhance public services, and provide better support to poor and vulnerable households. In the short term, these measures would encourage households to save less and spend more. In the long run, they would boost worker productivity and China's growth potential and help the country achieve a more equal society.

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