

Trade Union Reform: Towards a Better and More Effective Union System with Chinese Characteristics ?

— A Case Study of the 2016 Shanghai Reform of Mass Organizations

Qiao Jian

Synopsis: Why is it necessary to have trade union reforms? What problems are troubling China's union system? These are major topics among China's pressing social issues. The Central Party Conference on the Mass Organization Work called for upholding the "political, advanced and people-conscious nature" of China's trade union while removing the "bureaucratic, administrative, aristocratic and entertainment-oriented tendencies" in its work. The literature of China's trade union shows that its chronic problem of alienating from working masses is closely related to the way the Party has defined its union policies after the founding of the People's Republic. This paper intends, on the basis of the 2016 Shanghai pilot reform of mass organizations, to present a case study on the "de-administration" of unions, featuring redefinition of union functions at various levels, optimization of union organizational setup, multiple-source selection of union functionaries through elections, special appointments or secondment arrangements, etc., making workers as the principal focus of union work, and expanding union work to include cyber-based and socialized services. Through a review of previous union reform in China, this paper hopes to reveal that the current round of reform may represent yet another important step forward in terms of quality and effectiveness in advancing a socialist, Chinese-style path of trade union development.

Key words: union reform, people-conscious, cyber-based union, union-led service providers