

**“THE PRESENT SITUATION AND THE TASKS BEFORE US”  
(SPEECH, JANUARY 16, 1980)  
By Deng Xiaoping**

**Introduction**

Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) engineered a take-over of the Communist Party leadership in 1978, which culminated at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in December of that year, when his supporters took over the Central Committee and the Central Committee's Political Bureau (Politburo).

As part of his struggle to take control of the Party leadership, Deng had tacitly allowed democracy activists in Beijing to put up posters at “Democracy Wall” and to print and circulate informal news magazines. Inasmuch as the activists attacked the Cultural Revolution and Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng (b. 1921), they were helpful. However, when Deng had gained power, the activists were no longer of any value — in fact, their questioning and challenging of Deng and his policies made them a liability. The repression began in the spring of 1979. This was part of the larger process of Deng Xiaoping asserting his control and preparing the Party, the government, and the country to move in the direction of economic reform and opening to the outside world that would characterize the period of Deng's leadership.

In this speech of January 16, 1980, Deng laid forth his analysis of China's situation and the most pressing tasks at hand.

**Document Excerpts with Questions**

From *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), 224-258.

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First, it is essential to follow a firm and consistent political line. We now have such a line. In his speech at the meeting in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, Comrade Ye Jianying formulated the general task — or, if you will, the general line — as follows: Unite the people of all our nationalities and bring all positive forces into play so that we can work with one heart and one mind, go all out, aim high and achieve greater, faster, better, and more economical results in building a modern, powerful socialist country.

The socialist system is one thing, and the specific way of building socialism another.

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on**

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This superiority [of the socialist system] should manifest itself in many ways, but first and foremost it must be revealed in the rate of economic growth and in economic efficiency.

Without political stability and unity, it would be impossible for us to settle down to construction. This has been borne out by our experience in the more than twenty years since 1957. ...

In addition to stability and unity, we must maintain liveliness ... when liveliness clashes with stability and unity, we can never pursue the former at the expense of the latter. The experience of the Cultural Revolution has already proved that chaos leads only to retrogression, not to progress ...

**Questions:**

1. How does Deng Xiaoping understand socialism?
2. How does Deng’s understanding of socialism contrast with that of Mao Zedong?
3. Compare Deng’s comments quoted above with those of Chiang Kai-shek when he discussed national identity in 1939. Are there similarities in their rhetoric?
4. Looking at things from Deng’s point of view, what reason would he have for regarding the Democracy Wall activists as something similar to the Cultural Revolution?