

INTELLECTUAL OPINIONS FROM THE HUNDRED FLOWERS PERIOD (1957)

Introduction

By 1956 the People's Republic of China had completed the transition from a capitalist, market economy to a planned socialist economy. In making that transition, China had followed the Soviet model of economic development and socialist economy: five-year plans, a capital-intensive emphasis on the development of heavy industry, and an elitist educational and managerial system which rewarded technicians, engineers, and Party bureaucrats. However, agricultural production did not increase at the rates required by the economic planners, which in turn slowed the growth of industrial production.

In this context, Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976) decided to call upon intellectuals to voice their criticisms. On February 27, 1957, Mao delivered a speech before the Supreme State Conference in which he encouraged criticism, using the phrase "let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend." Intellectuals were at first reluctant to speak out, but by May 1957 they were convinced that they had official permission to do so. The following documents are a sample of the kind of criticisms that Chinese intellectuals raised in May-June 1957.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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Intellectual Opinions from the Hundred Flowers Period (1957)

[From a writer:]

... We cannot but admit that since the liberation of the country, our guiding theoretical ideas [in literature] have been conservative and at the same time profoundly influenced by doctrinairism from abroad, which to a considerable degree has hindered and stunted the development and prosperity of literary and artistic enterprises. ...

[From the editor in chief of the Guangming Daily:]

... I think a party leading a nation is not the same as a party owning a nation; the public supports the Party, but members of the public have not forgotten that they are the masters of the nation ... isn't it too much that within the scope of the nation, there must be a Party man as leader in every unit, big or small, whether section or subsection. ... For many years, the talents

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on
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or capabilities of many Party men have not matched their duties. They have bungled their jobs, to the detriment of the state, and have not been able to command the respect of the masses, with the result that the relations between the Party and the masses have been tense.

[From a college professor:]

The Party members, due to their occupying positions of leadership and being favorably situated, seem to enjoy in all respects excessive privileges. ...

[From a student leader:]

True socialism is highly democratic, but the socialism we have here is not democratic. I call this society a socialism sprung from a basis of feudalism. ...

Questions:

1. What faults do these critics find with the Party?
2. Compare these criticisms of the Party with the criticisms voiced by students in the 1989 Democracy Movement.
3. Are there any hints here as to the critics' ideological outlook? Are the critics liberal democrats? Marxists?
4. What changes would need to be made to satisfy the critics? Would the entire political system need to be overthrown, or could they be satisfied with minor adjustments within the context of continued Communist Party rule?
5. If you were a Communist Party cadre, how would you answer these critics?

Longer Selection

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[From the editor of Literary Studies:]

No one can deny that in our country at present there are still floods and droughts, still famine and unemployment, still infectious disease and the oppression of the bureaucracy, plus other unpleasant and unjustifiable phenomena. ... A writer in possession of an upright conscience and a clear head ought not to shut his eyes complacently and remain silent in the face of real life and the sufferings of the people. If a writer does not have the courage to reveal the dark diseases of society, does not have the courage to participate positively in solving the

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crucial problems of people's lives, and does not have the courage to attack all the deformed, sick, black things, then can he be called a writer?

[From a factory manager:]

Learning from the Soviet Union is a royal road; but some cadres do not understand and think that it means copying. I say if we do, it will paralyze Chinese engineers. ... I have been engaged in electrical engineering for twenty years. Some of the Soviet experiences simply do not impress me. Of course, I suffered a good deal in the Five-Anti movement [against private business and business leaders] because of these opinions.

[From a writer:]

I think that Chairman Mao's speech delivered at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art consisted of two component parts: one was composed of theories of a tactical nature with which to guide the literary and artistic campaigns at the time, the other was composed of theories involving general principles with which to guide literary and artistic enterprises over the long run. ...

Owing to the fact that the life these works reflected belonged to a definite period and that the creative processes of the writers were hurried and brief, the artistic content of these works was generally very poor, and the intellectual content extremely limited. ...

If we were to use today the same method of leadership and the same theories as were used in the past to supervise and guide writers' creative works, they would inevitably perform only the function of achieving "retrogression" rather than progress.

We cannot but admit that since the liberation of the country, our guiding theoretical ideas have been conservative and at the same time profoundly influenced by doctrinairism from abroad, which to a considerable degree has hindered and stunted the development and prosperity of literary and artistic enterprises. ...

The root causes of formalization and conceptualization lie in the dogmatists mechanically, conservatively, one-sidedly, and in an exaggerated way carrying out and elaborating upon the tactical theories that Chairman Mao used to guide the literary and artistic movement at the time. ...

Literature and art do not serve politics by mechanically serving a certain policy, nor do creative works that conform to the constitution, Party regulations, and the letter of the law; they mainly do so through the class nature of works, through encouraging people, and through the function of aesthetic education of the people's moral qualities.

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[From the editor in chief of the Guangming Daily:]

After the liberation [1949], intellectuals warmly supported the Party and accepted the leadership of the Party. But in the past few years the relations between the Party and the masses have not been good and have become a problem of our political life that urgently needs readjustment. Where is the key to the problem? In my opinion, the key lies in the idea that “the world belongs to the Party.” I think a party leading a nation is not the same as a party owning a nation; the public supports the Party, but members of the public have not forgotten that they are masters of the nation ... isn't it too much that within the scope of the nation, there must be a Party man as leader in every unit, big or small, whether section or subsection. ... For many years, the talents or capabilities of many Party men have not matched their duties. They have bungled their jobs, to the detriment of the state, and have not been able to command the respect of the masses, with the result that the relations between the Party and the masses have been tense.

[From a college professor:]

The Party members, due to their occupying positions of leadership and being favorably situated, seem to enjoy in all respects excessive privileges. Take theaters, for instance; a certain Party member pointed out in his self-examination that he was never happy unless he was offered a seat in the first ten rows. Why did he feel like that? Because he was used to seats in the first ten front rows. ... During the past few campaigns, one by one the people have had the skin of their faces torn to pieces, and the intellectuals have had their authority knocked for six, all of which may, should, and indeed does have certain advantages. But why is it that the rectification of Party members must be done behind closed doors, and why is it that the masses are not allowed to probe into things if and when a Party member makes a mistake? ... Never treat a person as if he were worse than dog's excreta one moment and regard him as worth ten thousand ounces of gold the next. The intellectuals cannot stomach the ice-cold, nor can they swallow the piping-hot.

[From a student leader:]

True socialism is highly democratic, but the socialism we have here is not democratic. I call this society a socialism sprung from a basis of feudalism. We should not be satisfied with the Party's rectification and reformist methods and the slight concessions made to the people.