

The Hundred Flowers Campaign 1956-1957

In 1956, Mao surprised everyone when he launched a campaign under the slogan 'Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend.' He was demanding that intellectuals should feel free to openly voice criticisms of the Communist Party and its policies. Mao's decision to do this grew out of debates that had been going on within the Communist Party leadership over the results of the Five Year Plan (1953-1957) and the future pace of economic change. Unable to get his way in those debates, he called on intellectuals – people from outside the Party – to criticise his party as a way of putting pressure on those officials who were standing in his way.

Reasons for the Hundred Flowers Campaign

There had been much debate about Mao's motives for the Campaign. Was it a genuine attempt to find out what people thought or a devious way of flushing out the opposition? Read through the evidence below and make your own judgement:

1. Mao had travelled widely throughout China during the early 1950s and had always been received very warmly. He appears to have believed that it was possible to allow greater expression in China.

2. By 1956 the CCP was losing much of its early popularity. The city population rose by 40m leading to over-population, food shortages and housing problems as well as a shortage of consumer goods.

3. Many peasants were not keen on the higher-stage co-ops in which they lost ownership of their land.

4. Mao had heard that local CCP officials had been accused of acting heavy-handed and wanted to hear other opinions.

5. In 1954 President Liu Shaoqi had delivered a report to the Congress of the CCP in which he mentioned Mao's name 104 times. At the next Congress in 1956 Liu mentioned Mao only four times.

6. On the face of it, Mao was calling for a great debate on the Five Year Plan, but in reality the campaign may well not have been sincere, but simply an attempt to discover any potential opponents.

7. In the autumn of 1956 Wang Meng, a 22-year old son of a professor of philosophy at Beijing, published a short novel Young Man Who Has Just arrived at the Organisation Department which attacked laziness and incompetence in the communist bureaucracy.

a.) Sort the evidence into two groups: 1. Campaign was a trap 2. Campaign was a colossal blunder

b.) Use the evidence to give your assessment of Mao's motives for launching the campaign **AND** his later decision to turn it into an anti-rightist campaign.

8. *'Right now there are certain people who behave as if they can sit back and relax and ride roughshod over the people...such people are opposed by the masses...From my point of view...there are times when nothing but a beating can solve the problem. The CCP has to learn its lesson...and not allow a bureaucratic lifestyle to develop.'* (Mao in 1956)

9. *'Letting a hundred flowers blossom is the policy for promoting progress and a socialist culture in our land. Questions of right and wrong should be settled through free discussion. We are against poisonous weeds...but we must carefully distinguish between what is really a poisonous weed and what is really a fragrant flower.'* (Mao in February 1957)

10. *'In recent days the rightists...have shown themselves to be most determined & most rabid. We shall let them run amuck for a time. The more outrageous their conduct, the more quickly they will show themselves up as doing the opposite of cooperating with the CCP...They will then end up burying themselves.'* (Mao in May 1957)

11. *'He cooked up a devious plan. Few guessed that Mao was setting a trap and that he was inviting people to speak out so that he could then use what they said as an excuse to victimise them.'*

12. *'The campaign was a muddled and inconclusive movement that grew out of conflicts within the CCP leadership. At its centre was an argument about the pace & type of development that was best for China.'*

13. *'Mao made two misjudgements. He underestimated the volume and bitterness of the criticism, and the Party's ability to withstand them.'*