Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956)

"Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend"

In late 1956, Mao finally opened up the floor for criticism. After all his preaching about Communist ideology and the importance of being allegiant to the CCP, he now begins actively encouraging people to exercise their short-lived right to freedom of speech.

Many people were rightly suspicious of this seemingly harmless campaign, and therefore the flow of criticism was not as heavy as Mao would experience in the months to come. Due to the history between Communists and Nationalists, and Mao's strong policies against Rightists, one can gather why suspicion is a valid reaction to this campaign.

However, by the spring of 1957, Mao received many letters, mainly from intellectuals, that openly and freely criticised the Chinese government and their plans. This was mainly due to the fact that Mao had told the people he “preferred” to be criticised, and had even begun putting pressure on those who would not evaluate him.

This is arguably the climax of Mao’s time in power, when things were good, the majority of people had enough food to eat, and Mao had stopped killing his own citizens for menial reasons.

Although all good things must come to an end eventually, as did this very soon after it began.

When people began openly protesting and propaganda began cropping up at universities and in public places that did not support Mao, he decided to pull the plug on the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Or more accurately, he decided to drop the facade.

Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957)

Alright that’s enough of that

Shortly after the Hundred Flowers Campaign began, and just as it was gaining major traction, Mao moved on with the Anti-Rightist campaign, proving he is most likely the biggest snake in the history of, well, history.

The Anti-Rightist Campaign allowed Mao to put all the criticism he received to use. But not like a normal person, like the crazy dictator he was.

Instead of improving the Chinese government, he used the information of the people who sent him criticism to determine who was a Rightist. This allowed him to more precisely and productively target his opposition and get rid of it.

In fact, the majority of people sending him criticism were intellectuals, that was the main group of people he cared. Whether they were expressing opinion or actually anti-communists, Mao cared not.

By the end of the year, 300,000 people had been labeled as rightists. The punishment ranged from public humiliation and forced labor to execution.

This marked the slow downhill march Mao had begun as a leader.