

Document 16.6: Excerpts from Fang Lizhi and Liu Binyan, two Chinese activists, writing about democracy, 1990

Fang Lizhi was born in 1936 and studied physics at Beijing University. He was first expelled from the Party during the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957 and spent much of the Cultural Revolution in prison. Officially rehabilitated in 1979, he became the vice president of the Chinese University of Science and Technology in 1984. In 1986, student dissent led to his being fired from this post, and he was expelled from the Party again, due to his outspoken advocacy for democratic reform. Fang wrote and spoke extensively on the need for democracy in China in order to fully modernize, and he called for intellectual freedoms in order to innovate in the sciences. During the Tiananmen Square movement he sought shelter and asylum in the U.S. Embassy, where he and his wife remained for over a year before being allowed to leave China for a life in exile. In 1989, Fang Lizhi won the Nobel Peace Prize.

In democratic countries, democracy begins with the individual. *I* am the master, and the government is responsible to *me*. Citizens of democracies believe that the people maintain the government, paying taxes in return for services—running schools and hospitals, administering the city, providing for the public welfare.... A government depends on the taxpayers for support and therefore *has to be* responsible to its citizens. This is what people think in a democratic society. But here in China, we think the opposite way. If the government does something commendable, people say, “Oh, isn’t the government great for providing us with public transportation.” But this is really something it *ought* to be doing in exchange for our tax money.... You have to be clear about who is supporting whom economically, because setting this straight leads to the kind of thinking that democracy requires. Yet China is so feudalistic that we always expect superiors to give orders and inferiors to follow them. What our “spiritual civilization” lacks above all other things is the spirit of democracy. If you want reform—and there are more reforms needed in our political institutions than I have time to talk about—the most crucial thing of all is to have a democratic morality and a democratic spirit.

Liu Binyan was born in 1925 and joined the Communist Party in 1944. He worked as a reporter and editor for China Youth News starting in 1949. In 1956 he published two controversial pieces, one about political corruption and one about the controls over the press, and, as a result, in 1957 he was labeled a “Rightist” and was expelled from the Party. He was “rehabilitated” by the Party and brought back in the 1960s, only to fall out of favor again due to his reporting in 1969. He was sentenced to a labor camp. From 1957 onward, he spent over two decades in and out of labor camps. In 1978, Liu was again re-admitted to the Party and the label of “Rightist” was officially removed. He continued, however, to report on injustice in Chinese society and corruption in politics, which once again led to his expulsion from the Party in 1987. In 1988 he came to the United States to work as a writer. After criticizing the Party during the protests in Tiananmen Square, he was officially prohibited from returning to China; he died of cancer in the U.S. in 2005.

Evidently, these bloodthirsty rulers stake everything on the force of arms. They have lost all ability to understand the people, whom they fear and despise at the same time. They assume that the people, in the eighties [1980s], are just as submissive as they were in the twenties [1920s] and thirties to the bloody rule of the warlords of the time, or just as responsive to the rallying calls and lying propaganda of the Communist Party as they were in the fifties [1950s] and sixties.

On the surface, the rulers have attained their objective. Under the all-encompassing terrorism, China seems to have been cowed into silent submission. But this will actually create a bigger nightmare for them than if they had made some compromise.

The peaceful demonstration at Tiananmen Square was crushed, but it lit a flame in the hearts of countless people. The long-suffering Chinese people, after repeatedly being bullied and cheated, have finally given up their last illusions about the Chinese Communist Party....

I gave up my youth for the Communist Party in its struggle to seize state power. And now a handful of tyrants have betrayed the Party, turning themselves into enemies of the people in the real sense of the word. My generation has thrown itself into the struggle led by the Communist Party in the hope that our children will lead a better life, and now it is precisely the best and brightest of their generation who have died at the butchers' hands, or are fugitives fleeing from arrest.

Sources: Fang Lizhi. *Bringing Down the Great Wall: Writing on Science, Culture, and Democracy in China*. Trans. James Williams. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991. 169.

Liu Binyan. *A Higher Kind of Loyalty: A Memoir by China's Foremost Journalist*, trans. Hong Zhu. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990. 282.