

HOW SHOULD THE CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION TO THE
COMMUNIST YOUTH LEAGUE BE ADMINISTERED AFTER
INSTALLATION OF THE PRODUCTION RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM?
(1981)

Introduction

As economic reform changed the way Chinese lived and worked in the 1980s, old identities were challenged and new identities emerged. In this context, the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League were faced with new questions about what it meant to be a good Communist. In the past, one could look to an individual's behavior and attitudes within the context of collective work and collective life. With marketization, private entrepreneurship, and the contract responsibility system, many people no longer worked within collectives.

In the exchange below, a local Communist Youth League official asks for clarification: How do you tell whether someone has the characteristics of a good Communist when their behavior can no longer be observed within the framework of collective labor?

Document Excerpts with Questions

From "Shixing zerenzhijou, zenyang zhangwo rutuan biao zhun?" *Zhongguo qingnian* [China Youth], No. 16 (August 26, 1981): 21. Translation from *Chinese Education* 18:1 (Spring 1985): 10-12. Reprinted with permission from John P. Burns and Stanley Rosen, editors, *Policy Conflict in Post-Mao China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe), 1986. © 1986 M.E. Sharpe.

How Should the Criteria for Admission to the Communist Youth League Be Administered After Installation of the Production Responsibility System? (1981)

Comrade Editor:

Since the production responsibility system was installed in the countryside, we have been at a loss how to administer the criterion for recruiting new members of the Communist Youth League. To determine whether or not a youth meets the standard of a League member, our previous practice was to find out whether or not he devoted himself to the interests of the public, loved the collective, and did his share for the construction of a socialist new countryside. Now production is contracted out to individual households. With the overall contracting system being implemented, the young people are confined to the small world of a family or a household, calculating how to increase the family income and earn a greater bonus for overfulfillment of production quotas. In this way, how can we examine and determine whether a youth has a high degree of political awareness and possesses the collectivist spirit of devoting himself to the interests of the public?

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Please give us an answer.

Yours,

*Wang Baochang et al., Sichuan
August 26, 1981*

Response:

Comrades Wang Baochang and Others:

We must examine young people who apply for League membership strictly according to the League membership requirements set forth in the League constitution. The constitution of the Communist Youth League states in explicit terms that a League member must “implement the Party’s general and specific policies, enthusiastically fulfill the tasks assigned by League organizations, and play an exemplary role in studies, labor, and work.”

Right now, different forms of the production responsibility system are being implemented across the countryside; it is precisely the major policy the Party has adopted to regulate production relations. Quite a few young people who apply for League membership are in full support of the policy. They take the initiative in contracting production projects that call for more intensive labor and higher skill in an effort to wrest continuous high yields in the land they have contracted for. This embodies precisely the exemplary role they play in carrying out conscientiously the Party’s general and specific policies. Whether a rural youth can wrest high yields, make more contributions, and provide the state and the collective with more agricultural and sideline products has now become a basic criterion for assessing his genuine love of the state, his concern for the collective, and whether or not he is doing his part for the socialist cause. To define without analysis the endeavor of doing a good job with the land one has contracted for as a move to “further one’s own interest” is incorrect.

Implementing the different policies the Party adopts toward rural areas adds new content to the criterion a League organization should administer when recruiting new members. For example, whether or not a youth supports the line, the general and specific policies of the Party, and abides by the decrees, rules, and regulations issued by the state serves as a specific criterion for assessing his political awareness. Since implementation of the overall contracting system, for another example, investigation must be made to determine who works the hardest, who studies science and makes use of science, and who provides the state and the collective with more agricultural and sideline products. All this will serve as ironclad evidence. Compared with the previous practice of “everyone eating from the same big pot,” don’t things at present provide us more accuracy in administering the criterion of recruiting new League members?

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Obviously, the situation has changed, but the requirements for a League member set forth in the League constitution remain the same. The problem is some comrades still judge candidates by old standards when recruiting them. In their eyes, going to work like a swarm of bees and allowing “everyone to eat from the same big pot” are precisely a wholehearted devotion to the interests of the public and a love for the collective, while spending more energy on the land one has contracted for is “calculated” to further one’s own interests. In this way, they feel everything is out of step with their standard and most young people, it seems, do not measure up to League member requirements. Under the new circumstances, therefore, the basic condition for one to administer correctly the criterion of admitting new League members is to catch up rapidly with the changed situation in terms of one’s way of thinking. Of course, this does not mean that we can willfully tamper with the League member requirements set forth in the League constitution and lower our demands on progressive youth. That, too, would also be incorrect.

*Organization Department,
League Central Committee*

Questions:

1. How would you describe the problem that Wang poses in his letter to the editor?
2. How does the League Central Committee Organization Department resolve the question? Are you satisfied with the way in which the Organization Department handles the issue? Why or why not?
3. Given the position of the League Central Committee, what would you expect a young person who wanted to get into the Youth League to do?
4. Compare the League Central Committee’s response with Mao Zedong’s and Liu Shaoqi’s perspective on what it takes to be a good Communist. What similarities or differences do you see? If there are differences, what might account for them?
5. If you were in China, would you qualify for Youth League membership under these criteria? Why or why not?