

The Current Debate on the Socialist State System – A Reply by the Revolutionary Communist Party,USA

The following article was originally written for circulation to parties and organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) in June 2006. The article was a response to an article written by Ajith of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [Naxalbari] entitled "The Current Debate on the Socialist State System" appearing in the journal New Wave. That article was largely based on earlier material from 1998 in which Naxalbari criticized K. Venu, a former leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [Central Reorganisation Committee]. Some additional passages had been added to Ajith's article which comment on some of the RCP,USA writings and also the writings of Bob Avakian including elements of Avakian's new synthesis of communism.

Ajith's article objected to Avakian's formulation of "solid core with lots of elasticity" with regard to the socialist transition period. Ajith contends that Avakian's approach argues is really no different than what Mao argued for with his policy to "let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" but that this has been proven impossible by the actual conditions of socialist revolution.

In addition, Ajith argues that because of Marxism's "proletarian stand and partisanship", it cannot (and should not attempt to) conform to the scientific method used in the natural sciences. Ajith's article thus gives voice to some long-standing theoretical and epistemological tendencies within the communist movement that Bob Avakian has been identifying and struggling for the communist movement to rupture with.

A version of Ajith's article has been published on line. As of June 2012, it could be found at the following <http://thenewwave.files.wordpress.com/2007/10/nw-2-full-final-1.pdf>.

Since this earlier exchange of articles the differences reflected therein have come into sharper and sharper conflict among those forces who have been united in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement. We believe that this exchange is not only of interest to those seeking to understand the origin of the differences in the international communist movement, these articles also help to illustrate some of the implications and consequences of two different political and ideological lines .

The article is reprinted as it appeared in 2006 with only slight editing to respect the confidentiality of exchanges within the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement.

Comrade Ajith of the CPI (M-L) (Naxalbari) has written an article "The Current Debate on the Socialist System" in which he presents some clear and developed positions on a number of questions that are under discussion within RIM and the ICM more generally. Most of the article is based on earlier material criticising K.Venu's worship of bourgeois democracy and his "theory of nonclass aspects". Our party has written at length against Venu's deviations in an article entitled "Democracy, Now More than Ever, We Can and Must do Better than That" written by Chairman Bob Avakian and published in no. 17 of *A World to Win*. It is not our purpose here to focus on Venu's deviations or closely examine Naxalbari's arguments against them. Rather we will focus our remarks on those sections of the article that were added recently as a means of participating in the present discussion within RIM.

Comrade Ajith's article has the merit of serving as a window into the approach and thinking of CPI (ML) (NB), and some others as well, not only in relation to some specific points under dispute, but concerning basic questions of our ideology. We find in Ajith's article an argument which seeks to justify and cling to some of the very features of our movement and past thinking that most need to be subject to re-examination. This is not by any means to say that CPI (ML) (NB) are the worst offenders in this regard – on the contrary, it is to be commended that they have recognized the importance of the discussion under way and are striving to participate in it fully. Further, comrade Ajith is correct in stressing the great importance of the lessons of the Venu experience, which, in essence, means replacing Marxism-Leninism-Maoism with a variation of the ideology of bourgeois democracy. Nevertheless, we are convinced that comrade Ajith's struggle in defense of MLM

principles is handicapped by a refusal to really examine the shortcomings of the communist project. His arguments reflect the lead in the wings of our Movement which we need to cast aside if we are really going to be able to soar to the heights which are both necessary and possible in the circumstances of today. It is in this spirit that we have prepared this answer to comrade Ajith, in the hopes that through sharpening the debate in RIM we will be able to go through the necessary leaps and transformations we so desperately need.

Let's Start from the Objective World

Ajith's article is not focused on analysing the current objective situation in the world and this response is not the place to develop at length our own, differing, understanding. Still, it is worth noting that Ajith begins his article by "framing" the discussion at hand with what must be called a subjectivist view of the current world situation. We learn that "revolution is the main trend in the world today" and that "the world situation is more favourable to the revolutionary masses than to the imperialists".

It is well past time that communists stopped substituting wishes for reality. It is only by "claiming" each and every reactionary, religious or nationalist conflict as part of the "emerging wave" of proletarian revolution that such an assessment can be made. For example, we have seen that many communist forces outside of RIM, such as the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Communist Party of India (Maoist), have uncritically hailed the "Iraqi resistance", ignoring the reactionary leadership and treating it as if it were playing the same revolutionary role as the National Liberation Front did during the Vietnam war. Then Ajith goes on to claim that "bold advances in practice", especially launching people's war, will serve to put Maoism at the head of the world revolutionary struggle. Although our present understanding is "certainly capable" of accomplishing this in the view of Ajith, further development of theory is "also" required.

No doubt comrade Ajith considers their affirmation a feature of revolutionary optimism – the objective situation is developing overwhelmingly in a positive direction, and the line and understanding of the RIM is capable of launching people's war and thus establishing Maoism at the head of the struggle. But this pollyannaish picture is really just another example of "political truth", the belief that the truth is based not on what actually exists but on what is considered to be useful in advancing the political struggle.

If our understanding really is adequate and if the objective situation is overwhelmingly positive, what explains the inability of RIM or most of the parties and organizations making it up to be able to establish themselves as the leadership of the revolutionary struggle in the world today? One is reduced to the subjectivist understanding of "will". That if only one had "dared" to wage people's war, somehow the whole situation would have changed qualitatively.

This is a wrong view on many counts. First, it actually does a great disservice to comrades who, in a number of cases, have repeatedly tried to initiate or sustain armed struggle and done so heroically and with great sacrifice. How does the understanding expressed by Ajith explain, for example, the repeated failure of the revolution in Turkey or Bangladesh to reach a stage of sustained people's war? A subjectivist approach, blindness to the real problems facing the revolution in different countries and on a world scale, will not lead to advances in revolution.

Again, it is not our intention in this article to discuss at length our own understanding of the current world situation.¹ The basic picture is that the intensification of the contradictions of the world imperialist system has sharpened greatly and this is giving rise to both new offensives by the imperialists and new waves of struggle and conflict, both dangers and opportunities, and that this cauldron of contradictions brings with it the basis for revolution to emerge more powerfully both in the oppressed countries and in the imperialist citadels themselves. It is not true that "revolution is the main trend in the world today" in the sense that it was put forward by Mao at the height of the worldwide upsurge of the 1960s.ⁱ

i It is also true that the generally correct analysis put forward by Mao was marred by an understanding associated with Lin Biao and developed in his work "Long Live the Victory of People's War" which treats the principal contradiction between the oppressed nations and peoples and imperialism as the only important contradiction of contemporary world imperialism and makes the question of waging armed struggle against imperialism the "dividing line" between revolution and revisionism. It is easy to see how,

The same degree of attraction to and spontaneity toward socialism that characterized that period is not part of the present situation. Communists must always “go against the tide”, to use Mao’s words, and that is especially true in the complex conditions of today and what remains an unfavourable ideological atmosphere internationally. If we are to make revolution, communists need to understand and act upon the objective world as it actually is in all its contradictions and motion. Unfortunately, we will see that in comrade Ajith’s article an approach is argued for that leads against a materialist understanding.

Mainly we will focus our remarks on the later section of the Naxalbari article beginning “Sticking to Fundamentals and Developing Ideology”. On one level, this subtitle might seem to be saying the same thing as the very correct and profound passage in the *Declaration* of RIM that “history has shown that real creative developments of Marxism (and not phoney revisionist distortions) have always been inseparably linked with a fierce struggle to defend and uphold the principles of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.”² But comrade Ajith understands “sticking to fundamentals” in a different and wrong way.

Comrade Ajith argues “one of the cornerstones of the CRC’s deviation was its departure from proletarian class stand. The philosophy and method it applied for analysing categories such as individual or democracy, its idealism, metaphysics and ahistorical treatment of the issue, was a *consequence*.” (emphasis added) Here Ajith is clearly separating “class stand” from philosophy and method. However, for Marxists “philosophy and method” are central to the proletarian ideology, not something that merely “results” from class stand. What does “proletarian class stand” mean separated from the philosophy and method that together with class stand make up proletarian ideology? Really it can only mean simple class feelings – for example, identification with the masses, hatred of the exploiting classes, and so forth. In this regard it is useful to look at the remarks of Chang Chun-chiao³ who is said to have argued that “theory is the most dynamic factor in ideology” as opposed to simple class feelings. A correct theory, philosophy and method can lead to the transformation of class feelings, to the identification with the exploited classes and so forth, whereas a theory which departs from MLM will inevitably corrupt any genuine proletarian feelings. Haven’t we seen this time and again in relation to revisionist leaders, many of whom have come from among the masses and have begun their revolutionary activities with the interests of the masses in their hearts but whose class orientation has changed as the revolution has advanced and new challenges have arisen? They have been unable to meet these precisely because they have not ruptured with the method and outlook of the bourgeoisie. But to reverse this relationship, to argue that people develop revisionist lines and methodology mainly as a consequence of their sentiments or feelings, is to reverse the dialectic. While life experience, class origins and class feelings, and so forth certainly play a role in shaping any individual and as such can influence their “philosophy and method”, this is not the principal aspect which determines their ideology nor what role they will play. Dialectical and historical materialism must govern the process of development of line, theory and policies and it is this ideological and political line that will essentially determine if and how thoroughly a leader or a party represents the class interests of the proletariat. By putting the primacy on “class stand” Ajith is claiming that there is something other than dialectical and historical materialism, something other than whether a line actually corresponds to the material world and its laws, and thus is a guide to practice, some other yardstick of measurement, that can be used for deciding if a line or a leader has departed from the proletarian ideology.

Perhaps the reader will accuse us of drawing too much from a few words in the Ajith article. But we can see from the further development of his argument that the primacy given to “proletarian class stand” compared with “philosophy and method” (dialectical materialism) is no accident.

A bit further in the same section of the article Naxalbari raises the alarm: “the very vagueness of talk on ‘re-examining the fundamentals of Marxism’ without elaborating on what exactly they are, carries the seeds of reducing Marxism to a methodology cut off from its proletarian stand and partisanship”. We are not sure to what Ajith’s “re-examining the fundamentals of Marxism” is referring. Our party has not made a general call for any such “re-examination” but has insisted on the task of developing and applying Marxism to address the problems of society and revolution. Nevertheless, Ajith’s comment is revealing in two ways: first, he again insists on the opposition between “stand and partisanship” and methodology. Second, Ajith is raising the questions of

especially in the conditions of today, this kind of analysis leads to tailing the bourgeois nationalist or even reactionary leadership of many struggles (such as the Iraqi resistance).

“fundamentals of Marxism” as a special category that somehow can escape from the realm of critical examination. In so doing, Ajith presents Marxism, its “fundamental principles,” not as a scientific method and approach, not as both a product as well as a tool of social investigation, but essentially outside this process.

Ajith goes on to discuss in specific detail the relationship between the development of Marxism and the further accumulation of experience (practice). “Though new advances in Marxism arise from concrete application and verification through practice in a particular country they contain universality precisely because they are guided by the fundamentals.” This passage contains two fundamental errors. First of all, it is not true that advances in Marxism necessarily come from “concrete application and verification in a particular country”. This is readily apparent if we consider the very process of the creation of Marxism itself. Marx and Engels developed their worldview not mainly out of any specific practice they were engaged in and still less out of the activities in “a particular country”. As Lenin emphasised in his well-known article “The Three Component Parts of Marxism,” Marxism was forged from elements of French socialism, British political economy and German philosophy. He goes on in the same article to discuss how Marxism never “stood aside” from developments in human society generally and we know that in fact during the lifetimes of Marx and Engels their theory continued to develop on the basis of further accumulated experience of mankind as a whole (or at least as much of this accumulated experience as was available to them during their lifetimes). Marx and Engels addressed not only all of the realms of the class struggle (including its ideological expression) but also very much drew from advances in science and production techniques in the 19th century. Engels, in particular, paid a great deal of attention to summing up contemporary advances in science, for example Darwin, and integrated these new discoveries into his thinking.

What then about the advances in Marxism that came more directly out of the class struggle, such as Marx’s thesis concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat and the need to “smash” the existing state apparatus that took a much clearer shape after Marx summed up the experience of the Paris Commune? Here it should be pointed out that Marx was not leading the Paris Commune; in fact followers of Marx were a small minority of the activists in the Commune so it really cannot be said that Marxism was being “applied” during the Paris Commune. It is certainly true that the Paris Commune gave Marx much richer experience to synthesize and it is also true that the Paris Commune did verify in practice a number of key theses of Marxism that Marx and Engels had been arguing for several decades, most importantly the need for proletarian revolution. But this example shows that the relationship between advances in theory and their verification and further advancement in practice is a far more complex process than Ajith seems to be suggesting in his article.

It would also be incorrect to think that it was correct and necessary for Marx and Engels to draw their theory from the accumulated experience of mankind but that once these “fundamentals” are established Marxism can only develop further through the process of being applied in revolutionary practice. Indeed, this is a common error that Ajith is unfortunately justifying and theorizing in this article.

The experience of the class struggle (at least if we understand this to include all its dimensions) is by far the most important factor when studying or summing up human history. But two things need to be said here – class struggle cannot be reduced to that which genuine communist forces are directly leading in “a particular country”. Such a viewpoint would never be correct even under circumstances where large sections of the world were under proletarian rule let alone in the situation of today when the communist movement is very weak. Any attempt to equate our direct experience with the class struggle as a whole would be extremely narrow. If Marxism is going to develop under the current circumstances it has to certainly be attentive to and sum up the lessons of the most diverse struggles in the economic, political, military and ideological spheres. Very few of these struggles are under the leadership of the proletariat and much of the class struggle involves struggles of other intermediate classes, as well as struggles within the bourgeoisie and the reactionary classes themselves (such as the struggle of Al Qaeda, which is in essence a struggle of reactionary classes and strata against the Western imperialists).

While class analysis is the bedrock of a Marxist analysis of contemporary events, this has to be done concretely and correctly. For example, we can also see tendencies by many forces to want to falsely interpret different struggles and movements as expressions of the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie that are nothing of the kind. Again, to return to our example of religious fundamentalism, trying to explain this as an expression of the contradiction between the two principal classes, or to see this as part of the emerging wave of

proletarian revolution as Ajith is in danger of doing in the triumphalist introduction to his article, will lead to tailism and the abandoning of our responsibilities. Of course, the Marxist stand, viewpoint and method does provide the basis for correctly analysing phenomena such as the growth of religious fundamentalism and situating it in the contradictions of contemporary society but that is different than either the tendency of Venu (which Ajith denounces) of declaring such phenomena as beyond the scope of Marxism or, on the other hand, reducing Marxism to a set of precepts and formulas to be superimposed on objective phenomena.

The other problem with Ajith's sentence discussing the "universalism" of Marxism is what he gives as his reason why advances in Marxism are universal. He does not argue they are universal because they are universally true, but rather because they correspond to, or were based upon, the "fundamentals" of Marxism. Gone is the objective criteria of truth, that it corresponds to material reality, and in flies another opposite criteria where the truth of some idea or theory (its "universality") is determined by its consistency with the premises on which it was based. If this were true the fundamentals of Marxism could never develop or change by the very definition Ajith is proposing. It is not a promising picture for the future of our scientific ideology.

Natural Science and Social Science

Ajith claims that there is a basic distinction in method and approach between the natural sciences and social science. Where he accepts that in the natural science fundamental principles are periodically re-examined (for example, as Einstein had to re-examine the fundamental principles of Newton in order to explain the universe more accurately and more completely than Newton had been able to do), this same necessity is refused the social sciences. According to Ajith, social science is qualitatively different than natural science because of its "class partisanship".

"While social facts are part of objective reality, the process of identifying them and seeking out truth, as well as the extent to which truth can be synthesised, are intimately bound up with class stand. Whether something claimed as new is really new is itself a matter of class struggle, in theory as well as in practice. All of this rules out a simple extension of the methods of natural sciences into the re-examining of Marxist positions." Ajith's argument dovetails with the argument of many bourgeois opponents of Marxism such as the philosopher Karl Popper who have insisted that Marxism cannot be considered a real science.

Comrade Ajith's statement is confused, but underneath the confusion is the recurrence of the idea of "political truth" as has been argued openly by some in our Movement. Yes, it is true that the "process of identifying" social facts is bound up with the class struggle as Ajith argues, but not in the way he says. First of all, the exploiting classes have interests in blocking the discovery of certain truths and, more importantly, their own class bias can stand as an obstacle, as "blindness", interfering with their ability to discover truths, including in the natural sciences where, for example, religious notions stood in the way of accepting many advances such as the fact that the earth revolves around the sun and is not the centre of the universe or Einstein's initial rejection of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle because "God doesn't play dice with the universe." In the social sciences, the interference of class bias is all the more flagrant as can be seen, for example, in the stubborn clinging to theories of the inferiority of certain "races" or of women. There must be very sharp struggle indeed between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the field of scientific methodology and epistemology (the study of how knowledge develops). But whether an idea or a theory is true or not true does not depend on the class struggle but rather depends on whether or not it corresponds to objective reality, although whether the truth is recognised as such can be very bound up with the class struggle. Take, for example, the theory of the labour theory of value. This is an objective law that governs capitalist society and existed before Marx and Engels formulated it. In fact the British bourgeois political economist Ricardo understood it to an important degree. Yet Ricardo's class position and his identifying his class interests with maintaining the status quo most likely blinded him to the source of capitalist exploitation and he could not follow his understanding of the law of value to the point of understanding the nature of capitalist exploitation based on the particular feature of labor power as the one commodity capable of producing value. So here we see concretely how class outlook in the social sciences can either accelerate or block the process of arriving at the truth, but it does not affect the truth itself.

Marxism is partisan and it is true; but one cannot say Marxism is true because it is partisan. There is a world of difference between these two conceptions. In other words, the proletariat has no class interests that prevent it

from understanding the objective world and, on the contrary, needs to understand the objective world as fully and completely as possible in order to achieve its mission of liberating humanity from class society. Marxism is a scientific understanding of nature and society that reflects reality as best and as thoroughly as mankind can do at this stage of history. And Marxism reveals the possibility and the necessity of proletarian revolution – it is partisan. But Marx and Engels did not seek to construct a theory to “serve” the proletariat, to create “truths” which would somehow be useful for the working class to accomplish a mission that Marx and Engels had arbitrarily or subjectively chosen. Marx and Engels wanted to change the world; without that orientation they would never have discovered the truths that they did discover. But their ability to play such a monumental role in the process of revolutionary change came precisely from the fact that they did indeed apply scientific principles and the scientific method to understanding human society and its development. Had Marx and Engels sought to construct rather than discover truth, however well intentioned and “partisan” they may have been, they would have succeeded no further than the various utopian socialists and other reformers who decried the injustice of class exploitation but were unable to understand wherein lay the roots of class exploitation or by what process such society could be transcended.

Ajith’s argument about the different approaches in the natural sciences and the social sciences are exactly the opposite of what Engels stresses in *Anti-Duhring*. Engels argues that while all sciences can only approximate the truth (he stresses that even mathematics can make no claim to absolute truth), some sciences, because of both the limitations in human knowledge and the complexity of the subject under study (he mentions biology) are all the more “relative” and thus in more need of constant reexamination of their postulates, methods and approach. When it comes to the study of human history Engels stresses that our knowledge is even more limited and he ridicules any attempt to find eternal truths.

No doubt Ajith’s rejection of the “re-examination of fundamentals” is in part a reaction to K. Venu’s rejection of basic Marxist principles. It is definitely the case that the fact that Marxism is only “relatively” true has often been argued by those who would refute its very essence as in the case of the Khrushchev-style revisionists, post-modernists and other opponents of Marxism as well as Venu. But the critics and revisers of Marxism cannot be refuted simply on the basis that they are opposing Marxism. It has to be shown how and why the Marxist method correctly explains the objective world and the revolutionary tasks, and why our opponents’ explanations and proposals cannot explain the world as fully and correctly or serve as a guide to action. Through this process of confronting its critics Marxism will be continually “re-examined” in every respect, including its “fundamentals”, and this is one important part of the process through which Marxism – including its “fundamental principles” – will develop and become even more correct, more fully reflecting reality.

Marxism recognises the existence of absolute truth, that is to say the existence and knowability of the objective world, but it also recognizes that our understanding can only approximate this truth and goes through stages of comprehension from lower to higher.⁴ The problem is that in our movement often the problem of relative and absolute truth has been turned “inside out”. That is to say, treating the current (necessarily relative) understanding of the ICM in an “absolutist” way (arguing to not re-examine fundamentals) goes hand in hand with failing to give primacy to the existence of the external world and its laws. In this upside down approach, ideas can be considered absolutely correct because they do not need to correspond to the world, as it actually is.

According to Ajith we may abandon “models” but not reexamine fundamentals. As he himself indicates in his example about achieving a deeper understanding of the caste question in India, our understanding of fundamentals can be deepened as they are applied to new arenas of enquiry. But it is metaphysical to say that “deepening” and “reexamination” have no relation between each other. Marxism is not proven (examined) “once and for all”, it does not lay claim to represent the absolute truth, it must constantly confront new problems of analysis and new attacks and in the course of doing this our grasp of fundamental principles will change, and what we call “fundamental principles” will also undergo transformation as well. For example, it was once considered a “fundamental principle” that revolution would break out first in the more industrially advanced countries and not in the colonies and more backward countries and regions of the world. Or was this principle only a “model”? In any event, changes in the world, especially the development of imperialism, required that this idea be cast aside. Similarly, many of Stalin’s erroneous teachings, such as the idea that antagonistic classes did not exist under socialism, were considered to be “fundamental principles” not only by Stalin himself but by the

ICM generally. But we have come to understand the importance of rupturing with those aspects of Stalin's thinking that do not correspond to the objective world, to the truth.

Nor is it the case that only political conclusions, analyses and so forth have had to be "re-examined" and, in some cases, drastically changed or even discarded. Let's look at a few cases where even fundamental principles of ideology needed to be re-examined. Marx and Engels considered "the negation of the negation" taken from Hegel as a basic principle of dialectical materialism⁵ and this "fundamental" was specifically upheld by the whole international communist movement. However, this understanding was simply not correct, it goes against the core understanding of dialectical materialism and it was necessary for Mao to criticize the concept of "negation of the negation".

Similar to this concept of "negation of the negation" (and in fact linked to it) is a non-scientific concept of "the inevitable triumph of communism" which long held sway in the communist movement. Even today there are comrades that are still burdened with this metaphysical notion. Is it inconceivable that the earth will be destroyed by some kind of natural catastrophe (collision with a comet, for example?) And if that unlikely event were to happen within the next several hundred years, might it not prevent the triumph of communism? Here we should point out that even if the odds of such a calamity happening are minuscule, any real, scientific possibility of the same is enough to rule out the philosophically unsound conception of "inevitability" even if such a remote possibility may have little or no practical implications for revolutionary tasks of carrying out revolution on earth. Furthermore there is the possibility (which unfortunately the rule of the exploiting classes makes far more likely than that of a stray comet destroying the earth) that mankind itself could, through all-out nuclear war or massive environmental destruction, wipe out or at least damage the human species to such an extent that communism became impossible. Indeed avoiding this latter possibility of mankind's self-destruction is an important arena and focus of struggle and one of the clear reasons why the proletarian revolution, if not inevitable, is necessary and urgent. So here again we see that a principle, that of the "inevitable triumph of communism", which most communists once considered "fundamental", has to be jettisoned. It is more correct to see that there is "coherence" to human history that gives a tendency toward communism as well as a necessity to achieve it. But when and even whether communism will be realised also depends on the conscious actions of women and men in developing and leading the proletarian revolution to victory.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Marxism, if it is to remain the most scientific, correct and revolutionary ideology, is required to learn from and absorb from all the further truth that is constantly being discovered in all fields of human endeavor. This is an important part of what is represented by Mao's statement that Marxism "embraces but does not replace" the other branches of science. A tremendous amount of new further knowledge is being obtained in every sphere and it is impossible that Marxism can remain unaffected, unchanged in the process. And any attempt to do so, to "wall off" Marxism from the other sciences, would only assure that Marxism would undergo the most unfortunate change of all – to be transformed into a stale and lifeless dogma incapable of leading revolution forward and discovering new truths in the process.

Just consider how much more is known in recent decades about the early history of humanity thanks to advances in linguistics, DNA studies, archeology and so forth. Or take the important discoveries of the last decades about the origin of the universe and the debates that that has sparked in the scientific community and more broadly. Is it possible that these discoveries will not influence our understanding of dialectical and historical materialism? Ask yourself what attitude Marx or Engels would have taken if they had the opportunity to witness these exciting developments. Would they have feared the re-examination of the "fundamentals", or can we expect that they would have welcomed the opportunity for their theories to be further tested ("examined"!) by the continued achievements of mankind and to adjust, modify or even discard those parts of their theory which could be shown to not correspond entirely to mankind's continually deepening understanding of the objective world? Note how Lenin put it: "for the materialists the world is richer, livelier, more varied than it seems for with each step in the development of science new aspects are discovered."⁶ We who are following in the footsteps of Marx, Lenin and Mao must aim as high as they did.

Bob Avakian's Emerging New Synthesis

Insisting that the current understanding of the communist movement is adequate for the revolutionary tasks of

today, insisting that Marxism has to be treated qualitatively differently than other forms of science, confusing the relationship between fundamental principles and concrete analysis, makes it difficult for Ajith to understand or accept the new synthesis that Bob Avakian has been bringing forward in relation to the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Comrade Ajith writes, “A recent talk by comrade Bob Avakian points out the need for a ‘...synthesis of the points that were emphasized in the polemic against K. Venu and some arguments made by John Stuart Mill.’ Pointing out Mill’s opinion that ‘it’s not enough to hear positions characterized by those who oppose them, it is necessary to hear ardent advocates arguing for these positions’, he argues that we have to incorporate more of this into the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the basis of the formulation ‘a solid core with a lot of elasticity.’ Significantly, there is nothing here about the institutionalised leading role of the proletarian party within the socialist state system.”

There are a number of problems with Ajith’s argument, but even to begin answering them it is first necessary to vigorously protest against the distortion of what comrade Avakian is actually saying. Ajith would like the reader to believe that “there is nothing here about the institutionalized leading role of the proletarian party” when the very citation from Avakian he is criticizing speaks of a “synthesis of the points that were emphasized in the polemic against K. Venu”. And what were the points made in the Venu polemic? The need to maintain the “institutionalized leading role of the party” is repeatedly emphasized throughout that article and can in many ways be considered its central point. So it should be quite clear that Avakian is specifically calling for upholding the basic stand and approach he develops exhaustively in his polemic against Venu, including the very central question of the leading role of the party, while incorporating and recasting the correct aspect reflected in the principle mentioned by John Stuart Mill of the need to hear different opinions expressed by their most forceful proponents (and not just the characterization of their arguments by their opponents).

Comrade Ajith argues that Mao Tsetung had already recognized the importance of “allowing opposing ideas” with his famous call “Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend” but that “the limits in actually implementing these policies are also part of the historical experiences of the international proletariat”. Basically what Ajith is arguing is that there is nothing new in what Bob Avakian is bringing forward and, furthermore, the real world contradictions make it impossible to envision a different way to handle the problems of the proletarian dictatorship.

Earlier in the same passage Ajith points out that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a tremendous experience in unleashing the masses and practicing mass democracy on the basis of maintaining and strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat. Indeed, this represents a cornerstone of the understanding reflected in the *Declaration* upon which RIM has been constructed. But it is not enough to restrict ourselves to this understanding and to remain content with simply defending this against the opponents of revolutionary Marxism, however important this task remains. With the hindsight of several decades and looking at the whole historical epoch of the proletarian revolution to date, it is more possible to identify some of the errors that were associated with the GPCR and how Mao and the revolutionaries in China were looking at the problems of carrying forward the socialist revolution in China, and from our new vantage point we can better grasp the essential and truly path-breaking accomplishments of the GPCR under Mao’s leadership.

The new synthesis Bob Avakian is bringing forward is very much rooted in the critical scientific approach first elaborated by Marx and Engels and carried forward by Lenin and Mao. The point is that it is now more possible to see how the GPCR “divided into two”, that is, to identify those conceptions, approaches and policies applied in the GPCR which did not contribute to really solving the problems of the socialist transition, or were contradictory and contained erroneous features which actually stood in the way of what Mao was trying to lead the masses in China to accomplish and which represent the overwhelmingly principal aspect. Once it becomes possible to see shortcomings in revolutionary experience, once some of these shortcomings have been identified and analysed as comrade Avakian is doing, we must not be afraid to let go of aspects of our previous understanding that were incomplete or erroneous.

Comrade Avakian summed it up this way: the new synthesis is “dealing with real-world contradictions,

summing up the end of a stage (the first stage of socialist revolutions) and what can be learned out of that stage, attempting to draw the lessons from that and dealing with real-world contradictions in aspects, important aspects, that are new. It is a synthesis that involves taking what was positive from previous experience, working through and discarding what was negative, recasting some of what was positive and bringing it forward in a new framework.”⁷

The concept of “solid core with a lot of elasticity”, a central concept of Bob Avakian’s new synthesis, has application on many levels. When Avakian talks about “solid core with a lot of elasticity” as applied to the problem of socialist society he is talking about how to maintain the “solid core”, that is the proletarian dictatorship, the leading role of the party and its scientific ideology, and on that basis encouraging “elasticity”, that is, the active involvement and initiative of wide sections of the masses and intermediate strata many of whom do not adhere to the communist ideology, or at least not fully, who may object to aspects, even important ones, of the party’s line and policy, and who may even differ over what transformations in society they hope to see. It is in this sense that comrade Avakian has spoken of a “united front under the leadership of the proletariat” existing throughout the whole period of socialist transformation. This concept of united front under the leadership of the proletariat and “elasticity” also involves a conception of a wider scope to the debate and discussion in socialist society than has been generally practiced in past socialist countries. This definitely includes involving the basic masses in all aspects of political life but it also means that the opinions and viewpoints of non-communists and even some opponents of the party and the socialist system must be part of the political debate and intellectual ferment in socialist society, incorporated into the framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is necessary to maintain a correct approach of unity and struggle with non-communist elements in the socialist society and, as we will examine later, it is linked to how the proletarian masses themselves must be further “fitted to rule”. ii

In fact, all previous socialist societies have had a “united front” aspect because it is necessary and unavoidable that large numbers of people who do not agree with the communist programme from different classes and strata will be united in the course of proletarian revolution and socialist transformation. At the same time it must also be said that by failing to recognize this “united front” character of socialist society there have often been mistakes made in how the communists have handled the relations between themselves and these other strata. These mistakes can have a rightist or a “left” character. For example, if it is falsely believed that the

ii Since this response was originally written, there has been very significant and concrete articulation of what the “socialist state system” would be, and look like, in the conception of the new synthesis - in particular, the *Constitution For The New Socialist Republic In North America (Draft Proposal)*, from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. This document expresses in concrete form “the basic principles, institutions, structures, and processes which would characterize this new socialist society, and particularly the functioning of its government” – and in this context, is especially relevant for topics like the nature and role of elections under socialism, dissent, etc - questions under discussion in this response.

For example, this original response states “the opinions and viewpoints of non-communists and even some opponents of the party and the socialist system must be part of the political debate and intellectual ferment in socialist society” but the Constitution lays out wider parameters of opposition specifying in Article III, Section 2. Legal and Civil Rights and Liberties:

A. Freedom of speech, of assembly and association, and of dissent and protest shall not be restricted, except in cases of violation of the law and through due process of law.

Expression of opposition to this Republic and its Constitution and government – including advocacy in favor of abolishing this Republic and replacing it with another kind of society and form of government – shall not be prohibited, and on the contrary shall be permitted and protected, except as this shall involve the commission, or an active conspiracy to commit, or the direct and immediate advocacy of, violent acts, which are not in self-defense, against the government or members of the government, or others residing in this Republic, or other actions which violate the law (but, once again, expression of opposition to this Republic and its government, or mere advocacy in favor of replacing this with another form of society and government, may not be declared and treated as a violation of the law). *Constitution For The New Socialist Republic In North America (Draft Proposal)*, from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, (Chicago, RCP Publications; 2010), p.68. revcom.us/socialistconstitution/SocialistConstitution-en.pdf

Other works published since this response was originally written are also highly relevant. In particular, given the questions under discussion of communism as science, and questions of philosophy and epistemology, we recommend:

Bob Avakian, Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity, *Revolution*, October 2007-February 2008. Also included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, pamphlet (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2008). In particular, see the section Marxism as a Science – Refuting Karl Popper. Revcom.us/avakian/index.html

Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005). *Communism As Science*, Appendix to the Constitution of the RCP, revcom.us/Constitution.html.

overwhelming majority in a socialist society accepts or adheres to the proletarian outlook many wrong understandings will be overlooked, the need to wage ideological struggle underestimated and many revisionist notions will be allowed to pass themselves off as “Marxism” as long as their proponents pledge allegiance to the “institutional leading role of the party”, all classic right deviations. On the other hand, considering adherence to Marxism as a requirement for genuine participation in the ideological life in a socialist society will stifle the initiative of many who can and should be united in the process of socialist revolution. We have seen both types of errors in the history of the socialist countries, often in combination – that is to say, a bureaucratic stifling of debate coupled with rampant and tolerated revisionism. Consider Enver Hoxha’s declaration that Albania had become “the world’s first atheist state” and the outlawing of all forms of religious worship (except, of course, the peculiar form of dogmato-revisionism that Hoxha erected as a new state religion in Albania).

In particular, we can see that there have been serious errors in the policies adopted in relation to artists and intellectuals in previous socialist societies, first in the USSR especially during the Stalin period and also, to a lesser but still significant degree, in revolutionary China under Mao’s leadership. It is certainly true that Mao was grappling with this problem in his lifetime and as Ajith notes, had called to “Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend”. Even more important was the whole experience of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution which represented a tremendous step forward in protecting and strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat, unleashing initiative and providing a mass vehicle for the debate and discussion among the masses and the critical examination of every aspect of socialist society. But our esteem for and defense of Mao does not mean that our understanding must stand still – and in fact, it cannot stand still and any effort to try to do so will only insure that thinking regresses and ossifies to the point where it will have little in common with the daring, path-breaking understanding of Mao.

There were cases in the pursuit of the natural sciences in socialist countries where what was considered to be politically expedient or what seemed to correspond to Marxism led to serious violations of the scientific method and to wrong conclusions. The most well known of these incidents was the Lysenko affair in the USSR under Stalin. The dispute in Soviet scientific circles was over whether genetic characteristics could be “acquired” and then passed along to descendants, as Lysenko argued. The party was quick to conclude that Lysenko was correct and threw its full authority behind him. The consequence was not only a wrong conclusion in genetics but a deep chill in the scientific circles more generally. In China, it seems to be the case that the revolutionaries wrongly attacked some mathematicians for working on theoretical problems (such as the Goldbach conjecture) because they had no known practical application, thus demonstrating a too narrowly constricted understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and the need for the work of intellectuals to serve the masses of people.⁸ It is correct and necessary to struggle to link scientific and technical personnel with the masses and for their work to meet the needs of the masses and society – broadly understood – but this dialectic is complex, and it must not be treated in a linear or mechanical “one-to-one” fashion.

These examples show a kind of utilitarian view toward science and math, seeing this aspect of human knowledge only from the narrow viewpoint of how science and math can “serve” the proletariat, whether that be in the class struggle or the struggle for production.

In fact, it is correct and necessary for the proletariat to lead work on the scientific and technological front and this was one of the important arenas of the GPCR. For example, it was necessary to establish the principle of “red and expert”, meaning that communist consciousness needed to be the principal aspect guiding work in these spheres as opposed to the revisionist argument of putting a classless concept of “expertise” in charge – which, in reality, means that the old experts will direct these areas of social life according to the old bourgeois relations, habits and division of labor. But there is the question of *how* to lead. Here again we see the importance of Mao’s comment that Marxism “embraces but does not replace” the other sciences – they are not and should not be considered “off limits” to the proletariat and its revolutionary ideology. But in carrying out the effort to revolutionize these sectors there was also a definite tendency to apply a mechanical one-to-one approach between work on the scientific and technological fronts and the immediate needs of the proletarian revolution. It should not be said, for example, that intellectual endeavors that have no immediate applicability to the class struggle or production have no positive role in socialist society. All truths that are discovered through scientific experiment, for example, become part of the raw material from which a fuller and more correct understanding of

the world can emerge.

In a similar vein, part of the new synthesis Bob Avakian is developing involves distinguishing between the historic role of the proletariat as the vehicle for achieving communism (what he has ironically described as the “God-like position of the proletariat”) and the fixation on the proletarians as they are at any point in time. This difference has everything to do with how we understand the dictatorship of the proletariat and its relations to other classes and strata. We can see that both of these radically different conceptions of the role of the proletariat have been part of the history of the ICM, in different proportions and often entangled. The socialist revolution must replace the dictatorship of the exploiting classes with a dictatorship of the formerly exploited but the purpose must be to create, step by step, the conditions for humanity to transcend the whole era of class society and the division of labour that it incorporates. We do not seek to create the “mirror opposite” of the existing society in which only the position of the oppressed and oppressor have changed places. The proletariat must rule – but not because it has been formerly oppressed or even because, together with its allies, it represents the majority of the population. The proletariat must rule because without its dictatorship, without its control over the political and economic levers of society (in broad unity with the allied classes and strata), it will be impossible to dig up the roots of capitalism and class society. If the proletariat is not trained and conscious of this mission, the proletarian revolution is quickly reduced to simply improving the lot of the formerly exploited (which, after all, many reformist regimes have accomplished to one or another degree) and, more importantly, the powerful spontaneous force of commodity production, the division of labour, and so forth will quickly lead to the re-emergence of a new bourgeoisie. Mao captured this dialectic well when he popularized Marx's statement that “the proletariat can only liberate itself by liberating all of humanity.”

Mao was very much focused on this problem during the GPCR, especially how to make the proletariat conscious of its historic role and to transform itself through revolution. But this does not mean that he or the revolutionaries in China were immune from some of the previous wrong understandings in the communist movement. This came out in many ways in the GPCR, for example the tendency of major red guard factions to restrict membership to youths whose families came from a “good class origin”, or tendencies to promote a sentiment of “revenge” against privileged intellectual circles, and thus not being able to unite and transform these sections to the degree that was possible. Indeed we can see a progression within the short turbulent decade of the GPCR to a more correct understanding of some of these questions. For example, the basis on which Liu Shaoyang was exposed included a significant effort to paint him as a capitulator from the early days of the Chinese revolution. This portrayal seems inaccurate, another example of “political truth”, which in this case directed attention away from the real source of the bourgeoisie in China.⁹

Similar errors of drawing a too direct “one-to-one” link between politics and other aspects of social life have been made in the artistic fields as well. How does the communist vanguard exercise its leadership in this domain? In the USSR officially there were sometimes tendencies to leave certain cultural spheres untouched by revolution or alternatively there was a definite tendency for approved critics to make hasty and sweeping judgments on cultural works, which tended to stifle creativity in the arts and promote a one-sided understanding of the relationship between art and politics. During the GPCR Mao correctly stressed the fact that class struggle finds expression in the realm of literature and art and that these domains could not be left under the domination of the bourgeoisie. One of the great fruits of the GPCR was for the proletariat and masses to enter domains that were previously off limits to them and in carrying through the Cultural Revolution real breakthroughs were made in creating high-quality “model works” such as the opera *Red Detachment of Women* or the film *Breaking With Old Ideas* which portrayed heroic images of the masses of people and extolled their revolutionary struggle. But in this domain, also, it is possible and necessary to take note of a negative, secondary, tendency to link too closely work on the artistic front with immediate political objectives. Yes, model works were needed and played the key role in blazing a new path and opening up theaters to the masses for the first time. But it is also necessary to allow and encourage other artistic endeavor as well and to realize that it is neither correct nor necessary for every work to be directly supervised by proletarian representatives in the cultural sphere. Yes, it is absolutely necessary for the proletariat to exercise leadership in the sphere of art, culture and education but how such leadership should be carried out and the content of such leadership are not easy matters. If proletarian leadership is misunderstood to mean that all artistic work must directly serve the political struggle the result will be a far too restrictive approach and serious mistakes will be inevitable. Furthermore, it is possible to see in *Breaking with Old Ideas*, for example, some of the one-sided understanding of what it means for the proletariat to guide

intellectual work, such as criticizing the teaching of anatomy of horses because none were present in the region where the technical school, the subject of the film, was located. Similarly the film portrays the reading of foreign books simply as “doing reconnaissance on the enemy” as if there was nothing positive that needed to be learned and assimilated, as well as criticized, from such books.

Another example of some of the wrong approaches in the artistic sphere can be seen in both the USSR under Stalin and during the Cultural Revolution where there were tendencies to consider one or another cultural form as inherently proletarian or inherently bourgeois. The nationalism in such an approach leaps out as well, as could be seen, for example, by ignorant remarks in the Chinese press about the “Western decadence” of jazz and rock and roll, when in fact much of the more progressive and even revolutionary currents in Western culture were found in those forms. There will be a multitude of artistic forms that will flourish under socialism.

Here again we see the importance of the “solid core with a lot of elasticity” that Bob Avakian has been arguing for. There must be a leading proletarian centre and a direction to society but this centre cannot and must not seek to orchestrate each and every aspect of political, social and cultural life. There must be space for divergence, experimentation, opposing schools and dissent. This problem has particular relevance in dealing with the intellectuals precisely because they are trained to “work with ideas” and crude or mechanical methods will have immediate negative consequences. But the necessity of a vibrant, invigorating atmosphere is also just as necessary for the masses as well. If they are to be truly the masters of society they must also be increasingly equipped to work with ideas in an all-sided and critical way.

Mao and the revolutionaries in China called on the masses “to be concerned with affairs of state” and called on them to play an active role in the two-line struggle and this mass democracy on a hitherto unseen scale was indeed a great school for the people. But we must also recognize that it is not a simple matter to overcome the disadvantage that education, culture and the division of labor of society have imposed on the masses and that there must be a whole process of “fitting themselves to rule” as Marx put it, and this process must include, as a central feature, mastering not only the conclusions of Marxism but the more difficult task of mastering the critical approach and method of Marxism as well.

The entire period of socialist transition will be one of tumult, dissent and contradiction. While, in an overall sense, this process must be led, it cannot be led in a linear mechanical way. Part of “leading” means unleashing a process whose course cannot be foreseen, to place the masses at the vortex of swirling debate and, together with the party, to be drawn into the process of discovering what is right and wrong and synthesizing a correct understanding of how the socialist transformation can advance at any given stage. It is with this context that comrade Avakian is raising the importance of incorporating the “JS Mill principle” into the framework of the proletarian dictatorship, that is, of allowing the most persuasive and passionate opponents to present their arguments, participate in public debates and to publish some books. If you want the full flowering of the debate and discussion amongst the people – and grasp the indispensable role of that in the complex process of the masses increasingly becoming masters of society – you must dare to expose masses to and involve them in discussing a wide range of political and ideological views. It is true that experience shows that it is difficult to carry out this policy – reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries will always try to avail themselves of every opportunity and they will attempt to seize power. But revolution is full of difficulties and dangers and in fact history has also shown that there is *no other way* to ensure that socialism will advance for long.

The “solid core with a lot of elasticity” is a description of how socialist society can be led to advance amidst complex and changing contradictions toward the communist future. It is a conception which represents a further rupture with past erroneous conceptions of the monolithic party and so forth and also clearly delineates with bourgeois pluralism and bourgeois democracy. As comrade Avakian has pointed out, it is not difficult to argue for all elasticity (pluralism) although the nature of class society makes it impossible to *implement* such a policy except as bourgeois pluralism (that is, hiding the class rule of the bourgeoisie under the signboard of democracy). Bob Avakian has put forward four crucial objectives of the “solid core”: hold on to political power; expand the solid core; struggle for the conditions that can lead to the abolition of the solid core; and maximize elasticity at each step on the way. This is in accordance with and gives further expression to the objective of the proletarian state being a new kind of state, very different from any previous form of state, which exists not just to exercise dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, but to make possible the historic mission of the proletariat – to bring

about a classless society, eliminating itself and the need for a state in the process.

The problems of socialist revolution are many fold and complex, but the question of handling dissent correctly does concentrate to an important degree the contradiction between ensuring that the revolution advances in the direction of communism, mobilizing and unleashing all of the potentially positive forces in society toward that end while being able to maintain dictatorship over the forces for capitalist restoration which will inevitably try to profit from and pervert the kind of widespread socialist democracy that is being called for.

Ajith argues that experience in the USSR and China shows that Lenin and Mao had both set out to allow dissent, wide scale democratic debate, direct election by the masses of their representatives (the Paris Commune principle), and so forth, but that the constraints of maintaining political power have forced them to act otherwise. Ajith speaks of “the contradiction between its [the party’s] orientation and its concrete application in different circumstances”. But this formulation is another step on the dangerous road toward “political truth” and “realpolitik”. Certainly there is always a contradiction between a party’s “orientation” (overall ideological and political line) and the concrete application of this line and this is always true of any party in or out of power. But we understand this contradiction as a unity of opposites (line and practice) where line leads and guides the practice and where practice tests the line and provides raw material for the line to be further advanced or corrected (along with other experience or raw material that comes from society in general). What Ajith is proposing is something different – we may have a communist “orientation” but the “concrete application” cannot avoid using methods that run in opposition to this “orientation”. Instead of dialectics we have dualism (a problem to which we will return later) – our ideas need not, and indeed if we follow Ajith’s approach *cannot*, fully guide our practice, the “concrete application”.

If “orientation” does not lead and guide “concrete application”, proclamations of seeking communism can become nothing but window dressing and empty verbiage covering over class exploitation. We should not forget that even the revolutionary bourgeoisie proclaimed “liberty, equality and brotherhood” which covered over the reality of class exploitation. Nor should we fail to remember the bitter experience of the modern revisionists who in words never dropped the final goal of “communism” but argued that the only way to reach that goal was by following a line of building up the productive forces by what they considered the most “expedient” means possible – capitalism.

The new synthesis Bob Avakian is bringing forward addresses the contradiction between “orientation” (principles and fundamental line) with the “concrete application” by looking at the experience of previous socialist societies, particularly the problems in the arts and intellectual life more generally in socialist society, and calling for our “orientation” to be further sharpened and new principles to be applied in building future socialist societies. The problems of maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat while unleashing and encouraging a wide range of debate are certainly daunting but by no means irresolvable. Ajith is unable to see beyond merely repeating the experience of the past and thus there arises the danger of giving up in advance. Avakian is arguing that we must and can do better than even the best of past experience even as we continue to uphold and learn from it.

The Contradictory Nature of the State

Comrade Ajith writes, “Any state represents the political power of the ruling class; its means of imposing its class interests. Precisely for this reason, we cannot extend the criticism on monolithic concept of party to the state. It is by its very nature monolithic”. This is true in so far as every state must ultimately represent the dictatorship of one class or another, but it is untrue that any state, even the most fascistic and undemocratic, is completely monolithic. Even the bourgeoisie itself allows, to varying degrees, democracy in its own ranks. Furthermore, any ruling class, even the most reactionary, seeks to establish a kind of “united front” with different classes and strata, for example, sections of the petite bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy, including various political representatives of these classes and strata, and generally speaking this kind of class alliance is reflected in different kinds of political and state structures. The bourgeoisie exercises dictatorship, in particular by maintaining an especially tight grip on the key organs of state power such as the standing army and police, and orchestrating and leading the whole set-up.

The proletariat, unlike the bourgeoisie, is open about its intention of establishing a dictatorship – it does not need to hide that reality since its rule is in the interests of the great majority of the society, whereas the bourgeoisie, whose rule is only in the interests of a relative handful, must always hide its dictatorship as the “will of the people”, etc. Within the framework of the institutionalized leading role of the proletarian party what role contested elections and so forth might play under different conditions needs to be concretely examined. This is another reflection that in modern society only the bourgeoisie or proletariat can rule society and that other classes and strata can participate in the state power only to the extent that they do so under the hegemony of one class or the other. There is no reason to argue, as Ajith does, that under socialism all “other parties are excluded” if some parties are willing to work together in a state apparatus whose nature is in a fundamental sense determined by the leadership of the party of the proletariat. In fact, the “institutionalized leadership of the party” is a requirement, a necessary constraint, that makes it possible to at least envision various forms of political competition, including in the form of some contested elections – all to make potentially richer the involvement of the masses in critical thinking, increasingly becoming political and ideological masters of society. Here again we have to recognize that the proletarian state, led by the party of the proletariat, if it is going to carry forward the transition from socialism to communism, has the responsibility to bring into being a wholly different kind of society, full of ferment and tumult, where dissent and critical thinking are not only tolerated but fostered.

The other point to be stressed here is that under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat the state will also not be “monolithic”. It is not possible to have an institutionalized leading role of the party (which Ajith correctly notes will not be monolithic), without facing the consequences that where capitalist roaders are in command and their line is leading this will have a material effect on the nature of the socialist society. In fact, this was the case in the USSR and Mao’s China: where and to the extent that the capitalist roaders held power, the dictatorship of the proletariat was undermined. The nature of the state is not monolithic but is determined by which class, the proletariat or the new bourgeoisie, and which line commands the main levers of the party and state.

The institutionalized leading role of the party is a *sine qua non* without which socialist transformation is impossible. But the leading role of the party, by itself, is no magic solution. In both the USSR and the People’s Republic of China the leading role of the party was “institutionalized” but this could not prevent the party itself from being seized by the capitalist roaders.

Ajith, of course, is aware of the double-edged sword of the “institutionalized role of the party.” But he tends to locate the problem incorrectly, mainly in the sphere of “bureaucracy”, which leads him to underestimate the real depth of the problem and to look in the wrong place for solutions. The concept of “bureaucracy” has limited value because it tends to obscure the class nature of the struggle under socialism, focused to a large degree on whether to expand or reduce “bourgeois right” (as Ajith correctly notes elsewhere in the article).

Besides the importance of unexplained “measures” to reduce bureaucracy, the measure that Ajith wants to stress in relation to the problem of preventing capitalist restoration is his endorsement of the views of the PCP and the CPN(M) on the problem of “arming the masses” as a “correct and sound step forward”. Certainly it is the case that the importance of militias has been shown by the capitalist restorations in the USSR and especially China, although we can also see from this same experience that the existence of militias is also not a magic answer to this problem. Who leads the militias, how can they be mobilized, what is their connection to the standing army? – all of these remain serious problems to be resolved. History has shown that while forms and vehicles are important there is no form that is immune from being turned into its opposite, just as Lenin’s Soviets turned into Khrushchev’s Soviets. We should be wary of proposals which suggest an institutional answer to a problem ultimately solved by the class struggle. However important we may agree that “arming of the masses” is, we cannot at all agree that the thesis of “people’s war until communism” that the PCP put forward on these questions can be considered a “correct and sound step forward”. The PCP held that “people’s war until communism” is the basic solution to the problem revealed by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and its eventual defeat in China. This understanding implies that cultural revolutions under socialism should be essentially violent struggle. This guts the heart out of Mao’s whole approach to the GPCR in which he saw mass criticism and debate as the main vehicle both for overthrowing the capitalist-roaders and to raise the level of understanding among the masses of people and their ability to play an increasingly active role “in affairs of state”.

We would like to raise two main objections here. The first is that this vision of socialist society – a perpetual “people’s war” – is not one of a society in which we would want to live, and we don’t imagine that too many others would want to either. And not only would we not want to live there, but this kind of approach can actually have a chilling effect, which would undermine and lead away from the opening up of society in the ways that are necessary for the masses to actually develop the proletarian class outlook and consciousness to take society forward toward communism and prevent the restoration of capitalism. It can go against the direction of society that is needed for drawing the masses increasingly into mastering all spheres. Secondly, how are the masses, in the complex conditions of the class struggle under socialism, going to know against whom to wage war? If we can assume that the capitalist-roaders are unlikely to announce themselves as such, how will the masses know if given figures of authority are to be the subject of violent struggle or not? The full dangers of such an approach can be seen sharply if we recall the earlier discussion in which Ajith argues that social science (Marxism) must be based on principles other than those that govern science in general, but rather on their “partisan” character. Again we ask, who will determine which lines and policies are “partisan” to the proletariat and on what basis will such a judgment be made? We would ask comrade Ajith to consider deeply the possibility that this method and approach could easily lead to replacing the conscious activism of the masses with a mindless mob easily manipulated by demagogues on the basis of appeals to their “partisanship”, “class stand,” “safeguarding the party and the revolution” and so forth. In fact, the history of the international communist movement is full of examples of revisionists attacking genuine communists on exactly such a basis, one tragic example being Hua Kuo-feng’s demagoguery to “smash the gang of four with a single blow” which was coupled with much workerist and pragmatist appeals to thinly cover over a line of restoring capitalism. And we should also ponder why so many forces in the ICM found it so difficult to see through Hua who claimed to be acting in the interests of the Chinese masses and in safeguarding the achievements of Mao and the Chinese revolution.

We can see that when the GPCR in China did take on more aspects of a violent struggle the results were far from positive, as Mao quickly summed up, such as the bloody struggle between red guard factions at Tsinghua University ¹⁰ which prompted Mao to organize the working class to intervene to stop the fighting and get the process of struggle-criticism-transformation back on track.

This brings us back to the problem that comrade Avakian is addressing as part of the new synthesis. He is addressing how to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat as part of building the kind of society that one would want to live in and he is arguing that we can reach communism, but only if we integrate the correct criticisms of the weaknesses of past socialist societies into our understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat under the leadership of its communist vanguard. This is part of, on the one hand, restoring a vision of communist society as originally conceived in broad strokes by Marx and Engels and which Lenin and especially Mao developed, in particular the passage beyond “the narrow horizons of bourgeois right” (which we are happy to see that comrade Ajith also stresses in his article in his criticism of Venu.) But we also have to recognize that this vision of communist society cannot be restored, or at least not fully and decisively, without at the same time being re-envisioned in light of historical experience and in light of the further advance of human understanding generally. This is the new synthesis that Bob Avakian is bringing forward.

The Implications for Now as Well as the Future

We believe that this new synthesis is essential after we seize power if we are going to reach new heights in the struggle toward communism. But we also believe that the questions involved in this new synthesis, including the approach and methodology that it represents, are not something that only takes on relevance after the seizure of power. Understanding this correctly will be key to being able to participate in a good way in the discussions of today and attract the new followers and cadre, including from among the intellectuals, that our communist movement so desperately needs. And it’s key as well already at this stage in involving the masses together with the communists in confronting and taking up the key questions about the future revolutionary society we are fighting to bring into being.

The questions under dispute here are not only matters concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat, they touch on everything about how we think and how we act now. They are not only important for “later” when we have new socialist states to advance and defend. We have seen that those who were unable to grasp or rejected Mao’s

developments concerning the continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat (sometimes in the form of arguing that such questions were irrelevant before seizing power) also fail to grasp or reject Mao's whole stand, viewpoint and method which relates to everything we are doing. Similarly, to refuse to look squarely at the shortcomings of the past experiences, even while we unfailingly uphold the tremendous accomplishments of the proletarian dictatorship, to turn away from the emerging new synthesis that comrade Avakian is bringing forward, means rejecting the required ruptures in methodology and approach which will affect not only what we do after we seize power, but also what is required now if we are going to succeed in seizing power in the first place.

Will it be possible, for example, to develop a correct class analysis in fast changing socio-economic class relations if we declare in advance that Marxist "fundamentals" cannot be re-examined? It is easy to see how such an approach flies in the face of Lenin's (and Mao's) remark that "concrete analysis of concrete conditions is the living soul of Marxism".

The question of "political truth" has been and remains a basic question of orientation for communists. It was first formulated as a concept specifically in relation to how our movement should address (or *not* address) some of the questions that have arisen in relation to the PCP concerning the possible involvement of Chairman Gonzalo in formulating the right opportunist line. But the problem runs more deeply than that: "political truth" flies in the face of basic Marxist philosophy that accepts the existence of objective reality independent of mankind or ideas and holds that the truth is the correspondence between our ideas and objective reality. Lenin fought hard against those who argued that it was impossible to have an objective standard for determining the truth and who held that "truth is only an organizing form of human experience". In his polemic with Bogdanov over this question he points out, "Contemporary fideism [religious faith] does not at all reject science; all it rejects is the 'exaggerated claims' of science, to wit, its claim to objective truth".¹¹ We should reject the dualism of the contemporary bourgeoisie in which science and reason are to be permitted in a certain domain and among a certain strata, especially when necessary for making profits or weapons, but idolatry and superstition are also true, and a higher truth at that, to be promoted among the masses. Once the door is opened to determining truth by its "partisanship" it will fly every "useful" myth – and why not angels and demons as well. Dualism allows for the scientific method on the one hand but argues that this same method cannot be applied in the realm of ideology. It goes hand in hand with pragmatism, which also denies the connection between principles and actions.

We have gone on at length in response to Ajith's approach because we feel that it concentrates in many ways a widely held approach within RIM and the ICM more generally. If we want to really be able to fulfill the challenges that are looming before us we cannot fear or run from the necessary ideological and political ruptures. These differences in approach have been present in our movement since its formation. Our increased responsibilities, the emergence of new objective and subjective problems for making revolution, and the need to further synthesize experience in the class struggle and other domains of human experience mean that these differences are sharpening and taking on more significance. We hope that comrade Ajith's article and our response will further encourage comrades to deeply grapple with the new synthesis Bob Avakian is bringing forward. It has not been possible, nor is it the purpose of this response to Ajith's article, to explicate fully all that is involved in the important contributions of Bob Avakian. Rather we have intended to open the door to further wrangling with this new synthesis in a dynamic process of engagement. In this light we would like to call attention to some of Chairman Avakian's recent contributions including *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*,¹² the series "Views on Socialism and Communism"¹³ and the most recent series "The Basis, the Goals and the Methods of the Communist Revolution".¹⁴ We urge all participants in our movement to read and consider what is new here in the spirit of struggling to bring forward the new wave of proletarian revolution so much needed in the world today.

June 2006

<http://www.demarcations-journal.org>

- 1 See in particular “Notes on Political Economy” (rwor.org/a/special_posting/poleco_e.htm) for an elaboration of our thinking on some of these questions.
- 2 *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* and *Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism*, 1998 edition, p. 14).
- 3 One of the so-called “gang of four” and one of the main leaders of those fighting for Mao’s line in China. See Bob Avakian’s article “The Need for Communists to be ... Communists” (*Revolution* no. 38, March 12, 2006) for a more thorough treatment of this point.
- 4 Going from a lower to a higher understanding is not automatic nor does it happen without struggle and reversals. Many examples of incorrect theories temporarily triumphing can also be seen.
- 5 This argument is specifically made at length by Engels in *Anti-Duhring*, chapter 13.
- 6 Lenin, “Materialism and Empirio-criticism” *CW*, vol. 14 p. 129.
- 7 “Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom”, <http://www.revcom.us/avakian/index.html>.
- 8 It is quite possible that targets of this criticism in China were indeed “bad elements”. The point is how the revolutionaries were looking at the problem.
- 9 As Chang Chun-chiao was to point out in 1974 toward the end of the GPCR, the capitalist roaders in China had, in the main, acquitted themselves well during the democratic revolution but never broke with the outlook of bourgeois democracy. Their attitude was “Here is my stop, please let me off the bus.”
- 10 William Hinton, *Hundred Day War: the Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University*, Monthly Review Press, 1973.
- 11 Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, p; 125.
- 12 Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, Insight Press, 2005
- 13 “Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom”. <http://www.revcom.us/avakian/index.html>
- 14 Serialized in *Revolution* and posted in its entirety at <http://www.revcom.us/avakian/index.html>