

Demarcations

A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic

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Issue No. 2, Summer-Fall 2012

K.J.A.: Polemical Reflections on Bernard D'Mello's Essay 'What Is Maoism?' – "Scientifically Comprehending, Firmly Upholding And Going Beyond Maoism for a New Stage of Communism"

A wide-ranging response to Bernard D'Mello's article "What Is Maoism?" that appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly* from India. D'Mello's articulates and concentrates a major line in the world today: an eclectic package of the mirror-opposite trends, principally in the form of reconfiguring communism as bourgeois democracy.

Bob Avakian: "The Cultural Revolution in China...Art and Culture...Dissent and Ferment...and Carrying Forward the Revolution Toward Communism"

A provocative historical and conceptual overview of what "the Cultural Revolution was seeking to address, and was addressing," while also identifying certain problems in conception and approach. The interview is a kind of laboratory of the new synthesis: providing scientific understanding and appreciation of the Cultural Revolution, the high point of the first stage of communist revolution, and indicating ways in which the next stage of communist revolution can go further and do better.

Raymond Lotta: "Vilifying Communism and Accommodating Imperialism, The Sham and Shame of Slavoj Žižek's 'Honest Pessimism'"

Raymond Lotta's sharp polemic against Slavoj Žižek's "fusillade of distortion of the historical experience of revolution and socialism in the 20th century, accompanied by an egregiously uninformed and unprincipled attack on Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism." Slavoj Žižek is an influential public intellectual who is perceived and presented as one of the most radical theorists on communism itself. Lotta begins and ends his piece with a challenge to Žižek to publicly debate these issues.

Revolutionary Communist Party, USA: Reply to "The Current Debate on the Socialist System"

An answer from the RCP, USA to an article entitled "The Current Debate on the Socialist State System" by Ajith of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [Naxalbari]. This response, written in 2006 but appearing publicly for the first time, addresses some critical issues of epistemology and political theory that demarcate the new synthesis of communism from other lines within the broader international communist movement.

Letter to the Editors and Reply

Exchange over the article "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation': A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World" in *Demarcations* no 1.

Editorial

Since the inaugural issue of *Demarcations*, the world has witnessed renewed upsurge, with mass social movements in Egypt and elsewhere capturing the imagination of and stirring defiance among broad sections of people who find the present order intolerable. This fresh wind of resistance and revolt has also been felt in the rebellions in London, in the Occupy and other youth and protest movements, while revolutionary struggles and resistance continue in various parts of the Third World.

Puncturing people's belief in, as Marx put it, "the permanent necessity of existing conditions", this renewal of upsurge has also brought fundamental questions to the fore: Of revolution – what is it? Of leadership – is it needed, and of what type? Of the state (and its armies and police) – should it be confronted, and can it be confronted? And what it means for the masses to make history. Most of all, the decisive question getting posed is what social change and what future are desirable and possible – and what constitutes freedom and emancipation.

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Letter to the Editors and Reply

Issue 1, Summer-Fall 2009

Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A.: Alain Badiou's "Politics of Emancipation": A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World (Also available in PDF)

On Developments in Nepal and the Stakes for the Communist Movement: Letters to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2005-2008 (With a Reply from the CPN(M), 2006)

Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA: "Crises in Physics," Crises in Philosophy and Politics

To send a comment, please email editors@demarcations-journal.org

Some of these crucial questions, posed by the Egypt upsurge and the Occupy movements, were addressed in the polemic against the political philosophy of Alain Badiou that appeared in the first issue of *Demarcations*: "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation': A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World." That polemic takes on new relevance in light of recent developments in the world, and we encourage readers to (re)engage with and respond to it. We also call readers' attention to Bob Avakian's statements on the Egypt uprising [revcom.us/avakian/Egypt/Egypt2011-en.html] and the Occupy movements [revcom.us/a/250/avakian_on_the_occupy_movement-en.html].

What is achingly missing in these new crucibles of struggle is a vision of a radically different society, and how to get there – which focuses up the question of communist leadership. The fact is, a viable and liberatory alternative to this world of horrors – and the kind of leadership needed to bring a new world into being – is concentrated in Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism. This new synthesis needs to be much more widely known, engaged, and taken up.

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Why Demarcations? Why Now?

Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic seeks to set forth, defend, and further advance the theoretical framework for the beginning of a new stage of communist revolution in the contemporary world. This journal will promote the perspectives of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.

Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement. Without drawing sharp dividing lines between communism as a living, critical, and developing science serving the emancipation of humanity, on the one hand, and other perspectives, paths, and programs that cannot lead to emancipation, on the other—whether openly reformist or claiming the mantle or moniker of "communism"—without making such demarcations, it will not be possible to achieve the requisite understanding and clarity to radically change the world. *Demarcations* will contribute to achieving that clarity.

In the wrangling spirit of Marxism, *Demarcations* will also delve into questions and challenges posed by major changes in the world today. The last quarter-century has seen intensified globalization, growing urbanization and shantytown-ization in the Third World, the rise of religious fundamentalism, shifting alignments in the world imperialist system, and the acceleration of environmental degradation. *Demarcations* will examine such changes, the discourses that have grown up in connection with them, and the ideological, political, and strategic implications of such developments for communist revolution. *Demarcations* will also undertake theoretical explorations of issues of art, science, and culture.

Demarcations makes its appearance at a particular historical juncture in the communist project, one best characterized as the "end of a stage, the beginning of a new stage."

The first wave of socialist revolutions and societies began with the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871, the first attempt to overthrow and replace bourgeois rule. It took a leap with the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, and went further and took yet another leap with the Chinese revolution of 1949, in particular the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. This first wave came to an end in 1976 with the overthrow of proletarian power and restoration of capitalist rule in China.

This first wave of socialist societies in the Soviet Union (1917-1956) and China (1949-1976) constituted an unprecedented and inspiring breakthrough in liberation for humanity. At the same time, and not surprisingly, this first wave was secondarily marked by shortcomings and mistakes; and while not the cause of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and China, these shortcomings did nonetheless play a role in the defeats of these revolutions.

With the end of this first stage, communists have been confronted with the objective responsibility of scientifically summing up the lessons and legacy of these revolutions and the rich experience of exercising state power towards the transition to communism, in order to forge the theoretical framework for going forward.

Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has risen to that challenge and in the process qualitatively advanced communist theory. He has developed a theoretical framework for the new stage of communist revolutions, a new synthesis. This new synthesis is not a pasting-together of the "best of the previous experience" and the criticisms of these experiences. Rather, as *Communism: The Beginning of A New Stage, A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, puts it, the new synthesis "builds on all that has gone before, theoretically and practically, drawing the positive and negative lessons from this, and raising this to a new, higher level of synthesis."

In terms of *philosophy and method*, the new synthesis establishes communism even more fully and firmly on a scientific foundation. It deepens understanding of the material basis for *internationalism* and why, in an ultimate and overall sense, the world arena is most decisive, even in terms of revolution in a particular country. On the character of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, Avakian has brought forward a model of socialism as a vibrant and dynamic society—characterized by great ferment, dissent, experimentation, and initiative—that is also a revolutionary transition to communism. The new synthesis also comprehends a breakthrough in the *strategic approach to revolution* in today's world, in particular an orientation for making revolution in the imperialist countries such as the U.S. For more, go to bobavakian.net.

As the *Manifesto, Communism: The Beginning of A New Stage*, points out, Bob Avakian's new synthesis objectively stands in opposition to two seemingly alternate but in fact mirror-opposite conceptions of communism that, among those who consider themselves, or at one time considered themselves, to be communists, have emerged in response to the defeat of the first wave.

In a nutshell, the first conception buys into the bourgeois verdict that the socialist societies in the Soviet Union and China in the 20th century were fundamentally flawed and oppressive – marked by the "totalitarian," "bureaucratic," and undemocratic "dictatorship of the party." Central to this conception is the rejection of what some of its adherents term the "party-state" framework, that is, the need to seize state power and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat as the transition to communism, and the need for the leadership of the vanguard party through this process.

Intertwined with this negative appraisal of the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the supposition that revolution and the actual seizure of state power are no longer possible. This is accompanied by a rejection, sometimes

expressly so and sometimes thinly lacquered with Marxist rhetoric, of the philosophy of dialectical materialism and of historical materialism (the scientific understanding of the development and transformation of human society based on the application of materialist dialectics). In their stead is the wholesale adoption of pragmatism and empiricism, the worship of bourgeois democracy, either explicitly or in the form of "new" thinking, that blunts the antagonistic contradiction of the masses with the capitalist-imperialist or dependent neocolonial state and affords the state "agency," unmoored and severed from the underlying production relations of society. This ends up, ultimately, in the advocacy of all manner of economism and reformism.

The second conception clings uncritically, in a quasi-religious way, to previous socialist experience—thus ranging itself against a scientific approach to historical summation of the communist project and to the further advance of the communist project in making revolution and emancipating humanity.

Starting in the 1970s, there has also been an ebbing worldwide of revolutionary and national liberation struggles that has given strength to these trends – as has a relentless imperialist-bourgeois ideological assault on the communist experience and the communist project in the wake of the defeat of socialism in China in 1976, and in some ways heightened with the fall of the revisionist (state-capitalist) Soviet Union in 1990-91.

As the *Manifesto from the RCP, USA*, further points out, both of these conceptions share significant features. These include pragmatism in place of science; a profound lack of engagement with and appreciation for "Mao Tsetung's path-breaking analysis concerning the danger of and basis for capitalist restoration in socialist society... [and] with what principles and objectives Mao initiated and led this Cultural Revolution." Further, both of these conceptions hold in common a retreat to the past, either to the previous stage of socialist revolution, or even further back to the era of bourgeois revolution and its principles, "to what are in essence 18th century theories of (bourgeois) democracy, in the guise, or in the name, of '21st-century communism...'"

The *Manifesto* concludes this discussion with the following call:

It is only by rupturing with these erroneous tendencies, and deeply engaging with and becoming more firmly grounded in the viewpoint, methods, and principles of communism, as they have been developed up to this point (and must be continually developed further), that communists can rise to the great responsibility and challenge of indeed being a vanguard of the future, and not consign themselves to remaining, or degenerating into, a residue of the past, and in so doing betray the masses of people throughout the world for whom the communist revolution represents the only road out of the madness and horror of the present world and toward a world truly worth living in.

Demarcations is taking up this call and challenge to be part of the vanguard of the future.

To put it concisely, *Demarcations* is the polemical engagement of the new synthesis with other conceptions and approaches to the "problem" of the oppression and exploitation of world humanity...and its solution, to "what is to be done" to make revolution and emancipate humanity. Through articles and polemics, as well as through moderated debates and exchanges, *Demarcations* aims to assist those seeking a better world to compare and contrast various theoretical perspectives and programs and to draw a broader audience into a deeper understanding of and engagement with communism, as a living and developing science, and its most advanced expression in the new synthesis.

Demarcations takes to heart Bob Avakian's injunction that "transformation goes through a lot of different 'channels,' and is not tied in a positivist or reductionist or linear way to however the main social contradictions are posing themselves at a given time." He is underscoring the relative autonomy and initiative of the superstructure; and the journal plans over time, as mentioned earlier, to feature articles on art, debates on communist ethics and values, and science. In this spirit, *Demarcations* will interrogate various political and theoretical trends exerting influence in the current conjuncture.

We invite correspondence in response to articles in *Demarcations* and in connection with questions and controversies falling within the broad scope of this mission statement. We also encourage suggestions and proposals for future issues. We aim to reach tens of thousands across the globe, in movements, in colleges and universities, and at sites of struggle and resistance – while also forging the ways and means for growing cores to support the mission of this journal. We welcome your input, feedback, and participation.

Polemical Reflections on Bernard D'Mello's Essay "What Is Maoism?"

Scientifically Comprehending, Firmly Upholding, and Going Beyond Maoism for a New Stage of Communism

By K.J.A.

Bernard D'Mello has opened up important questions for discussion with his article "What Is Maoism?" in the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly [EPW]*. The essay aims to identify Mao's specific and qualitative contributions, Mao's "*differentiae specifica*" to use D'Mello's term, and thereby delineate its contours as a coherent theory and locate and situate this within the larger stream of communism. D'Mello strives to proceed from the standpoint of what will free those at the bottom of society. The *EPW* article is part of a collection titled *What Is Maoism and Other Essays*, edited and introduced by D'Mello.¹ The introduction begins, "This book is motivated by a desire to rekindle an imagination of socialism that brings to the fore the emancipation and fulfillment of the basic human needs of the most exploited, the most oppressed, and the most dominated on this earth."

The publication of this essay in one of India's leading progressive intellectual journals is significant at this moment – when the Indian state is engaged in a coordinated campaign of terror against the revolutionary and Maoist movement, dedicating military and paramilitary forces to destroy the movement, hunting down and extra-judicially assassinating leaders, unleashing vicious repression against all perceived to be supportive of the Maoists, arming reactionary thugs to terrorize areas that support the movement, including with wanton rape and murder, and spreading disinformation and slander through official channels and the mainstream media. Imperialist powers have applauded this campaign of terror, including dispensing with the obligatory protestations about human rights violations.

It is in the context of these attacks that a section of the intelligentsia, including, in addition to D'Mello, the celebrated novelist and essayist Arundhati Roy, have bravely opposed state repression, and firmly rejected the narrative and labels of "terrorism" applied to the Maoist movement in that country. They see the banner of Maoism in India deeply associated with opposition to unbridled capitalist globalization, and the just and righteous rebellion of the most viciously oppressed and downtrodden section of the masses, such as the tribal Adivasis, invisible to mainstream official society – when not despised by it.

This discussion of Maoism is also taking place in the context of a world of horrors, of howling and growing inequalities – and of nascent possibilities, manifest in recent mass social upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East or in the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon in the U.S. and similar movements in a number of other countries.

It is important that at this juncture of world history some are again investigating Maoism and revolutionary communism. What does one make of the history of the communist revolutions of the 20th century? Can Marxism be considered a valid science? Does communism represent the path by which humanity can achieve emancipation? This is the context in which Maoism has attracted attention – not merely as an academic exercise but in the spirit of Marx's Eleventh Theses on Feuerbach, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world; the point however is to *change* it,"

invoked by D'Mello himself.²

This renewed discussion of Maoism is no doubt very positive. But exactly because of the importance of what is at stake for the future of the revolutionary and international communist movement it is crucial to thoroughly examine the contents of these arguments. Without making demarcations – between communism as a living, critical and revolutionary science serving the emancipation of humanity, on one hand, and programs that cannot lead to emancipation on the other – it will not be possible to achieve the requisite understanding and clarity to radically change the world. What may seem to be abstract questions of theory today foreshadow crucial questions that will be posed in the practical political struggle on the horizon.

D'Mello's Definition of Maoism

D'Mello's central conclusion, and his central error about which I will have more to say below, is that Mao was a "radical democrat." His conclusion is also consistent with the "specific features" that D'Mello identifies as Maoism. They are, in D'Mello's words:

- "the poor peasantry of the interior of a backward capitalist/semi-feudal society rather than the urban proletariat constitute the mass support base of the movement;
- theory of revolution by stages as well as uninterrupted revolution, implying a close link between successive stages;
- the stage of NDR [New Democratic Revolution], which makes capitalism much more compatible with democracy, thereby aiding the transition to socialism;
- the path and strategy of PPW [Protracted People's War], which relies on the peasants, builds rural base areas, carries out 'land to the tiller' and other social policies in these areas (run democratically as miniature, self-reliant states) thereby building up a political mass base in the countryside to finally encircle and capture the cities;
- the conception of 'base areas' and the way to establishing them;
- 'capturing' (winning mass support in) the cities by demonstrating a brand of nationalism that is genuinely anti-imperialist, thereby re-orienting an existing mass nationalist upsurge (as during the anti-Japanese resistance, 1937-45 in China) in favor of the completion of the NDR;
- democratic centralism *plus* the 'mass line,' ensuring that 'democracy' doesn't take a backseat to 'centralism' and making sure the people are involved in policy making and its implementation;
- the central idea that contradictions – the struggle between functionally united opposites – at each stage drive the process of development on the way to socialism, which is sought to be brought about in a series of stages, where the existing stage, at the right time, is impregnated with the hybrid seeds of the subsequent one, thereby dissolving the salient contradictions of the former and ushering in the latter;
- open-ended interrelations among and between the forces of production, the relations of production, and the superstructure; and
- the idea that political, managerial, and bureaucratic power-holders entrench themselves as a ruling elite and, over a period of time, assume the position of a new exploiting class, and that the people have to be constantly mobilized to struggle against this tendency."³

D'Mello's list suffers from his fundamental inability to understand, situate and evaluate Mao as a *revolutionary communist*. D'Mello wraps what he understands to be Mao's contributions in a package whereby Mao is reduced to a peasant-based democrat, a kind of populist, acting in the interests of the masses and always ready to listen to them (this is D'Mello's interpretation of the "mass line" as presented in the article, which we will return to later). There is conflation of the necessary revolutionary process that Mao led (the new democratic revolution) and the features of building rural base areas, basing oneself on the peasantry, etc., and the ideology that Mao represented and which he sought to imprint as the guiding line and orientation of the whole

revolutionary process. Even when D'Mello may appear to be circling close to Mao's most essential contribution, for example his concern about a new "ruling elite" and the need to mobilize the people against it, the "radical democratic" wrapping leads D'Mello away from a correct and scientific understanding of classes and class struggle as they exist under socialism. For example, D'Mello targets the entrenched "ruling elite" instead of what Mao termed "capitalist roaders" and "the bourgeoisie in the party." In fact, this kind of classless characterization of "ruling elite" can easily dovetail with the common anti-communist criticism of a communist vanguard or even of Mao himself supposedly as part of such a "ruling elite." The real question is this: which line and whose political representatives dominate, what policies and transformations will take place, and thus, fundamentally, which class holds power?

We can see a stark contrast between the way in which D'Mello recasts Mao as a radical democrat (actually imposing his own world view on Mao) and a scientific study of the material, political and ideological contradictions of socialist society. The continuing inequalities and divisions characteristic of class society, including hitherto existing socialist society as a society in transition, still require that some persons will have a "disproportionate influence" in relation to the masses as a whole. Under socialism there is still a contradiction between "leaders and the led" that contains the possibility of being transformed into a contradiction between exploiters and exploited. These are some of the questions that Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has been examining repeatedly and from many angles for four decades.⁴ Avakian's new synthesis of communism charts out a pathway for how these contradictions can be overcome in recurring waves and amid a complex process through which the proletarian revolution will advance. D'Mello's wrong and simplistic notions of "radical democracy" cannot actually address the real contradictions that make a state, a vanguard and leaders necessary for a whole historical period, and how, through all-around revolution, these contradictions can be overcome.

A real examination of Maoism must necessarily have as its center Mao's theory of "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" and the practice led by this theory (especially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution). Such an examination was a crucial part of forging the new synthesis. Avakian's new synthesis encompasses and recasts Mao's theses on "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" and provides a basic orientation to how a communist vanguard can "do even better" in leading the masses to transform society in the direction of the communist future. D'Mello's repackaging of Maoism as "radical democracy" would rob the proletariat of crucial lessons that Mao was able to draw. It does not lead ahead but is a big retreat into the past.

D'Mello ends his essay with a call:

"... given the *radical* democratic streak running from Marx to Mao, the best thing that Maoism could do is to commit to the promise of radical democracy; after all, while it is true that there cannot be liberty in any meaningful sense without equality, for the rich will certainly be more 'free' (have more options) than the poor, so there cannot be equality without liberty, for then some may have more political power than others.

"So far, all revolutions inspired by Marx have only enjoyed the support or participation of a significant minority. Can the commitment to *radical* democracy up the tide to get the help of the majority? Will the means then be carefully chosen so that they never come to overwhelm the socialist aspiration?"⁵

D'Mello reads Maoism as trying "to enrich the democratic process in the Leninist vanguard party, the mass organizations, and the society." Repeatedly he asserts that Maoism "has its roots in Marx who was, above all, a radical democrat" and warns "that which is not democratic cannot be socialist."

Calls for democracy, for radical democracy, for an immediate "equality of political power," converge and resonate deeply with the dominant currency of the day. Everywhere one looks, including in radical social movements, freedom and emancipation are conceived within the framework, the horizons and the language of equality and democracy – largely seen as the establishment and global extension of a radical egalitarianism.

In a world of crushing inequalities, this is understandable; but in order to understand why "democracy" is being dusted off and repackaged as communism and to understand the danger of this orientation, it is necessary to step back further and situate D'Mello's reading of Maoism and his political project, as concentrated in the call above, in today's historical moment and the current juncture of communism.

End of a Stage, Beginning of a New Stage

There has been no socialist country in the world since the defeat of socialism in China in 1976 following the death of Mao and the restoration of capitalism led by Deng Xiaoping. That defeat marked the end of the first wave of communist revolutions and socialist societies – which began with the short-lived Paris Commune in 1871; followed by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 led by Lenin, and the establishment of the Soviet Union as a socialist society (from 1917 till the mid-fifties, when Khrushchev restored capitalism); and the victory of the Chinese revolution of 1949 and the construction of socialist society led by Mao till his death in 1976. This historical experience of the first attempts at proletarian revolution to emancipate humanity, along with qualitative advances and developments in communist theory from Marx and Engels through Lenin and Mao, not only greatly improved the conditions for hundreds of millions of people, it established and charted new and radical pathways to a radically different and better world.⁶

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China was the pinnacle of this revolutionary experience of the first stage of communist revolutions and socialist societies. Underlying the GPCR was Mao's theoretical analysis of the contradictions continually characterizing the socialist transition and that constantly pose the question of advancing on the socialist road or retreating onto the capitalist road. Tumultuous in nature, the Cultural Revolution had the task of defeating the capitalist roaders in China but, as Mao stressed,⁷ it had an even greater goal: to transform people's world outlook, reaching into all aspects of society and touching people to their souls, as a central part of carrying forward the further revolutionization of all aspects of society. It was during this great revolution that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism fully emerged and was recognized by the Communist Party of China as "a new and higher stage" of revolutionary communism (although at the time communists in China and throughout the world used the term Mao Tsetung Thought). After a decade of heroic struggle and radical transformations, the GPCR ended with Mao's death in 1976 and the subsequent counter-revolutionary coup d'état that put the capitalist-roaders back in power and opened the flood gates to the rapid restoration of capitalism by the new rulers led by Deng Xiaoping.

Since the restoration of capitalism in China after 1976, and escalating even further after the collapse of the revisionist and social-imperialist Soviet Union and its bloc in the late eighties, we have also seen three decades of relentless counter-revolution, an "anything goes" slander and distortion of these socialist experiences as part of a broader ideological offensive by guardians of the imperialist world order. This ideological offensive has targeted Mao's further development of the whole ensemble of revolutionary communism to the stage of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. All of this has also resulted in lowered sights among revolutionary, radical, and progressive forces, a belief that a radically different world is impossible and maybe not even desirable. Acceptance of the material and ideological fundamentals of the world *as it is* is the unspoken and (sometimes at least)

unconscious given, even among those who are truly horrified by these injustices in the world. In a sense, *whether we know it or not, we all suffer from the loss of revolutionary China, the defeat of that experience and the lack of a living example of a genuinely socialist state and society fighting to advance in the direction of communism.*

The end of this stage has surfaced big questions: how does one evaluate this stage and sum up this rich experience of proletarian revolution, its achievements and its shortcomings? These questions will objectively confront any individual or force examining how to radically change society. Is communist society an achievable and desirable goal? And if so, how to go forward and usher in a new stage of communist revolution? D'Mello's article needs to be seen in this light.

Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage – A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA presents the following framework of evaluation and summation of the historical experience of the 20th century revolutions:

"The first stage of the communist revolution went a long way, and achieved incredibly inspiring things, in fighting to overcome the very real obstacles it faced and to advance toward a world where all relations of exploitation and oppression would be finally eliminated and people would enjoy a whole new dimension of freedom and would undertake the organization and continuing transformation of society, throughout the world, with a conscious and voluntary initiative unprecedented in history. But, not surprisingly, there were also shortcomings and real errors, sometimes very serious ones, both in the practical steps that were taken by those leading these revolutions and the new societies they brought forth, and in their conceptions and methods. These shortcomings and errors were not the cause of the defeats of the initial attempts at communist revolution, but they did contribute, even if secondarily, to that defeat; and, beyond that, this whole experience of the first stage – with both its truly inspiring achievements and its very real, at times very serious, even if overall secondary, errors and shortcomings – must be learned from deeply and all-sidedly, in order to carry forward the communist revolution in the new situation that has to be confronted, and to do even better this time."⁸

Bob Avakian has been doing precisely this, and has developed an extensive body of work that sifts through and studies these questions scientifically, doing the hard work of identifying strengths and limitations in the methods and approach previously employed by the communist movement, repeatedly going back and excavating these experiences further and examining them in different ways so we can do better the next time around, all resulting in a radical re-envisioning of the socialist transition. This re-envisioning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialist transition to communism, is a central part of a new synthesis of communism, the theoretical framework for the new stage of communist revolutions.

In opposition to the new synthesis of Avakian there have been two "mirror opposite" responses from some of those who have been part of the international communist movement.

The first response is a conception of communism which clings largely uncritically, in a quasi-religious and dogmatic way, to previous socialist experience and communist theory, or at least sections of it, rejecting a scientific approach to summing up the past and further advancing communist theory.

The second response openly rejects Marxism, or renders it unrecognizable, and reaches back to the 18th century and the proclaimed democratic and egalitarian ideals and social models of the emerging bourgeois epoch, to philosophers and political theorists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson. In some cases, they discard the very term communism; in other cases, they affix the label "communism" to a political project that situates itself firmly within the bounds of

bourgeois-democratic principles.

Such forces reject real scientific analysis of the contradictions of the socialist transition, and applying bourgeois-democratic criteria, distance themselves from the unprecedented breakthroughs in human emancipation represented by the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions. In the main, the second conception buys into the bourgeois verdict that the socialist societies in the Soviet Union and China in the 20th century were essentially bureaucratic, authoritarian, and fatally flawed – and rejects what some of its adherents term the "party-state" framework, that is, the need to seize state power and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat as the transition to communism, and the need for the leadership of a vanguard party throughout this whole process.

Among intellectual observers and scholars of the communist movement like D'Mello, it is far more often the second erroneous summation, in short the "bourgeois democratic" rejection or reinterpretation of Marxism, that predominates. But as the *Manifesto from the RCP* explains, each of these two responses constitutes a kind of "mirror opposite" of the other, and it is not unusual to see one error flip over into the other, usually dogmatism turning into old-fashioned revisionism and social democracy. We will examine further in the course of this article how some of the long-standing political and methodological errors within the Maoist movement created a basis for the kind of "Maoism" that D'Mello feels he has discovered and which can exist symbiotically with a more dogmatic, but equally erroneous, "Maoism" that has also existed internationally.

One area where the dogmatism of some can marry with the social democracy of others can be seen in the tendency to reduce "Maoism" to simply a prescription for waging people's war in a third World country and not scientifically grasp or appreciate Mao's greatest contribution, his deeper understanding of socialism as a society *in transition* toward communism and his path-breaking analysis concerning the danger of and the basis for capitalist restoration in socialist society and his struggle to prevent it. As the *Manifesto from the RCP* points out, even among those who uphold the Cultural Revolution in China, those tending to the "mirror opposites" often "lack any real or profound understanding of why this Cultural Revolution was necessary and with what principles and objectives Mao initiated and led this Cultural Revolution." There are many different variations of composite errors that can come from the "mirror opposites." In D'Mello's case, "Maoism" is re-fashioned as a package of an overarching radical democracy plus the theory of people's war, a thesis that stands in stark opposition to *genuine* communism, as qualitatively advanced and brought to a new juncture by Maoism (or more accurately put, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism), and since then recast and further scientifically advanced with Avakian's new synthesis. These are the two packages in contention, the core of our dispute with D'Mello.

Radical Democracy or Scientific Communism

In contrast to the approach of D'Mello and many others like him who look back to the bourgeois ideals of the 18th century, re-framing even communism as radical democracy, those who seek a truly revolutionary transformation should insist upon a thoroughly scientific approach to the first stage of communist revolutions, not from bourgeois-democratic criteria and notions of legitimacy but from the standpoint of the real contradictions faced in transforming society and advancing to communism. The achievements and shortcomings in practice and conception must be seen from this perspective.

Today it is necessary and possible to consider the whole sweep of the first stage of communist revolution and the theory which led it precisely in relation to achieving the communist goal. Marx defined the communist project this way:

"This socialism is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution*, the *class dictatorship* of the

proletariat as the necessary transit point to the *abolition of all class distinctions generally*, of all the production relations on which those class distinctions rest, of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations."⁹ During the Cultural Revolution in China the revolutionaries led by Mao adopted the shorthand term the "4 Alls" to describe the historical tasks and sweep of the proletarian revolution.

It is on the basis of scientifically assessing the first stage in relation to achieving the Four Alls, as well as incorporating new experiences and advances in thinking from other spheres of human endeavor such as science and culture, that Avakian's new synthesis has advanced the science of communism beyond Maoism, representing both continuity and rupture with what we have called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The *Manifesto from the RCP* puts it this way: "The new synthesis of Bob Avakian embodies a continuation of Mao's ruptures with Stalin but also in some aspects a rupture beyond the ways in which Mao himself was influenced, even though secondarily, by what had become the dominant mode of thinking in the communist movement under the leadership of Stalin."

As Avakian has expressed it, communism is an *integral philosophy and political theory* at the same time as it is *a living critical and continuously developing science*. It is not the quantitative addition of the ideas of the individuals who have played a leading role in developing it (nor is it the case that every particular idea, policy or tactic adopted by them has been without error). "Communist ideology is a synthesis of the development and especially the qualitative breakthroughs that communist theory had developed since the founding by Marx up to the present time."¹⁰

Mao's Immortal Contributions

Mao stood for *revolution*, an all-the-way-revolution that would lead society beyond the nightmare of class exploitation. In order to carry this revolution forward Mao needed to rupture with important elements in the practice, methods and thinking of communists, especially those focused to an important degree in the leadership of Joseph Stalin in the USSR following the death of Lenin. Mao not only had to combat the revisionists in the USSR who seized power after Stalin's death, he had to grapple with the laws of socialist society that made such a reversal possible and to develop the means to prevent it. He also faced a series of struggles within China itself with various other leaders of the Communist Party who were proposing policies and an approach similar to what Khrushchev had carried out in the USSR, lines which, Mao understood, would lead society back to capitalism. As the *Manifesto from the RCP* puts it, "Contradictions within the economic base, in the superstructure, and in the relation between base and superstructure of the socialist countries themselves, as well as the influence, pressure, and outright attacks from the remaining imperialist and reactionary states at any given time, would give rise to class differences and class struggle within a socialist country; these contradictions would constantly pose the possibility of society being led on either the socialist or the capitalist road, and more specifically would *repeatedly regenerate an aspiring bourgeois class*, within socialist society itself, which would find its most concentrated expression among those within the Communist Party, and particularly at its highest levels, who adopted revisionist lines and policies, which in the name of communism would actually accommodate to imperialism and lead things back to capitalism."¹¹ Mao came to understand on a higher level the relation between beating back attempts to overthrow proletarian rule and further transforming society toward the communist future. This theoretical understanding went hand in hand with Mao's leadership in, as the Chinese Communist Party put it, "continuing the revolution under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat."¹² His daring launching of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was aimed at preventing capitalist restoration and at advancing socialist transformation. While this was Mao's central contribution to communist revolution in theory and practice, it necessarily involved all aspects of the revolutionary communist science. In particular, even as Mao correctly upheld Stalin as a proletarian revolutionary, he also had to

confront and sharply criticize much of Stalin's methodology as well as concrete policies during the period of the construction of socialism in the USSR. Criticizing what he called Stalin's "metaphysics," Mao gave renewed emphasis to the conscious dynamic role of people in the revolutionary process, and raised the understanding of dialectical materialism to a whole new level. In so doing Mao went up against much of the entrenched thinking of the communists in China and worldwide.

Even when Mao was alive there were conflicting understandings about whether or not he represented a rupture with previous communist thinking and, if so, what this rupture represented. Today, when re-examining Maoism, this takes on all the more importance. There were some who failed to see or accept Mao's rupture, seeing instead only that he continued upon the path of Lenin and Stalin. Others at most begrudgingly accepted that Mao, benefiting from historical experience, made minor "course adjustments." They failed to understand or opposed that Mao also had to *go against* significant wrong thinking and wrong methodology of the previous communist movement, especially manifested under Stalin's leadership.

The other side of the coin was represented by those who wanted to strip their repackaged "Maoism" of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and especially the leading role of a vanguard communist party. Such people had a bourgeois-democratic reading of Mao's Cultural Revolution, seeing it as an assault on the "party-state" "apparatus" and "paradigm," rather than a life-and-death struggle to keep revolutionary China and the very real dictatorship of the proletariat, led by a genuine communist party, advancing on the socialist road. There were forces and individuals, especially but not only in the imperialist countries, who recognized Mao's rupture with Stalin but gave this a social-democratic interpretation, mistakenly viewing Mao as having made a kind of *departure* from the dictatorship of the proletariat and the leadership of a vanguard communist party. These forces tended to accept the bourgeois consensus that the problems in the USSR under Stalin's leadership were his "authoritarian" and "iron-fisted" leadership (often slandered as personal dictatorship) when, to the extent that Stalin did mishandle contradictions among the people or suppress dissent and criticism, these errors stemmed most fundamentally from a deeper failure to correctly grasp the dynamics of the contradictions in socialist society.¹³

There were many who shared one or the other of these misinterpretations but who mainly saw in Mao a kind of third world populist whose contribution remained restricted to his answers to how to make revolution in the countries oppressed by imperialism and held in backward conditions due to feudalism, especially his theory of protracted people's war.¹

When the coup in China took place in 1976, Mao's most prominent followers, known as the "Gang of Four," including his widow Jiang Qing¹⁴ and the outstanding leader and theoretician Zhang Chunqiao,¹⁵ were arrested by the new revisionist rulers and made the target of a vilification campaign. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had been, according to those who had taken over in China, a criminal folly. The basic theses that Mao had developed, and most especially his thesis on continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, were systematically assaulted. Most of the international Maoist movement at the time was either incapable or unwilling

i This kind of understanding shared much in common with the line of Lin Biao, at one time officially designated Mao's successor in the Communist Party of China. Lin had influenced many with his work *Long Live the Victory of People's War!* which theorized and concentrated many of the wrong understandings and lines of the time. Among other problems, waging people's war was made the decisive criterion in assessing the correctness of ideological and political line. This was given central import in the context of an analysis that the world had entered a "new era" and, by implication, that the basic laws Lenin had discovered concerning the era of imperialism were no longer determinant. According to this view, what was needed to advance the world revolution was reductively equated with and collapsed into the advance of national liberation struggles against imperialism. This line gained traction in the 1960s against the backdrop of such struggles throughout the world, including the heroic struggle against the U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

to scientifically examine what was going on in China. Even among those who did not accept the new Chinese leaders' open reconciliation with the U.S.-led imperialist bloc, few combated the actual theoretical assault mounted by the revisionist usurpers, and they often opposed or were incapable of recognizing the centrality or the importance of Mao's thesis of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.ⁱⁱ Instead such people fell back on the litmus test of protracted people's war or other one-sided or wrong criteria.

In sharp distinction to all this was the systematic and comprehensive answer given by Bob Avakian to the question of what Maoism represented. His book *Mao's Immortal Contributions*¹⁶ was written in the immediate aftermath of Mao's death and the counter-revolutionary coup directed against Mao's closest supporters and, in a broader sense, against the proletariat and revolutionary masses. Mao's Immortal Contributions systematizes Mao's main developments to the revolutionary science in the fields of political economy, philosophy, strategy and tactics, revolutionary warfare, the party, and other spheres.¹⁷ Avakian gave particular attention to Mao's central and most important contribution, his thesis of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the leadership of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution led on the basis of this understanding. Avakian drew deeply from the works of Mao and those written by the revolutionary headquarters in China, which the Chinese party under Mao's leadership had translated into numerous languages and distributed broadly. Nevertheless it is to be noted that how rare were those who really sought out and built upon what Mao and his followers had bequeathed to the world's revolutionaries, and how shallow or outright wrong much of the understanding of the Maoists at the time was when the movement was confronted with by far its greatest test: the loss of China as a bastion of proletarian revolution, its capitalist transformation, and the all-out ideological assault led by the now-revisionist Communist Party of China itself.

All this explains in no small measure the depth of the collapse of what seemed such a widespread international Maoist movement. And it also partially explains why in more recent years some wrong understandings of Maoism have crystallized and become obstacles blocking the way of revitalizing the communist project.

In our discussion we will return to some of these and other previous debates within the "Maoist movement" taken in its broadest meaning. What D'Mello's discussion reveals is that much of the understanding of Maoism reflected in his article overlaps in important ways with different, and, I would argue, wrong interpretations of Maoism from within the ranks of the Maoist movement itself.

Fighting to Uphold Mao and Laying the Basis for Going Further

It was Bob Avakian who took the lead in confronting the loss of proletarian rule in China in 1976. It is not coincidental that, in the course of meeting this great need of the communist movement, Avakian both synthesized the contributions of Mao and laid the basis for his subsequent breakthroughs in communist theory. As Avakian put it, his "immersion" in and "reverence" for Mao during this period laid the basis for the critique he was to develop beginning with *Conquer the World* and is an important part of his new synthesis.

At the time when the Maoist movement was reeling from the shock of the coup in China and efforts were underway to regroup the genuine communists internationally, there were serious disputes about whether Lenin's thesis on the division of the world between rival imperialist powers was still

ii Many others followed Enver Hoxha of Albania, who used the defeat in China to argue against Mao's whole development of Marxism. Instead Hoxha preached a return to a caricatural version of Stalin's understanding, in particular arguing *against* Mao's whole thesis on the contradictory nature of socialism and the need to continue to carry out the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. "Beat Back the Dogmato-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tsetung," *The Communist*, Number 5, 1979.

applicable and whether these contradictions were leading to a new world war,¹⁸ on whether Maoism should be considered a development of an "integral whole" of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism or an incorrect view of "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Principally Maoism" which largely separated Maoism from the body of revolutionary communist science,¹⁹ on how to correctly conceptualize – and understand – the material basis for and the principles of proletarian internationalism,²⁰ the relation between defending the socialist state and advancing the world revolution, the evaluation of the "three worlds theory" proposed by the Chinese Communist Party as well as previous experience in the USSR in opposing imperialist encirclement and aggression, whether Mao's criticisms of Stalin both in terms of socialist construction and in relation to philosophy are valid and should be upheld, and other important questions as well.

Many of these disputes contained seeds both of the more advanced understanding that was to emerge fully in Avakian's new synthesis as well as of the earlier-cited "mirror opposites" that are opposing it. While the work of Avakian had to a great degree laid the basis for the 1984 formation of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement which regrouped a large portion of the world's Maoists, the unity within RIM and in the Maoist movement more generally also encompassed some of these differences.²¹ Unfortunately, D'Mello seems unaware of these discussions, and his collection of articles titled *What Is Maoism?* is particularly striking for its absence of texts from within the Maoist movement itself. It is important to note that D'Mello's interrogation of Maoism is not coming from within the Maoist movement – he does not share the same political history or reference points. This is by no means a reproach. Indeed a view from the exterior should be welcome and could provide new perspectives, and is all the more appreciated coming from those who are fighting an unjust society. But D'Mello's text on Maoism suffers from his failure to address the discussions that have taken place within the Maoist movement itself.

Today, several decades later, when the communist movement is at a crossroads, the discussion can no longer be fruitfully conducted within the framework of seeking to define or return to what constitutes "real Maoism." This is because the science of communism has advanced beyond Maoism, re-synthesizing and recasting what was overwhelmingly positive about Maoism while rupturing with the secondary incorrect elements,ⁱⁱⁱ and the incorrect understandings have developed

iii Avakian summed up that "This new synthesis involves a recasting and recombining of the positive aspects of the experience so far of the communist movement and of socialist society, while learning from the negative aspects of this experience, in the philosophical and ideological as well as the political dimensions, so as to have a more deeply and firmly rooted scientific orientation, method and approach with regard not only to making revolution and seizing power but then, yes, to meeting the material requirements of society and the needs of the masses of people, in an increasingly expanding way, in socialist society – overcoming the deep scars of the past and continuing the revolutionary transformation of society, while at the same time actively supporting the world revolutionary struggle and acting on the recognition that the world arena and the world struggle are most fundamental and important, in an overall sense – together with opening up qualitatively more space to give expression to the intellectual and cultural needs of the people, broadly understood, and enabling a more diverse and rich process of exploration and experimentation in the realms of science, art and culture, and intellectual life overall, with increasing scope for the contention of different ideas and schools of thought and for individual initiative and creativity and protection of individual rights, including space for individuals to interact in 'civil society' independently of the state – all within an overall cooperative and collective framework and at the same time as state power is maintained and further developed as a revolutionary state power serving the interests of the proletarian revolution, in the particular country and worldwide, with this state being the leading and central element in the economy and in the overall direction of society, while the state itself is being continually transformed into something radically different from all previous states, as a crucial part of the advance toward the eventual abolition of the state with the achievement of communism on a world scale.

In a sense, it could be said that the new synthesis is a synthesis of the previous experience of socialist society and of the international communist movement more broadly, on the one hand, and of the criticisms, of various kinds and from various standpoints, of that experience, on the other hand. That does not mean that this new synthesis represents a mere 'pasting together' of that experience on the one hand, and the criticisms on the other hand. It is not an eclectic combination of these things, but a sifting through, a recasting and recombining on the basis of a scientific, materialist and dialectical outlook and method, and of the need to continue advancing toward communism, a need and objective which this outlook and method continues to point to – and, the more thoroughly

and consolidated as well.

Maoism itself is now undergoing a process of dividing into two between the new synthesis and mirror-opposites in relation to it as described above. It is true that within the thinking of Mao, and much more so within the thinking of many of those who claim to follow Mao, there are elements that approximate or resemble the Maoism that D'Mello feels he has discovered. But a "Maoism" that does not incorporate and in fact rejects today's required ruptures will turn into its opposite, a pale, non-revolutionary parody that cannot retain Maoism's previous revolutionary character, much less represent revolutionary communism as it is now advancing.

Substantial numbers of young people opposed to the imperialist world order are drawn to non-revolutionary and even counter-revolutionary ideologies such as Islam or the worship of imperialist-sponsored "democracy." This is not only because of the material lack of a socialist alternative such as existed when revolution was flourishing in China under Mao's leadership, but also at least partly a result of the inability of the communist movement internationally to sharply and consistently project a thoroughly revolutionary communist vision and path²² that meets the needs of the day, both in summing up the past experiences and in addressing changes in the contemporary world. Yesterday's "Maoism," or rather the pale and distorted shadow of Maoism, cannot represent the compelling vision that people need.

On the other hand, the new synthesis enables communism to speak convincingly to past as well as current experience and points to a viable and desirable solution to the problems of society. Avakian's new synthesis incorporates and *reforges* both a stronger grasp and further development of Mao's breakthroughs as well as further rupture with the secondary elements in Mao's conceptions that stood in opposition to this.

Mao (and Marx) as "Radical Democrats"

Let's go back to how D'Mello defines Marx's goal. He writes that "Marxism has to be judged by the fruits of its project of taking humanity along the road towards equality, cooperation, community, and solidarity." It is difficult to read these words and not think immediately of the motto "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" of the French bourgeois revolution of 1789 or even "with liberty and justice for all" of the U.S. pledge of allegiance to the flag. Dreams of cooperation and equality are as old as classes themselves. But in this epoch these kinds of slogans and appeals have always ended up being used by *bourgeois* forces, at best, to rally the masses, including in revolutionary struggle in which the great majority of the population, "the whole nation" to put it in other terms, faces a common enemy such as the feudal system in pre-revolutionary France before 1789. In reality, such slogans and such a vision cover over the truth that society is divided into conflicting classes with conflicting interests. Indeed, most of the reactionary states in the world today are rife with such talk of democracy.

At several points in his article, D'Mello attributes to Maoism generalizations about the nature and tasks of revolutionary transformation which actually reflect D'Mello's own world view and not that of Mao or his followers. Changing the world "for the better" or very similar expressions are repeatedly used to describe both D'Mello's goal and his yardstick for measuring revolutionary efforts. For example, D'Mello puts it: "Maoism did something unprecedented in human history – it brought about a drastic redistribution of income and wealth in China; it radically reordered the way Chinese society's economic surplus was generated and utilized, all for the better." Yes, Mao did these things and that is worth recalling, especially now when vile (and frankly ridiculous) slander of

and deeply it is taken up and applied, the more firmly it points to this need and objective." Bob Avakian, "Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity", Part 1, <http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/> and included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a Revolution pamphlet, p.35-36.

Mao is so commonplace in mainstream society and in liberal and academic discourse.

But "all for the better" is not the right viewpoint from which to view the Marxist project, nor is it the right criterion to judge the success or shortcomings of Maoism. Mao did not primarily aim to "change the world for the better" through income redistribution and social planning. His project was to radically transform society and people as part of a worldwide process of getting to communism.

At other points in his article, D'Mello's definition of Maoism (and Marxism) does come closer to reflecting the task and goal of achieving a classless society, or to put it more scientifically, getting beyond the "4 Alls" as addressed earlier in this article. But by confounding communism with the extension of radical democracy D'Mello eviscerates the goal of achieving classless society and in any event separates this goal from the actual course society can and needs to travel. It is an impoverished "Marxism" which holds D'Mello prisoner to a crippled and distorted conceptualization of social reality. Once the goal of communism is dismissed, consciously or unconsciously, as unobtainable or irrelevant, one is left with, at best, looking for one means or another of changing society "for the better" without transforming its fundamental structure. It is worth noting that in D'Mello's collection of articles "What Is Maoism?" he includes an article by Paul Sweezy arguing about the importance of winning reforms in the absence of any real possibility of revolutionary transformation. It is a reminiscent of the theory argued by Huey Newton a leader of the Black Panther Party in the US in the 1960s who called for a strategy of "survival pending revolution." Paul Sweezy, "What is Marxism?", in Bernard D'Mello , *What Is Maoism and Other Essays?*

D'Mello is correct that both Marx and Mao began their political life as "radical democrats," although the political circumstances and climate of mid 19th-century Europe and early 20th-century China were substantially different. The revisionists who seized power in China following Mao's death in 1976 made a point of stressing Marx and Engels' origins in the democratic movement in Germany in their efforts to refute the revolutionaries in China and Mao's thesis on "bourgeois-democrats becoming capitalist-roaders," examined later in this article. Both Marx and Mao saw a world full of inequality and injustice and sought out a way to end it. In this sense they were not unlike so many of their contemporaries or those we see fighting on many fronts in the world today. The essential point, however, is the opposite: Marx was able to make a theoretical *radical rupture* with the bourgeois-democratic framework confining the progressive and revolutionary movement of his times. And it was this radical rupture in thinking and a scientific understanding of goals and means that laid the basis for a century-long wave of revolutionary struggle that could be consciously aimed at making the changes in society whose outline Marx was able to foresee.

D'Mello misses the centrality of Marx's breakthrough and radical rupture with the thinkers of the Enlightenment and theoretical forerunners of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions such as Rousseau, Locke and Kant.^{iv} This rupture and the specific scientific character of communism is concentrated in the quote from the passage from Marx cited earlier, on overcoming "the Four Alls," describing the content and goal of communist revolution and the socialist transition to communism and distinguishing it from utopian and ultimately reformist "socialism."

iv "The great men who in France were clearing men's minds for the coming revolution acted in an extremely revolutionary way themselves. They recognized no external authority of any kind. Religion, conceptions of nature, society, political systems – everything was subjected to the most unsparing criticism: everything had to justify its existence before the judgment-seat of reason or give up existence...

"We know today that this realm of reason was nothing more than the idealized realm of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realization in bourgeois justice; that equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the most essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, Rousseau's social contract, came into being, and could only come into being, as a bourgeois democratic republic. The great thinkers of the eighteenth century were no more able than their predecessors to go beyond the limits imposed on them by their own epoch." Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 20-21.

The communist revolution necessitates the radical transformation of people and their thinking, of economic, political, and social relations and institutions – aiming not for radical democracy or attenuating the extremes of polarization, but overcoming all forms of exploitation and abolishing classes, the goal of communism.

As part of getting beyond the Four Alls and the struggle for communism, a fierce struggle against all forms of social inequality constitutes a critical aspect, but is not the defining horizon. It is precisely in the process of uprooting and transforming the material basis for such social inequalities and antagonisms that the horizon of equality will be transcended.²³

How different and more revolutionary is Marx's view than the vision of "radical democracy" D'Mello attributes to him!

We must again return to Marx's insistence on "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as the necessary and liberatory transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.^v Mao's theoretical understanding and his life-long revolutionary practice needs to be seen from this viewpoint. Indeed, as we have stressed, Mao's central contribution involved identifying and engaging with the contradictions of this transition (socialism and proletarian dictatorship) and finding the revolutionary means to advance toward communism. Both the goal (classless communist society) and the means (dictatorship of the proletariat) explode the confines of "radical democracy" to which D'Mello wants to confine both Marx and Mao. The notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat is so much at odds with D'Mello's central thesis of "radical democracy" that he essentially avoids it in his article. Once this goal and means are left out of the picture, then there is no choice but to fall back on *other criteria* such as those that D'Mello offers about better wealth distribution, etc.

It is true that Mao, like Marx, began political activity as a radical democrat. But again the essential point is the opposite of what D'Mello is insisting. Mao *transcended* the "radical democracy" that was dominant in the thinking of the young revolutionaries of China in the early decades of the 20th century. His understanding – his grasp of the science of revolution that was known then as Marxism-Leninism – enabled Mao to correctly situate the revolution to liberate China from imperialism and semi-feudalism as part of the epochal effort of world proletarian revolution. Most of the other leaders of the Communist Party of China did not fully share this vision and understanding, which had much to do with why the course Mao had charted was reversed so soon after his death.

Confounding Communism and Democracy

Again, let's consider D'Mello's conclusion: "Maoism has its roots in Marx who was, above all, a *radical* democrat... given the *radical* democratic streak running from Marx to Mao, the best thing that Maoism could do is to commit to the promise of *radical* democracy." Indeed, D'Mello's argumentation and his portrayal of Mao is consistent with this conclusion.

D'Mello thesis of "radical democracy" actually runs directly contrary to one of the central theoretical developments of Mao and his followers concerning the relationship between the democratic revolution and the further advance of the socialist revolution. In particular, the Maoists

v " . . . no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle of the classes, and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*; 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*." "Marx to J. Wedemeyer, March 5, 1852," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Ed., ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 220.

in China emphasized the reality of "bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist-roaders."²⁴ By this they meant that many of the top leaders of the Communist Party who had fought hard to liberate China from imperialism and semi-feudalism during the long years of the first stage of the Chinese Revolution did not fundamentally share Mao's goal, vision and line that the revolution needed to develop into a socialist revolution whose ultimate goal would be worldwide communism. Rather these people, some of whom were valiant leaders of the revolution in the first stage, went along with some measures of socialist revolution but increasingly balked at going further in the direction of radically transforming society beyond the Four Alls – ultimately taking the capitalist road and coming into opposition to the socialist revolution. While this process of "bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist roaders" does not encompass the whole phenomenon of capitalist restoration in China, which was rooted in the underlying contradictions of socialist society, it does explain to an important degree the history and configuration of the opposing headquarters within the party. D'Mello, on the other hand, understands it quite differently. Not only does he overlook or oppose Mao's thesis in this sphere, we will see below that he also treats key capitalist-roaders in China like Zhou Enlai as "close comrades" of Mao.

D'Mello's thesis on radical democracy has much in common with the very real limitations the whole communist movement has had in correctly understanding communism as the *transcending* of all class society, and with it all forms of rule of one class over another.^{vi} "Democracy" is no exception to this: each ruling class will have a form of democracy which is most suited to its social system. Democracy under conditions of the proletarian dictatorship is qualitatively different than the bourgeois democracy of the capitalist societies. The dictatorship of the proletariat grants and assures the fundamental rights to the formerly oppressed and relies on the broad masses in the exercise of power. But most importantly, this type of democracy, as more expansive and qualitatively richer as it is, still is not an end in itself but *serves* the continuing struggle and continuing transformation to achieve the abolition of Marx's "Four Alls," thus creating the material and ideological conditions for the state to "wither away" (to use Marx's term) and, with it, proletarian democracy as well.

Again, this was a very important point of struggle and debate in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao in China. For example, the revolutionaries in China gave great attention to "criticizing bourgeois right" and the ideology of bourgeois right. "Bourgeois right," a conception elaborated by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*,²⁵ refers in particular to the fact that, under conditions of socialism, distribution of goods would be according to the principle of "to each according to his work" and it is still not yet possible to implement the communist principle of "to each according to his needs." This principle of "to each according to his work" comprehends a measure of equality but masks the underlying inequality – differences in capabilities and needs. Bourgeois right takes in such relations of formal equality that mask actual inequality, and more broadly refers to the continuing influence of the aspects of bourgeois society that carry over into socialism, and their ideological manifestations and expressions in state and policy. The revolutionaries in China recognized that bourgeois right could not be fully abolished until it was possible to move out of the realm of commodity production and exchange through money completely – that is to say, as a product of the material and ideological transformations of the whole socialist transition period, which can only be understood as a world process of transition from the bourgeois to the communist epoch. But that was exactly the point: socialist society has to be seen not as an end in itself but precisely as a transition toward the future communist society.

vi In contrast to D'Mello's formalist and classless "radical democracy" and his efforts to remake Marx and Mao in that image, we can contrast Bob Avakian's following three sentences on democracy: "In a world marked by profound class divisions and social inequality, to talk about 'democracy' – without talking about the class nature of that democracy and which class it serves – is meaningless, and worse. So long as society is divided into classes, there can be no 'democracy for all'; one class or another will rule, and it will uphold and promote that kind of democracy which serves its interests and goals. The question is: which class will rule and whether its rule, and its system of democracy, will serve the continuation, or the eventual abolition, of class divisions and the corresponding relations of exploitation, oppression and inequality." *Revolution*, 273.

Mao and the revolutionaries in China understood that commodity production and bourgeois right would be present in different degrees during the whole period of socialist transition, but most importantly they understood that these very same "birthmarks" from capitalist society, even while the revolution had to restrict and reduce them, would still provide material and ideological soil engendering new capitalist elements who would inevitably try to overthrow the socialist system and restore capitalism. And indeed, the revolutionaries in China understood that a very important terrain of class struggle would precisely be whether to restrict bourgeois right or allow it unrestricted expansion. This was a major battlefield between Mao and his followers and the capitalist-roaders who took power after Mao's death.

Democracy, even *radical* democracy as D'Mello likes to emphasize, is integrally bound up with the exchange of commodities, the "equal exchange of equal values" so very much at the heart of both the capitalist system of production and the (bourgeois democratic) ideology that corresponds to that system of production and exchange.

The notion of radical democracy, of absolute egalitarianism, was first propounded by the radical bourgeois thinkers of the 18th century from Jefferson to Robespierre. Radical democracy is a bourgeois ideal that is both unrealizable within an economy and society dominated by commodity production and exchange – and one that most corresponds to the position of the petite-bourgeoisie.^{vii}

Even struggles against inequality, so just and so necessary as they are, will not left to themselves escape from what Marx called the "narrow horizons of bourgeois right"; they will remain unable to see beyond commodity production and exchange and the material basis of class society. This type of thinking is so pervasive in bourgeois society and so much of an accepted given in the discourse of our epoch that even resolute opponents of the injustices of the contemporary world are trapped by its limits without real work to make the necessary rupture.

It is worth recalling Engels' remark that before the division of society into classes and the emergence of the state "there was no difference between rights and duties."²⁶ The replacement of the dichotomy between "rights and duties" with the free and voluntary association of human beings is a hallmark of the difference between even the democracy that will exist in a genuine and liberatory socialist society and the future communist society that has fully escaped the horizons of bourgeois right and all class divisions.

This does not mean that the radical democrats such as D'Mello so forcefully counts himself are consciously seeking to perfect the capitalist system of commodity exchange or consciously respectful of the boundaries and permanence of capitalism.^{viii} The problem is that D'Mello argues

vii "At the heart of the matter was that Robespierre – and the Jacobins generally – tried to institute a society that would realize the bourgeois ideals of equality, freedom and the universal rights of man, avoiding the extremes of wealth and poverty, monopolized power and mass powerlessness. The historic irony lies not in the fact – as is often alleged by bourgeois democrats and bourgeois historians generally – that in the attempt to do this they resorted to dictatorial and violent means and then themselves became the victims of this; rather, it lies in the fact that *this bourgeois ideal actually corresponds most to the position of the petite bourgeoisie...* – and yet this class (or more accurately, these petit-bourgeois strata) are incapable of ruling society and reshaping it in their image. This is because the very property relations – and even more, the laws of commodity production and exchange – of which these strata are an expression, and the whole process of accumulation in which they are enmeshed once bourgeois production relations take hold, *inexorably lead to the polarization of society into a small number of big bourgeois and a large mass of propertyless proletarians* – with these petit-bourgeois strata caught in between. *One or the other of these two main forces must rule modern society.*" Avakian, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, (Chicago, Banner Press, 1986), p. 35.

viii But here it is worth recalling Marx's comment on the petit bourgeois shopkeeper and the democratic intellectual: "This content is the transformation of society in a democratic way, but a transformation within the bounds of the petite bourgeoisie. Only one must not get the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general*

that such rupture is not necessary and instead argues that Maoism should redefine itself to fit safely with this paradigm of radical democracy.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss at length the relationship between democracy and the overcoming of all class divisions. Here, too, it is necessary to note the substantial body of work that Avakian has developed on this subject, beginning especially with his book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* published in 1986. In that work and in many others over the several decades since then, Avakian examines how, even within the communist movement, all too often the communist goals have been confounded with and limited to the struggle to "perfect" democracy. Avakian's body of work and theorizations include critiques and a scientific understanding of bourgeois democracy as practiced today, past and recent polemics on the political philosophy of Rousseau, Locke, Jefferson, and other 18th century and contemporary theorists of democracy, as well as a further scientific understanding and conceptualization of proletarian democracy in socialist society, a critical appraisal of past socialist societies in this regard, and its eventual withering away in transition to communism worldwide. That these are no mere academic disputes can be seen clearly in Nepal where the Maoist leadership redefined the goals of the struggle *away* from socialism and communism and instead settled for a bourgeois-democratic republic.²⁷

Missing the Lessons of the GPCR

Given D'Mello's effort to recast Mao as a radical democrat, it is not surprising that D'Mello, like far too much of the Maoist movement itself internationally and historically, never really examined Mao's theoretical work on "bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist roaders" and "bourgeois right" nor really understood the rich experience of the GPCR in this light. This is consistent with D'Mello's belief expressed in his article that 1969 "marks the beginning of the end of the Maoist era," thus lopping off the latter part of the GPCR which was not only a precious historical experience but also the time when the revolutionaries in China were able to give a fuller and more scientific theoretical expression to the whole experience of the GPCR. Again, D'Mello is not alone in this wrong periodization of the GPCR. We have seen in recent years that Alain Badiou's "reinterpretation" of the GPCR also relies on a similar construct.²⁸ And the "mirror opposite" dogmato-religious version of Maoism also had real difficulties in understanding the Cultural Revolution following the downfall of Lin Biao in 1969.

D'Mello, like many others who see things through a radical-democratic prism, considers the first stage of the GPCR, with its mass upheavals and mass criticism, as the essence of the GPCR. In fact, this early period was but an initial phase of a complex revolutionary process that developed and deepened as it spread from revolutionary youth to the workers and peasants rising up against the capitalist-roaders in the party and state who were taking China down the same road that the Soviet Union had traveled after Khrushchev had come to power. Periods of upheaval alternated with the periods of consolidation of new forms of political power and the institution of new methods and practices in every sphere of society. The radical transformations that came after 1969 included the forging of new institutions such as the revolutionary committees that brought the masses into the exercise of power under party leadership and were integrated into the structures of the socialist state.

conditions within whose frame alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Nor should one imagine that the democratic representatives are all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven and earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent." Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx/Engels Selected Works, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969), p.126.

Throughout this process Marxism-Leninism-Maoism itself blossomed immeasurably as Mao and those most closely associated with him deepened their own understanding of the laws of socialist revolution under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, confronted new and complex problems and also worked night and day to train new communists and to regain and remold others who had fallen into revisionism. Far from being on a downward trajectory after 1969 as D'Mello believes, the Cultural Revolution advanced, faced new and difficult challenges, and generated even deeper theoretical understanding until Mao's death in 1976. For example, it was only after 1969 that it was clearly understood that "the capitalist-roaders were representatives of capitalist relations of production," whereas previously they were sometimes portrayed as mainly or simply capitulators, traitors, etc. The targets of the revolution were not simply "revisionists" but a new bourgeoisie, those high in the party and state taking the capitalist road. The question of when the decisive turning point in China took place may seem like an esoteric dispute, but the argument over the date reflects considerably different understandings.

D'Mello's "beginning of the end of the Maoist era" formulation will lead him and others *away* from studying the lessons of the Cultural Revolution as Mao and his followers saw it at the time. From the vantage point of several decades later and in light of Avakian's new synthesis, it is most definitely necessary to take another, more profound, look at the GPCR and draw appropriate conclusions. But this is not what D'Mello is doing – he has neither assimilated Mao's understanding nor has he advanced beyond it.

D'Mello's shallow and wrong understanding of the Cultural Revolution is revealed in his description of Zhou Enlai and Zhu De as Mao's "close comrades." In fact, Zhou became emblematic of those party leaders who increasingly opposed the deepening of the revolution.²⁹ And, as mentioned above, D'Mello passes over those outstanding communist leaders, such as Zhang Chunqiao and Jiang Qing, who actually did lead the Cultural Revolution on the basis of Mao's line. It is no accident that Zhang Chunqiao and Jiang Qing were vilified as part of the "Gang of Four," arrested after the counter-revolution and died in prison, whereas the legacy of Zhou Enlai is touted to the skies by the new capitalist rulers.

As Mao pointed out, many of the capitalist-roaders began as bourgeois and petit bourgeois democrats who never made the radical rupture to become communists ideologically. Many of these same communist party members did not want the revolution to advance to the socialist stage or did not want to see the further deepening of that stage of the revolution. As Zhang Chunqiao put it, they saw revolution like a bus: "Here is my stop and I must get off the bus." They did not want the revolution to keep digging away at the birthmarks of the old capitalist system such as bourgeois right. Instead these forces became more or less conscious representatives of the very capitalist relations of production that the revolution still needed to overcome. This is a different dynamic to socialism than the view wrongly attributed to Mao by D'Mello in which each stage of the revolution prepares the subsequent stage – as if this could take place in a purely evolutionary way without sharp struggle. And it is different from the widespread "bureaucracy" theory that D'Mello also echoes, an understanding that does not look at the economic basis of the capitalist-roaders.

Although Mao was certainly aware of the tremendous changes that the revolution had brought about for the masses of people, he chose to emphasize the *opposite* point: the long, persistent, difficult struggle to move China forward along the socialist road toward the communist future. Mao stressed "If people like Lin Biao came to power it would be easy for them to rig up the capitalist system." Mao was sober and clear-sighted about the difficulties facing the revolution and he warned again and again that the danger of capitalist restoration was real. Unfortunately, the history of China after Mao's death – the counter-revolutionary coup and breakneck speed with which capitalism was restored and with it all of the horrors of exploitation – has proven just how insightful Mao was.

Our point is not to underestimate what Mao did accomplish or how this benefited the masses of the people. But we must be clear and firm on upholding what Mao was able to accomplish as part of the revolutionary communist project and not to substitute a different vision and a different yardstick, in fact a very paltry one, of radical democracy, wealth redistribution and "change for the better."^{ix}

It is an illusion of the "radical democrat" to believe that there can be gradual reduction of wealth disparities, a greater and greater sense of community and fraternity and incremental change "for the better" without having to tackle the momentous task of uprooting capitalism, commodity production and class society generally, and to do so by the only means that this can be achieved, the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*. In fact, the radical democrat's goal itself – a classless community, fraternity and democracy without the thoroughgoing revolutionization of all social relations – is itself an illusion. Although history the world over proves the opposite, and will prove it over and over, experience alone will not pop this bubble of illusion. That is because these illusions do not result from a lack of perceptual information but rather from the class outlook of the "democratic intellectual" (or, if D'Mello prefers, the "radical democrat.")

National Democratic Revolution

In this article, we need not and cannot examine in depth Mao's very important teachings on what he called the New Democratic Revolution (NDR). Still, there are a few essential points that need to be understood, and differently from how D'Mello presents them.

Mao argued that in China the revolution needs to go through two stages, the first being one of "New Democracy" directed against foreign imperialism, feudalism and what he called "bureaucrat capitalism," the kind of capitalism closely linked to imperialism and feudalism. Mao argued that the proletariat, represented by its vanguard communist party, could lead the broad masses, especially the downtrodden peasants, in completing this revolution. We can see the continued importance of Mao's breakthrough even today, when the task of doing away with imperialist domination remains central to the revolution in most of the world and many features in society are still marked by the stench of feudalism and other pre-capitalist systems of exploitation.

But even while D'Mello is correct in pointing to the importance of Mao's thesis on New Democracy, he shows a real misunderstanding of it when he asserts that one of the distinctive features of Maoism is the "the conception of NDR as opposed to that of bourgeois-democratic revolution." Actually, Mao was quite clear that in its social character, the NDR remained bourgeois-democratic in that its target is precisely the foreign domination and semi-feudalism that objectively prevented China from being an independent modern capitalist country.

Mao did very much insist that the New Democratic Revolution was "part of the world proletarian revolution" and no longer part of the bourgeois-democratic revolution *of the old type*. Mao argued that the leadership of the NDR by the proletariat through its vanguard communist party is linked to the proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, and that it had important *socialist elements within it* (including targeting foreign imperialism and comprador-bureaucrat capitalism,

ix It is also worth noting that if the socialist road is not maintained even many of the democratic features or "changes for the better" that D'Mello and others recognize will be put into jeopardy. There were some, such as William Hinton, whose article D'Mello has included in his collection of essays, who were unclear on the terms and nature of the two-line struggle in China during Mao's last years, and this confusion led them to side with the opponents of the revolutionary headquarters in the party. (Hinton, "Mao, Rural Development and Two-Line Struggle" and "On the Role of Mao Zedong.") A few years later the results were such that the collective system of ownership in China's countryside which had been such a source of inspiration to Hinton and many others was transformed into private capitalist farming. Gaps in wealth that the revolution had reduced skyrocketed and took new forms as capitalists ferociously went about intensifying class polarization, building a new class of billionaires and its corollary, the dispossession and impoverishment of huge sections of the rural population and their enslavement in what many have aptly called the "world's sweatshop."

the main form of large-scale capitalism in China), thus laying the basis for and potentially ushering in socialist revolution as opposed to the *consolidation* of bourgeois democracy and capitalism. Perhaps it is this understanding D'Mello is trying to reference in his distinction between NDR and "bourgeois-democracy." But D'Mello's understanding of this is quite different than that of Mao and his followers.

It may seem very revolutionary for D'Mello to deny the "bourgeois-democratic" character of the NDR. In fact, collapsing the socialist and democratic revolutions into a single whole is a classic error of reformists, particularly of the Trotskyist variety in the third world countries. By presenting both the NDR and the "socialist revolution" together in the framework of "radical democracy" D'Mello ends up missing the proletarian revolutionary character of the communist revolution and its *qualitative distinction* from the democratic revolution which is *and can only be* bourgeois in its social character. This is precisely the material base for a great many who remained "bourgeois-democrats" in their outlook to join the Communist Party and even fight heroically in the first stage of the revolution in China. But when the revolution entered into its socialist stage and as it deepened many of these leaders jumped out to oppose the revolution.

Further work needs to be done on how revolution in the 21st century will proceed in the countries dominated by imperialism and still suffering from the scars of feudalism and other pre-capitalist forms of exploitation. Avakian's theses concerning the more "inter-knitted" character of the world, including understanding that imperialism has become internal to the class structure in the oppressed countries,³⁰ provide a basis for more thoroughly underscoring the proletarian internationalist content of the revolution in every country.

Great changes continue to take place as imperialism penetrates and shapes the socio-economic system in countries all over the world – and this will surely call forward further development of strategy and tactics. But Mao's thesis on New Democracy will remain a vital reference and starting point for elaborating revolutionary strategy. It is not possible to imagine, for example, a revolution in Iran in which a strong component does not include attacking religious obscurantism and the medieval oppression of women which has integrated in new ways with "modern" forms of capitalist exploitation. And we have also seen, time and again, that revolutions in the oppressed countries which remain "stuck" in the perspective of "radical democracy" will be defeated or, if they do seize and consolidate political power, rapidly "tamed" and transformed into another cog in the life-crushing machinery of the imperialist world order.

It is an important truth that revolutionary communism is the most thoroughgoing rupture with *every kind* of oppression. This is a point Lenin stressed in the preparation period of the Russian Revolution when he argued that a communist must be seen as "a tribune of the people" and not as a trade-union secretary. Mao's New Democracy thesis and his leadership of the Chinese revolution stressed the principle that the proletariat must act not on the basis of its narrow economic interests but as vanguard fighters for taking the whole of society to a new level.^x But this is not an argument for confounding communism with radical democracy as D'Mello is insisting.

It is necessary to emphasize that we are not calling into question the need for communists to shoulder the task of leading the democratic revolution where such a stage is necessary. But when communists take up and lead such a struggle they do not do so as "radical democrats"; they subordinate this struggle and situate it in the larger framework of achieving communist society. The specific goal of national independence and democracy is only important in so far as it furthers this

x Indeed, Avakian's call for "enriched What is To Be Done-ism" [Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity, Part II] is broadly applicable in all countries and is not fundamentally rooted in the existence (or non-existence) of a bourgeois-democratic stage of revolution but rather in the need for the proletarian revolution to liberate all of humanity and wipe out every sphere of oppression. revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/.

goal. In reality D'Mello is formulating in theoretical terms what many Maoists have been practicing – "combining two into one" (in this case the bourgeois-democratic with the proletarian revolution), and in so doing making a confused mess rather than understanding the difference, the distinction, between the two. The experience of the last several decades leads to an opposite conclusion: communists must resist any effort to repackage communism as "radical democracy": there can be no genuine emancipation without the radical rupture with all previous social systems and their corresponding ideologies – including radical democracy.

The New Democratic Revolution is bourgeois-democratic in its immediate character, but because it is led by the proletariat and because of the specific policies – such as thorough-going agrarian revolution, confiscation of bureaucrat capitalist and imperialist property – the NDR can and must lead directly, indeed usher in, the socialist revolution. Without understanding this correctly there will be both right and "left" errors. "Left" in the sense that the communists may fail to recognize the actual democratic tasks that the revolution needs to accomplish, and may also consider the open and avowed bourgeois democrats as unwelcome intruders in the revolutionary movement. But by far the greater danger is the openly rightist deviation, that at some point in the revolutionary process, either before or after the nationwide seizure of power, the goal of socialism and ultimately communism will be dropped altogether, just as we are seeing in Nepal today.

What does Proletarian Leadership Mean?

How are we to correctly understand the concept of "proletarian leadership" which Mao argued for? D'Mello is correct in rejecting the mechanical notion that this means that urban industrial workers must necessarily be at the head of the revolution, as some still try to argue. But D'Mello fails to correctly understand wherein lies the proletarian character of Marxism. Looked at from the long sweep of history, it is the emergence of the proletariat on a world scale, as the product of capitalist relations of production, which carries the *possibility of transcending the capitalist mode of production and achieving communism*. This is what it means, scientifically, to speak of the historic mission of the proletariat.

D'Mello however understands it this way (citing Benjamin Schwartz): "in Maoism, the term 'proletarian' refers to a set of moral qualities – 'self-abnegation, limitless sacrifice to the needs of the collectivity, guerilla-like self-reliance, unflagging energy . . . iron discipline, etc' – as the norm of true collectivist behaviour. Proletarian leadership then comes to be constituted by a set of intellectuals, workers and peasants who excel in these moral requirements."

It is certainly correct that people from different social classes can adopt the world view of the proletariat and many have done so. It is also the case that such a world view does not exist spontaneously or automatically among the workers *themselves* (in any country, oppressed or oppressor). But the proletarian world view is not reducible to "moral requirements," even while it is important to recognize that there is a moral component to the proletarian world view.

It is also possible to recognize that Schwartz (and D'Mello's) description of proletarian characteristics (self-abnegation, limitless sacrifice to the needs of the collectivity, guerrilla-like self-reliance, unflagging energy . . . iron discipline) are not limited to proletarian revolutionaries alone. There have been throughout history and in many countries numerous bourgeois and petit bourgeois revolutionaries who displayed these same virtues. Robespierre, who led and sacrificed his life for the (bourgeois) French Revolution, was known as the "incorruptible." Would it not be fair to say that many cadres of a nationalist grouping such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka shared many of the qualities D'Mello cites?

The proletarian world view is, above all, a question of the science of understanding and

transforming society and the identification of the social process which alone can lead to the achievement of classless, communist society, specifically the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is not a question of the particular concrete members of the proletarian class, but rather of the proletariat as a class determined by its relation to the mode of production and not as a collection of individuals who embody "moral requirements." It was a great breakthrough of Marx to understand that the social conditions of the proletariat meant that only "by emancipating all mankind can the proletariat achieve its own final emancipation."³¹ The mission of the proletariat to "liberate all of humanity" flies squarely in the face of the kind of vulgar, economist and workerist interpretations typical of revisionism and it is noteworthy that the revolutionaries in China made Marx's quote one of their principal slogans during the GPCR. It has a profound moral content, clearly, but it is a morality founded on a scientific understanding and not at all the empty moral injunctions of classless democracy and humanism.

Mao himself was a consistent and thoroughgoing representative of the proletariat (which is not to deny secondary, contradictory aspects of his thinking). Mao's proletarian quality stemmed from his world outlook, which was overwhelmingly that of dialectical and historical materialism, and the fact that he led in fighting for a political line that overwhelmingly corresponded to the class interests of the proletariat in the largest historical sense, specifically policies and transformations that would push society forward, and very concretely, that would create, through a complex and protracted struggle, the economic, political and ideological conditions for society to move in the direction of socialism and communism. What distinguished the proletarian revolutionaries from capitalist-roaders such as Deng was ultimately where their respective orientation, politics and economic policies would lead and, in that sense, what class relations they represented. Indeed, Mao's whole conception of the New Democratic Revolution is in keeping with the orientation of proletarian leadership. Yes, the NDR as Mao formulated it is in many ways as D'Mello describes it: based on the peasantry, surrounding the cities from the countryside, waging a protracted people's war, and so forth. But the proletariat was *leading* this revolution, which was concentrated in the leadership of Mao and the communist party, precisely because he fought for a political line that would enable the revolution to go *beyond* the democratic revolution and usher in the socialist stage.

When it comes to making socialist revolution there is no "neutral." In other words, either there is a determined, conscious and protracted struggle to transform society, including periodically confronting fierce challenges and making great leaps in the direction of communism, *or* the direction of society will be determined by representatives of capitalist relations of production and organized along capitalist lines. There has to be a conscious and revolutionary struggle in the political, economic and cultural spheres to go against both the inherited inertia of centuries of class exploitation and the spontaneity that comes with the daily, hourly exchange of commodities – the exchange of equal values (again linked to the bourgeois right that was so so sharply criticized in the Cultural Revolution) central both to capitalism and to capitalist ideology where the "equal exchange" of commodities masks class division and exploitation.

D'Mello doesn't understand it this way. Again, it needs to be pointed out that he is, unfortunately, in good company. This is one of the reasons that Bob Avakian remarked that "most communists, most of the time, are not communists".³² Being part of a communist party is not enough, nor is it even enough to fight and sacrifice in the interests of the people. The success or failure of the revolution will be ultimately decided by the political and ideological line that is leading. This does not only mean whether the leaders accept the communist goal in words, but also whether, in a fundamental sense, achieving this goal actually guides the choice of strategy and tactics throughout different stages of the struggle, including in the bourgeois-democratic phase of the revolution where such a stage is required.

This is why Mao stressed so importantly toward the end of his life that "the correctness or the

incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything."³³ Unfortunately far too many party members and middle level leaders ended up supporting the revisionist takeover, perhaps unwittingly for many, at least at first. And this was just as true of communists internationally, including in India, where important Maoist formations, even some who had been carrying out heroic revolutionary armed struggle against the guardians of the old order, initially supported the coup in China marked by the arrest of the so-called Gang of Four.

Indeed when discussing moral qualities one must be very careful *not to separate them from the overarching political and ideological line*. We should remember how the capitalist-roaders in China sought to slander the revolutionaries as "soft, lax and lazy." On the other hand, the revolutionaries in the China correctly pointed to the "hard-working capitalist-roaders" who toiled day and night to restore capitalism.

The importance of this question is staring everyone in the face now as the revolution in Nepal is being reversed. No one should deny the struggle and sacrifice during the people's war by all of the members and leaders of that party – which seems to be what D'Mello is getting at by the "moral qualities." But whether the revolution in Nepal could open a pathway toward a socialist future and serve as a vitally needed breakthrough in the socialist revolution or whether, as the current trajectory indicates, the end result will be the consolidation of a bourgeois republican order with the masses remaining in chains, depends essentially on the political and ideological line of the leadership. "Self abnegation" can be a feature of revisionists and capitalist-roaders, just as frugality and discipline were often associated with the capitalist class as it first emerged.^{xi}

As Avakian put it: "There is a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion about the question of communist leadership, confusion which is bound up to a large degree with misconceptions about – and in some ways opposition to – the principles and objectives of communist revolution itself. Leadership – in particular communist leadership – is concentrated in line. This does not simply mean line as theoretical abstractions, although such abstractions, especially insofar as they do correctly reflect reality and its motion and development, are extremely important. But in an all-around sense, it is a matter of leadership as expressed in the ability to continually make essentially correct theoretical abstractions; to formulate, to wield, and to lead others to take up and act on – and to themselves take initiative in wielding – the outlook and method, and the strategy, program, and policies, necessary to radically transform the world through revolution toward the final aim of communism; and through this process to continually enable others to increasingly develop their ability to do all this. This is the essence of communist leadership."³⁴

Third World Marxism?

D'Mello's definition of Maoism as "radical democracy" also overlaps with other tendencies in the history of the Maoist movement to understand Maoism essentially as "third world Marxism," a tendency that was associated with Lin Biao, a major leader of the Communist Party of China.^{xii} This

xi D'Mello's wrong thinking is illustrated by his attitude toward Babarum Bhattarai, who is quoted favorably in his article and whose own article is included in D'Mello's collection. Bhattarai, a leader of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and at this writing Prime Minister of the country, has won the admiration of the international bourgeoisie for his "unflagging energy" and even "self-abnegation" in the interests of capitalism. But the *line* of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which D'Mello finds "imaginative," is actually a line that can lead only to capitalism, as the party leadership is now vigorously promoting. Moral qualities, like other elements of ideology such as culture, must ultimately reflect and serve the underlying economic base or, in the case of communist morality, reflect the future economic base and the struggle communists are waging to bring it into being. We can be sure that the "self abnegation" of the revisionists and the "hard working capitalist-roaders" will gradually transform into the nepotism and corruption that is the companion of every exploitative system and which the masses naturally find so infuriating but which are the symptoms of an exploiting system, not its cause. D'Mello, p.261.

xii In his very influential book "Long Live the Victory of People's War" Lin Biao argued that the basis for determining whether or not a person was revolutionary was "whether one dares to fight a people's war against them, means

involved reducing Maoism to a number of specific features that D'Mello lists, especially the waging of protracted people's war and making revolution in the "world's countryside" of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

D'Mello gives a great deal of importance to the fact that the working class masses in Europe did not carry through the revolutionary struggles that Marx envisioned.³⁵ It is true that the process of world proletarian revolution as foreseen by Marx and Engels was profoundly affected by the later changes that took place in the world. As Lenin was to analyze, the growth of capitalism into imperialism carried with it important changes to the class structure of the advanced capitalist countries and, in particular, a division within the proletariat itself in the advanced countries between a labor aristocracy benefiting from imperialism and ready to collaborate in the imperialist adventures of the ruling classes and, on the other hand, a more dispossessed section of the proletariat whose conditions of life and work more correspond to those described in the *Communist Manifesto* as having "nothing to lose" but their chains. Lenin understood this reality very deeply and considered this division within the working class the starting point for developing revolutionary strategy and tactics in that kind of countries. Thus he called for the communists strive to build a base "lower and deeper" in the proletariat. Given Lenin's well-known theses on this subject, it is surprising that D'Mello says that these conditions "thwarted the permeation of a revolutionary consciousness in the workers on the continent" but that this reality "eluded" Lenin.

Definitely the relatively privileged position of workers in the advanced countries is an important factor which reflects the class structure in those countries and bears on the thinking of this section of the workers. But D'Mello is also falling into the vulgar determinism that he warns about in his article. First, there is a material basis for *both* revolutionary communism *and* class collaboration in the proletariat of the imperialist countries and it is wrong to *only* see the one aspect of the bourgeoisification of major sections of the working class. There are also "lower" and "deeper" or otherwise oppressed sections of proletarians such as Black masses, immigrants, oppressed women, and other sectors, even in the most advanced imperialist countries, whose conditions of life lend themselves to a hatred for the existing system. Furthermore, it must be stressed that in no situation can the mere existence of extreme conditions of exploitation and impoverishment be sufficient for "automatically" acquiring the class consciousness that communist ideology represents. Indeed the need for the communists to *win* the workers to a class conscious understanding was a fundamental element of Lenin's teachings and is developed at some length in *What Is To Be Done?* where he

whether one dares to embark on revolution. This is the most effective touchstone for distinguishing genuine from fake revolutionaries and Marxist-Leninists. " In fact, this type of thinking was quite widespread among the new-born Maoist forces in the late 1960s. With hindsight it is not difficult to see how erroneous this view is. There were many types of forces that took up armed struggle against the ruling classes, especially in what Lin called the "storm centers of the world proletarian revolution" of Asia, Africa and Latin America. There were many new Maoist forces that took part in that historic upsurge but many others were nationalist reformists who felt that at that time in history their objectives could only be achieved by participating in the armed struggle and aligning with revolutionary China. Yasser Arafat in Palestine and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe were active proponents of armed revolutionary struggle at that stage and were in a broad sense "pro-China" in terms of their political alignment, if not ideological commitment.

It is worth noting what that D'Mello considers the high point of the Cultural Revolution came before Lin Biao's aborted revolt against Mao and the beginning of a more systematic criticism of some of the erroneous features of Lin's line. Clearly D'Mello is unlikely to accept many of the positions of Lin Biao, many of which were associated with a kind of militarism and ultra-"leftism." But the definition of Maoism as a "third world," peasant-based Marxism, and a view in which the "countryside of the world" (Asia, Africa and Latin America) were surrounding imperialists citadels, was not confined to Lin Biao alone. In fact, there were elements in Mao's own thinking, and all the more so among some of his genuine supporters, where this kind of understanding coexisted with the more correct understanding of Mao. The Lin Biao affair was part of a process of "one dividing into two." The revolutionaries in China pointed out that there was the process of Lin exposing himself and also a process of the "us coming to know Lin." The correct, scientific kernel of Mao's thinking was developing, including against some features of "Maoism" that were objectively present to a degree in his own thinking and certainly widely held in the Maoist camp, in China and internationally. Lin Biao, *Long Live the Victory of the People's War.* marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/index.htm

persuasively argues that the spontaneous struggle and the reality of exploitation will not automatically translate into proletarian consciousness. This consciousness, he stresses, needs to be "brought" to the workers from *outside* their immediate experience. It hardly needs to be pointed out that Lenin advanced this thesis in conditions of great misery and hardship in Tsarist Russia.

D'Mello's re-casting of Maoism within the framework of radical democracy and a peasant-based and third world people's war severs the crucial role of Lenin's contributions, Leninism, as part of the integral character and synthesis of communism – a scientific appreciation and understanding of the need for communist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the transition to communism as part of a world process, and the institutionalized leading role of the vanguard party through this whole process.^{xiii}

Even in countries where the exploitation and oppression of the masses is extreme and the masses frequently rise up in different types of struggles, it is still the case that these conditions do not lead spontaneously to communist consciousness. During the high tide of revolutionary struggles during the 1960s and early 1970s, the spontaneous consciousness of the revolutionaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America tended to be characterized by one or another variant of revolutionary nationalism. Often this took on a kind of "Maoist" coloration – in part out of recognition of the genuine support that China was giving to these struggles. The problem was many of the Maoists were themselves confused over the difference between revolutionary nationalism and revolutionary communism.

Today it should be enough to note the unfortunate grip that some reactionary ideologies such as religious fundamentalism or various kinds of opportunism have on significant sections of even the extremely downtrodden masses in many of the oppressed countries to see that revolutionary communist ideology does not develop spontaneously. This reality should spur on efforts to wage *resolute ideological struggle*, and not to try to sidestep this necessary battle.

It was important for Mao and revolutionary China to wholeheartedly support the struggles for national liberation that were sweeping the world in the 1960s and reached their high point with the war of liberation in Vietnam. In so doing, Mao had to fight against the Soviet Union and other revisionists who either sabotaged these struggles and/or tried to manipulate them to serve the USSR, which Mao had correctly analyzed as a "social-imperialist" superpower. At the same time, problems existed in how Mao and the Communist Party of China related to the struggles in the oppressed countries. For example, they did not do their maximum to support the development of independent communist organization, often resting content to support various kinds of fronts or liberation organizations in which bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces predominated, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization or Robert Mugabe's ZANU in Zimbabwe. In his last years especially, as Mao faced an increased threat of war from the Soviet Union, he made efforts to build a kind of "united front" even involving reactionary states opposed to the USSR. Mao's mistakes in this regard³⁶ were not the first and not the worst in the history of the international communist movement. For example Stalin's subordination of the world revolution to the state interests of the USSR, especially in the period before, during and after World War Two, was a more egregious case. But Mao's mistakes in this arena, even while he rejected basic revisionist theses such as "non-capitalist road of development," still caused real problems. Errors in this sphere also interpenetrated with other errors in method and approach as well.

The tendency to define "Maoism" as an ideology of national liberation struggle definitely existed

xiii Writing in *Conquer the World* in 1980, Avakian presciently theorized "To put it somewhat provocatively, Marxism without Leninism is Eurocentric social-chauvinism and social democracy. Maoism without Leninism is nationalism (and also, in certain contexts, social-chauvinism) and bourgeois democracy. Now those may sound like nice little axioms but they apply, and have real importance, and this is, in my opinion, a summation from experience of some phenomena that exist in the world and around which there must be deeper struggle."
revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld/index.html

within the Communist Party of China during Mao's lifetime, a tendency that was taken up and greatly amplified by many revolutionaries of that period who never went beyond the boundaries of struggle against imperialism and feudalism. In other words, those who never saw beyond "the narrow horizon of bourgeois right." It would be a great injustice to equate Mao with the limited vision of some of his supporters. But nonetheless, here, too, is one of the contradictions of Maoism: the emancipatory outlook corresponding to the proletariat's task of taking human society beyond the boundaries of classes and nations co-exists with a secondary but nonetheless real tendency on Mao's part to sometimes combine two into one with respect to communism and the liberation of nations. This tendency is reflected in Mao's often cited remark that "in China, patriotism is applied internationalism."³⁷ D'Mello is making use of the ambiguities and secondary errors of Mao and in so doing *recasting* the ensemble of Mao's teachings as the work of a non-communist, a "radical democrat."

Mass Line

Let us now look at how D'Mello's explicates the Maoist concept of mass line: ".. a distinctive feature of Maoism. This is a method of involving the masses in how, for instance [carrying through different kinds of struggle], each of the above is to be done and then implementing what had been decided upon with their participation. The party leaders thereby correctly understand the opinions of the people and so fashion the required policies in a manner the masses will support and actively implement."

Mao did develop a theory of mass line, but it is also another area where many Maoists themselves as well as scholars and friends of the communist movement have misunderstood the essential matter. Mass line must not become an argument for simply "listening to the masses," allowing them to criticize and so forth, or just systematizing their thinking, although all of these things are crucial to Mao's understanding and practice. Communist leadership of the masses must encompass a profound understanding of the masses and their thinking (which can only mean their *contradictory* thinking). On the basis of an overall scientific understanding of the tasks of the revolution, the necessary strategy and tactics, and revolutionary communism more generally, the communists are able to develop slogans, policies and so forth that concentrate the fundamental interests of the masses and that increasing sections of the masses can be won to take up and fight around. "Mass line" must not be used as an argument that communist slogans or policies should be a simple empirical reflection or concentration of the spontaneous sentiments and understanding of the masses; if so the communists would be promoting all sorts of backward-looking ideas. (Indeed, this is what the revisionist distortion of the mass line often leads to). For example, it would be quite damaging to "unite" with (and still less concentrate) the communalist or religious sentiments of the masses, however widespread they might be at any given point. And we have seen this type of error even among those seeking or claiming to apply Maoism.

D'Mello leaves out the dynamic role of politics and ideology, the struggle that takes place in these spheres, and the necessary role of communists in waging this struggle. Here again we should note that Mao's insistence on the need to carry out this ideological and political struggle is very much a central feature of Maoism, although one which goes little noted in D'Mello's article. (This does not mean that there is nothing in Mao's understanding of the mass line or the relation between consciousness and class position which could give rise to D'Mello's populist rendition as I will explain below). The kind of tailist understanding of the mass line promoted by D'Mello (shared by many Maoists, now and historically) cannot help but diminish the dynamic role of revolutionary theory in guiding the whole revolutionary process. In fact, far from being a passive reflection of the sentiments and thinking of the masses, scientific communist theory must "run ahead" of practice, as Avakian has put it.

Related to the problem of the "mass line" as a justification for tailing the masses is the history in the international communist movement of wrong tendencies toward what Avakian has referred to as the "*reification* of the proletariat" (reification being misunderstanding an abstraction, in this case the proletariat as a *class* with its long-term and fundamental interests, for its specific concrete manifestations, in this case the ensemble of specific *proletarians* and how they might perceive their interests at any moment).

This tendency toward reification expressed itself during the Cultural Revolution to varying degrees but represented a counter-current to what Mao was mainly bringing forward. Throughout the course of the very complex struggles in the GPCR – including efforts by the capitalist-roaders to manipulate the workers by demagogic appeals to their narrow interests (for example, trying to get the workers to focus their struggle on obtaining higher wages) when the whole future of the country was at stake – Mao and the revolutionary headquarters in the party called on the workers to "pay attention to affairs of state." Again, this was not without contradiction. The revolutionaries themselves deepened their understanding and gave greater emphasis to struggling for the masses to use what was then known as Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought in order to sort out correct from incorrect lines. Zhang Chunqiao was said to have argued that "theory is the most dynamic factor in ideology" in distinction to the simple class feelings.³⁸

Differences on how to understand the relationship between the spontaneous understanding of the masses and revolutionary communist theory could also be seen during Mao's lifetime. For example, in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution (the same period of the GPCR which D'Mello considers the high point), Lin Biao was frequently cited as saying that "the mainstream of the mass movement always conforms to the development of society and is always rational."³⁹ That argument, which disappeared from usage in the Chinese party, can be contrasted with the slogan by Mao stressed at the 10th Party Congress in 1974: "Going against the tide is a Marxist-Leninist principle"⁴⁰ The report from that Congress also made clear that only revolutionary communism would enable someone to be able to distinguish a correct from an incorrect tide.

So here again we can see that some partial and wrong elements in what Mao and the Chinese communists had earlier put forward (in this case an implication that the mass understanding should be considered always correct) are seized upon and raised above the more scientific and more central understanding that Mao and his followers were developing. Whether he is fully aware of it or not, D'Mello is insisting upon hanging onto and building upon elements in Mao's thinking and practice that Mao himself was calling into question or discarding. Rather than following D'Mello's retreat, we should look to the advanced understanding that Avakian has been forging on the relationship between the communists and the masses. Avakian has emphasized the role of putting forth crucial questions before the masses and involving the masses in grappling with them, breaking down, as much as possible, the barriers to their engaging in this realm. He has stressed, "The point of all this is not simply to create a situation in which growing numbers of the masses will 'feel involved' in the revolutionary process, but to actually help find the solutions to these problems and to enable the Party, as well as the masses, to learn in this way."⁴¹

"Practice alone is the criterion of the truth"

Another area where D'Mello concentrates an incorrect understanding shared by many within the Maoist movement is his discussion of what he describes as the Maoist dictum "seek truth from practice." While I am not aware of any statement by Mao that corresponds exactly to what D'Mello is citing, Mao did write that "practice alone is the criterion of the truth."⁴²

D'Mello defines Marxism as "a guide to life and social practice, and in the long run its validity can only be judged by its fruits," relying on a citation from Paul Sweezy whose article is reprinted in

D'Mello's collection. The depth of this error is more apparent when one reads the whole of the passage from Sweezy, which is truncated by D'Mello: "Perhaps most important, Marxism has a theory of history and destiny of humanity which is simple in its main outline and incalculably far-reaching in its implications. *It is a rational, not a mystical, theory; but like all such theory it can never be proved in any precise or scientific fashion.* It is a guide to life and social practice that can only be judged by its fruits" [emphasis added].⁴³ The point to emphasize here is precisely the words that D'Mello left out, the basic rejection by Sweezy of any scientific basis for "proving" Marxism.^{xiv}

Marxism is, above all, a science and not simply a "guide."⁴⁴ As with any science it can and needs to be continually verified, enriched and where necessary corrected. But this is different than saying it must be verified by "its fruits."

For example, Mao's teachings on the nature of socialist society, his thesis on the bourgeois-democrats becoming capitalist-roaders, his thesis on the danger of capitalist restoration, his predictions about what such a restoration would mean for the people in China and the world – all of this was, alas, "tested" by Deng Xiaoping's coup d'état, in this sense verified in practice. Indeed, it is difficult to think of many other scientific theses, at least in the sphere of the social sciences, that have been so thoroughly tested.^{xv}

In this light it is worth considering why so *few* of the Maoist forces in the world were able to understand, in even a basic way, what was going on in China following the coup d'état. A good many followed China blindly, only to wake up a few years later to the fact that the Chinese revisionists had no need for Maoist forces internationally.

The reasons for this collapse are multiple, but some of the questions of understanding and approach bear on our discussion here. In particular, many people were applying a vulgar understanding of the "criterion of practice" similar to how D'Mello, borrowing from Sweezy, formulates it in his article. According to such pragmatism, if the revolution was defeated, certainly a very bitter fruit indeed, it is easy to conclude that it must necessarily be the "fault" of Mao and his teachings. The point was not whether or not what Mao argued was *true*. So instead of science and its definition of truth as the ever closer approximation of the objective world, which must be tested in practice and experiment, we have a subjective criterion of truth whose validity is determined by its alleged utility.

Unfortunately, D'Mello's argument for using the standard of utility or usefulness to determine the truth is second nature to many Maoists. This is expressed in many ways, including in the most vulgar pragmatism of "if it works it must be right" and the corollary "if it doesn't work it must be wrong." The "failure" of the GPCR (which should be more correctly understood as a defeat) was cause for many, even most, "Maoists" to either justify support for the new leaders in China or to dump Maoism altogether.

It also needs to be pointed out that the "criterion of practice," as commonly understood by much of the Maoist movement (and as D'Mello promotes it in his article), is founded on a narrow and impoverished definition of "practice" – as immediate and direct experience, with theory only an empirical generalization of such practice. Social practice does not just consist of the experience of one's own immediate struggle – there is the importance of the experience, "practice," of the struggle

xiv D'Mello is eclectic on this point. He advances, correctly, that "scientific validity should be judged in the first instance by its contributions to the ability to explain reality." But in the next sentence he says, "here's something even more exacting – in the very long run, Marxism has to be judged by the fruits of its project of taking humanity along the road towards equality, cooperation, community, and solidarity." D'Mello, p. 24.

xv This does not mean, of course, that Mao's teachings were proven to be completely correct. While the fundamental outlines of Mao's theses are validated by a scientific examination of experience, this same process of examination and the application of lessons from other domains of human experience also makes it possible to identify weaknesses and errors in some of Mao's understanding.

internationally and historically. Here, too, it is worth remembering that the practice of the GPCR and the Soviet and Chinese revolutions more generally remains far and away the most important experience from which to examine previously existing understanding and to develop new theory.^{xvi}

Furthermore, revolutionary theory does not develop only from the experience of the proletariat itself, even when understood in its broadest sense. There are still other sources knowledge, such as the natural sciences, whose discoveries and advances do and must contribute to an overall scientific, revolutionary communist world view. For example, understanding the uncertainty principle in physics or recent advances in mathematics can help correct linear mechanical materialism, thus contributing to a more correct, dialectical and more scientific understanding of the laws of nature and society, and in particular, the relationship between necessity and accident, contingency and causality.

Isn't Marxism itself the product of a great deal of human knowledge accumulated in numerous spheres of activity?⁴⁵ On the one hand this seems obvious, including because of Lenin's well know article on the "Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, however, more often than not a pragmatist and empiricist epistemology has gone unchallenged in the Maoist movement, often hiding behind a wrong interpretation of Mao's statement that "practice alone is the criterion of truth."

Concluding Remarks

A key conclusion flowing from D'Mello's politics and discourse of Marxism/Maoism as radical democracy is that a fundamental flaw of socialist revolution is that "all revolutions inspired by Marx have only enjoyed the support or participation of a significant minority" and what is needed is a "commitment to *radical* democracy [to] up the tide to get the help of the majority." While we cannot get into a full discussion of this topic, I want to offer a few brief thoughts:

Socialist revolution objectively benefits the great majority of the population. But *this is quite different than acting as if the revolution must await the express approval of the majority before advancing*. The reality is that revolution will generally begin with only the support of a minority, although there is a material basis for what generally begins as a struggle of a conscious minority to draw in and mobilize increasing broader sections of the people. This is also true even in countries where the oppression is severe and the stability and "legitimacy" of the ruling classes very weak. For example, does anyone really think that in Nepal in 1996 the majority in the whole country would have approved the initiation of the people's war? Or in Peru in 1980? Or in China in 1927? And not only would this be a ridiculous claim when speaking of a country as a whole, it applies to a great extent even in the immediate areas where the armed struggle began, such as in Ayacucho in Peru or Rolpa in Nepal. By this I mean that there is certainly a large section of society, even in such extremely oppressed rural areas, who *fear* the outbreak of revolutionary struggle because they know all too well the vicious policies of the reactionary classes and their armed enforcers when anyone dares to lift their heads. The PCP referred to having to live in caves for the first six months or year of the people's war in Peru before the masses had enough confidence in the staying power of the revolutionaries to give them shelter.

xvi Avakian has characterized the dynamic between theory and practice this way: "proceeding at any given time on the basis of our theory and line, as determined collectively and through the structures, channels and processes of the party; extracting lessons from our practice and raising these up to the level of theoretical abstraction, but also drawing from many other sources (including the thinking and insights of others), and applying the scientific outlook and method of communism, dialectical materialism, to repeatedly synthesize all this to a higher level, in the development of and through the wrangling over theory and line – which is then returned to and carried out in practice, on what should be a deepened and enriched basis. And on...and on...and on...." (Quoted in *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, RCP Publications, 2008), p. 16.
revcom.us/Constitution/Constitution/index.html

A similar situation can also develop after the nationwide seizure of power. In other words, for many reasons a numerical majority might, at crucial junctures, be persuaded or bullied in to going along with a line and leadership which would lead to the restoration of the old exploiting order. In China during the later years of the GPCR, pressure from the world imperialist system, the uneven political consciousness of the masses and the inability of many to understand the real nature and import of the revisionist line, enhanced the capacity of the capitalist-roaders to gain support from significant sections of the population. Moreover, mistakes made by the revolutionaries contributed, even if secondarily, to an unfavorable balance of power and alignment of forces in 1976. If Hua Guofeng's coup d'état had been approved by an election, would it have been any more legitimate? Should the revolutionaries have just accepted counter-revolution as "the will of the people"?

One of the great difficulties of the socialist revolution is that it is in the interests of the great majority of people and must fundamentally rely upon them but the masses are constituted of advanced, intermediate and backward sections. Even under conditions of socialism the broadest masses are not fully conscious of their long-term interests or how to achieve them – and this calls forth the continual need for vanguard communist leadership. The masses must be increasingly mobilized to pay attention to affairs of state, participate in various state institutions, and take increasing responsibility for the direction of society and decision-making in society. But this does not mean that the masses can directly rule, in an unmediated way, without delegating some of the authority of the proletarian dictatorship to representatives. For a long historical period, there will be a need for a state, and, furthermore, in a world where imperialism still seeks to prevail, this will also include the need for a standing army.

In most future socialist countries, especially formerly oppressed countries, there will still be profound differences between town and countryside. In every country there will be a remaining chasm between mental and manual labor, and the contradiction between men and women will be a defining feature of society. All of these distinctions are part of the remaining basis for the revolution to be reversed and Mao paid great attention to how to handle these problems. Handled correctly, these same contradictions can be part of the motor through which society advances. It won't do to simply wish these problems and contradictions away.

This is related to Avakian's criticism of the establishment of an official ideology in the socialist country, as was the case in both the USSR and China, whose 1975 constitution stated, "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought is the theoretical basis guiding the thinking of our nation." In fact, in past and no doubt future socialist revolutions as well, large sections of society, including vast numbers of potential supporters of the socialist system – for example, many who uphold religious beliefs – cannot be said to share the communist ideology, and to claim otherwise is both false and harmful. Furthermore, insisting that society as a whole swear allegiance to communist ideology when many or most are not yet won over makes it less possible to unleash and embrace the energy and thinking which can, in a multifaceted and non-linear way, contribute to advancing toward communism. As Avakian has put it, the vanguard party will have to lead a dialectical process that will require it to repeatedly go "to the brink of being drawn and quartered" while still fighting through on the need for continuing revolutionary transformation. In this same light, Avakian has also insisted on the need to encourage dissent under socialism and correctly incorporate the principle enunciated by John Stuart Mill "on the importance of people being able to hear arguments not just as they are characterized by those who oppose them but as they are put forward by those who strongly believe in them."⁴⁷

But D'Mello addresses the contradiction between the communist leadership and the broad masses from his perspective of a "radical democrat," and misunderstands both the problem and the solution. In his description of the development of socialism in the USSR, D'Mello quotes from and relies

heavily on the UK social-democratic political theorist Ralph Miliband:

"Lenin's vision of the socialist state 'did not survive the Bolshevik seizure of power.' Yet, he 'never formally renounced the perspectives which had inspired *State and Revolution*.' Can we thus conclude that Lenin wanted 'the creation of a society in which the state would be strictly subordinated to the rule and self-government of the people'?... The contrast between theory and practice, in this respect, couldn't have been starker... After all, what happened to the Congress of Soviets – soviets which had the potential to be self-governing organs of the workers and the peasants – that had arisen almost spontaneously from the movement of February 1917? By the summer of 1918 the soviets had no more than a mere formal existence... Indeed, the dictatorship of the proletariat was deemed impossible except through the leadership of the single party; socialist pluralism too got precluded."

It should be pointed out that Miliband's discussion of *State and Revolution* as reprised by D'Mello is a grotesque distortion. Miliband/D'Mello are obscuring that *the main point* of Lenin's celebrated work is to argue in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat!

The reader familiar with the debates in the contemporary Maoist movement will immediately see the similarity between Miliband/D'Mello's arguments and those of the former Indian Maoist K. Venu⁴⁸ of the early 1990s, and more recently of Babarum Bhattarai in Nepal in his revisionist rendering of "proletarian democracy" and one-sided negation of the past experience of the proletarian revolution of the 20th century.⁴⁹

Here I would only emphasize a few points. While forms and structures of political rule and mass initiative are important,⁵⁰ there is no magic form (soviets or other) which alone can assure the actual rule of the masses. Certainly the "universal suffrage" characteristic of bourgeois democracy has been shown time and again, and in country after country, to be a very good vehicle for cementing and justifying the rule of a small minority of society, the exploiting classes. Nor will direct elections of workers' councils (soviets) or similar institutions solve the problem of the real and effective participation of the masses in the governing institutions or, more importantly, assure that the society is being led forward in keeping with the class interests of the proletariat in ultimately transcending class society. Nor should we forget that "radical democrats," when they come to power, can be among the worst tyrants (for example, when Nasser came to power in Egypt he used the military to crush what had been a flourishing mass movement and rounded up thousands of communists and others to be tortured and held in concentration camps).

D'Mello's attribution to Mao of the need to struggle against a "ruling elite" may appear to correspond to Mao's treatment of the class struggle under socialism. However, it actually separates the contradiction between the leaders and led from the contradictory nature of the socialist economic base which provides the basis for the emergence of a new bourgeoisie. In other words, there will be a need for planners, administrators and leaders throughout the period of socialism: the decisive question is which line is implemented by these forces, with the leaders of the party playing a particularly central role. The proletarian revolutionary line must lead society along the socialist road, which will include narrowing the remaining divisions between leadership and led, restricting the operation of the law of value and bourgeois right, drawing ever broader sections of the masses into the decision-making process, and so forth. If the capitalist line triumphs, as was the case first in the USSR with the ascension of Khrushchev to power and then in China following the coup d'état after Mao's death, all of the birthmarks of the old society, such as the division of labor, the law of value, etc., will expand exponentially and the horrors of the capitalist system will return.

Arguing for a struggle against a monolithic "ruling elite" while avoiding a scientific analysis of the class contradictions and tasks of socialist society, as D'Mello does, is neither what Mao taught nor

what he practiced. Worse than just a muddle of confusion, this kind of non-materialist approach can open the door to populist demagoguery. Capitalist-readers under socialism are just as capable of this as the populist demagogues in today's reactionary societies. There was plenty of this type of demagogic smoke covering the coup d'état by Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping in 1976, such as attacking Jiang Qing as "decadent" for playing cards and watching Western movies. And we should repeat again that many comrades internationally were also taken in by this.

Revolutionary communism requires a different democracy than that of the bourgeoisie, one which strengthens the proletarian dictatorship, that helps ensure that more and more sections of the masses are drawn into the process of decision-making and helps ensure that the state continues to advance toward communism.^{xvii} We know from historical experience that there will be bitter struggle to maintain this path and we also know that the very structures that the revolution has put into place can be transformed into instruments to re-enslave the masses and drag society backwards to capitalism, as happened in the USSR and China. We can also sum up that a flourishing debate and widespread political ideological struggle, however "messy" and complex this process may be, creates more favorable conditions to stay on the socialist road and defeat attempts to change the color of the socialist state. On the other hand, efforts to hem in, stage manage or even repress the political and ideological struggle will ultimately work in favor of those who would go backwards to capitalism. Fundamentally, however, bringing about a vigorous and lively socialist society is not mainly a question of democracy.

Avakian's new synthesis provides a new framework to unleash creativity and experimentation, to foster ferment and dissent, and to narrow and overcome the contradiction between mental and manual labor, between leadership and led – all as part of the advance to communism. He is providing a new framework to work on the contradiction between those forces in society determined to advance toward communism and the broader and contradictory sections of society. This gets concentrated in the formulation "solid core with lots of elasticity." "This means that, on the one hand, there must be a continually expanding force in society, with the revolutionary communist party as its leading element, which is firmly convinced of the need to advance to communism and deeply committed to carrying forward this struggle, through all the difficulties and obstacles; and, on the basis of and at the same time as continually strengthening this 'solid core,' there must be provision and scope for a wide diversity of thinking and activity, among people throughout society, 'going off in many different directions,' grappling and experimenting with many diverse ideas and programs and fields of endeavor – and once again all this must be 'embraced' by the vanguard party and the 'solid core' in an overall sense and enabled to contribute, through many divergent paths, to the advance along a broad road toward the goal of communism."⁵¹

There is a basis to bring a vibrant, exciting socialist society into being – a society that not only meets the expanding needs of the masses but one where the economy, political institutions, culture and relations between people are being revolutionized, and that is in motion towards a communist world. There is a basis to forge a path to a future where human beings could truly flourish and act as caretakers of the planet. Put differently, the challenge before us is to initiate a new stage of communist revolution.

xvii Avakian wrote, "Rule by the people – that is, democracy – what meaning does it have, when you have moved beyond the division of people into exploiters and exploited, when there is only the common association of people? Yes, there will be contradiction and struggle, but there will not be social relations and institutionalized forms through which one part of society will be dominating, ruling over and exploiting and oppressing other parts of society. So what meaning, then, is there to 'the rule of the people' when there is just the people, with their common association, without the need for and without the existence, in fact, of instruments of suppression of one part of society by another?" *What Humanity Needs – Revolution and the New Synthesis of Communism*, An Interview with Bob Avakian, *Revolution*, no. 267, May 1, 2012.

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

- 1 As of June 2012, the article could be found at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/dmello021109.html>. Bernard D'Mello, "What is Maoism?", in D'Mello, ed., *What Is Maoism and Other Essays*, Cornerstone Publications, 2010.
- 2 D'Mello, p. 24. Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1946), p. 354.
- 3 D'Mello, p. 43-44.
- 4 See Bob Avakian, *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution*. A Talk, 2009. For more on this and related questions, see other works by Avakian such as the "Dictatorship and Democracy" talk, "Reaching for the Heights and Flying Without a Safety Net", "Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon", "Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity," in the pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation* (May 1, 2008), the recent interview "What Humanity Needs – Revolution and the New Synthesis of Communism," and the GPCR interview in this issue of the journal - and other works that reflect the new synthesis such as the Manifesto of the RCP and the Constitution of the New Socialist Republic of North America. Most articles can be found at revcom.us/avakian/index.html and looking through the titles in the rubric Recent Talks and Writings. The interview "What Humanity Needs" can be found at revcom.us/avakian/what-humanity-needs/interview.html.
- 5 D'Mello, p. 52.
- 6 For more on this question, see the Website of the Set the Record Straight project: thisiscommunism.org.
- 7 See Mao Tsetung's 1967 "Talk to the Albanian Military Delegation," reprinted in *A World To Win* no. 1/1985.
- 8 *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*. rev.com.us/Manifesto/Manifesto.html. Hereafter referred to as *Manifesto from the RCP*.
For more discussion of this theme, see Lenny Wolf, "What Is Bob Avakian's New Synthesis?", revcom.us/a/129/New_Synthesis_Speech-en.html, and Avakian, *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part 1. revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/.
- 9 Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850," *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol 1, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969), p. 282.
- 10 *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, (Chicaog, RCP Publications, 2008), p. 42. Also revcom.us/Constitution/Constitution/index.html
- 11 *Manifesto from the RCP* [emphasis added].
- 12 Report to the Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, April 1969. marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1969/04/01.htm.
- 13 A leading exponent of this kind of view among academics is the French ex-Maoist Alain Badiou. See Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A., "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation' A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World," *Demarcations*, no. 1., demarcations-journal.org.
- 14 Jiang Qing (Chiang Ching) was Mao's wife and principal revolutionary leader on the cultural front. For more, see "Chiang Ching: The Revolutionary Ambitions of a Communist Leader," *A World to Win*, no. 19, 1993.
- 15 Zhang Chunqiao (Chang Chun-chiao) played a leading role in the 1967 January Storm in Shanghai and was both a major theoretician and a key leader of the revolutionary headquarters. See his seminal work *On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1975).
- 16 Avakian, *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, (Chicago, RCP Publications, 1979).
- 17 Other important works were to follow that further elaborated on Mao's contributions but also began to explore important areas in which mistakes in practice and conception existed. See, among others, *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld/index.html; *For a Harvest of Dragons* (Chicago, RCP Publications, 1983); *Democracy: Can't We Do Better than That?* (Chicago, Banner Press, 1986).
- 18 See *Conquer the World*.
- 19 See and contrast "On Marxism-Leninism-Maoism," Documents from the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) First Congress, *A World to Win*, no. 11, 1985; and "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism," by the RCP,USA, *A World to Win*, no. 12, 1988.
- 20 See Avakian, *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation* (a talk given shortly after *Conquer the World?*, first published in *Revolution* magazine, Spring 1984, revcom.us/bob_avakian/advancingworldrevolution/advancingworldrevolution.html. Also see *On Materialism and the Material Basis for Revolution, for Socialism and the Advance to Communism*. bobavakian.net/articles/basis-goals-methods/.html.
- 21 RIM's basis of unity at its founding in 1984 was stated in the *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement*. In 1993 RIM also adopted *Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism*.
- 22 For more on these themes see Bob Avakian, *Bringing Forward Another Way*, 2006. revcom.us/avakian/anotherway/index.html.
- 23 For a more thorough discussion on the relation between "equality" and the struggle for communism see Lotta et al., "Alain Badiou..." chapter 1.

- 24 See Text 38, "From Bourgeois Democrats to Capitalist-Roaders," and Text 39: Capitalist-Roaders Are the Bourgeoisie Inside the Party," in Raymond Lotta, ed., *And Mao Makes Five*. (Chicago, Banner Press, 1978).
- 25 Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, ed. Robert Tucker, (W.W. Norton, 1978) p. 530 – 531.
- 26 Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Cited by Avakian in his 2005 talk *Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, a Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom, Revolution*, March 8, 2006. revcom.us/avakian/index.html.
- 27 "On Developments in Nepal and the Stakes for the Communist Movement: Letters to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2005-2008 (With a Reply from the CPN(M), 2006)," *Demarcations*, no. 1. demarcations-journal.org.
- 28 See Lotta et al., "Alain Badiou..." chapter IV, "Rereading the Cultural Revolution in Order to Bury the Cultural Revolution."
- 29 Avakian, *The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung*, (Chicago, RCP Publications, 1978).
- 30 See Bob Avakian, *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement*, op. cit.; and *Conquer the World?*; op. cit.
- 31 Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol 1. (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969).
- 32 Avakian, "The Need for Communists to Be...Communists," *Revolution* no. 38, March 12, 2006. revcom.us/a/038/avakian-need-for-communists.html.
- 33 *The Tenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Documents)*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1973). Maoist documentation Project/mao/cpc/10cong.htm#p1
- 34 Avakian. *Ruminations and Wranglings – On the Importance of Marxist Materialism, Communism as a Science, Meaningful Revolutionary Work, and a Life With a Meaning*. 2009. revcom.us/avakian/ruminations/BA-ruminations-en.html.
- 35 D'Mello, op cit. Also see especially the Sweezy essay "What Is Marxism?" in this anthology.
- 36 See *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement*.
- 37 Mao, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 196.
- 38 Quoted by Avakian, "The Need for Communists to Be ... Communists."
- 39 Originally in *Peking Review* 39, September 22, 1967. Also quoted by Avakian, "The Need for Communists to Be ... Communists."
- 40 To find the 10th Party Congress, www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/etext/classics/mao/cpc/10cong.html
- 41 This is part of what he describes as "Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism." See *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part II.
- 42 Mao, "On Practice", *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1971), p. 68.
- 43 Paul Sweezy, "What is Marxism?," op. cit., p. 58.
- 44 See Avakian's discussion of this question in the section "Marxism as a Science – Refuting Karl Popper." Part I of *Making Revolution, Emancipating Humanity*.
- 45 "Stuck in the 'Awful Capitalist Present' or Forging a Path to the Communist Future? - A Response to Mike Ely's Nine Letters," by a writing group in the RCP, revcom.us/a/126/polemic-note-en.html.
- 46 Lenin, Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism, in *Karl Marx Selected Works*, (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1945), p. 45.
- 47 "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades, On Epistemology, On Knowing and Changing the World," *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, (Chicago, Insight Press, 2005), p. 43.
- 48 See CRC,CP(ML), "On Proletarian Democracy," and Avakian, "Democracy: More Than Ever We Can and Must Do Better Than That," *A World to Win*, no. 17, 1992.
- 49 See also the letters from the RCP,USA to the UCPN(M).
- 50 See for example the RCP's *Constitution for a Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)* outlining provisions for state institutions that can assist in developing the revolutionary character of the proletarian state as a vehicle for advancing toward communism, and provide for a wide scope for dissent and debate within the society, which also is a crucial means to move society forward. (Chicago, RCP Publications, 2010). revcom.us/socialistconstitution/index.html
- 51 *Constitution for a Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*, p. 5.

The Cultural Revolution in China...Art and Culture...Dissent and Ferment...and Carrying Forward the Revolution Toward Communism

by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

(The interview was conducted in 2004, and originally aired on Michael Slate's Beneath the Surface show on KPFK radio in Los Angeles, on July 29, 2005. This interview was originally published in Revolution newspaper in February 2012, for which some editing was done, particularly for clarity. In some places brief explanatory passages were added within brackets. Subheads were also added)

MS: *Let's dig into the Cultural Revolution [in China, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s]. You led communists around the world in fighting to understand what the significance of the Cultural Revolution was, and to uphold it as a dividing line question, and to see it as the highest point of class struggle in human history, the greatest height the class struggle's gotten to in human history. That's not exactly – in terms of conventional wisdom today, that's not exactly what you find on the bookstore shelf. You can find 70 books about how – and you can hear people who are 32 years old talking about how – the Cultural Revolution destroyed their careers, and they had remarkable careers when they were like two years old. But it's had an impact on people. It's had a big impact on people.*

You had musicians who once were major supporters of the Cultural Revolution who now listen to these stories from people, from artists coming out of China, for instance, and saying, "I was misled. I didn't understand everything that went on because I didn't understand the suffering that people have." Or you have these popular cultural forms, The Red Violin, for god's sake: a movie that had nothing to do with China, but there was this one scene in it where they had to show the Red Guards banging down doors and pulling people out of their houses, searching for this red violin that they needed to smash. And it was this symbol of artistic freedom and creativity.

Or you had Farewell My Concubine, which was a big, big movie among – I know a lot of my friends, a lot of artists and intellectuals who went to see that film two, three times, and really looked at it as a sign of what was wrong, and how the Cultural Revolution was not an advance for humanity, but something that was actually part of suppression, and particularly suppression of intellectuals and artists.

I wanted to ask you about that – let's talk a little about the question of intellectual freedom. And I think it's tied up with the question of dissent, but we can get into that separately. But I think actually this idea of – what you've been saying all along, and one of the reasons I asked you about this question about the Party and everything else in terms of people starting to settle in, and that kind of thing – is that you had talked earlier about the need for really just a totally, tremendously creative surge among the people and in the Party and among communists, this constant creative application, and then that Marxism itself is a science that actually, in a living form, really does do that. When you were saying that, I was just thinking, you know, it's so refreshing to hear this thing because it invigorates you with a sense of like, you know, [what] our science really is – it unleashes the greatest creativity, when you grasp it, it unleashes the greatest creativity possible.

But there's this common, or this conventional wisdom that actually – here's this crucial development in the class struggle, this crucial development of the science of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and yet it's portrayed as this sort of thing that was the suppression of artistic and intellectual freedom.

BA: Well, once again, I hate to sound like a broken record, but this is a complex question and a complex problem that the Cultural Revolution was seeking to address, and was addressing. And once more you have to situate this in what was occurring in the development of the Chinese Revolution, and not come at it from the way all too many people do in this society. They don't understand the actual dynamics – why these revolutions were necessary in the first place, what they

arose out of, and what were the contradictions they faced when they emerged. And some people have some sense of, OK in China people were poor. If you have read those Pearl Buck novels, you know, people of our generation, where you get a sense about the terrible life of the peasants, and you can understand why people would want to cast off that oppression, and so on. But a lot of people are even ignorant of that, especially now. They have no real sense of what China was like, and why a revolution was needed, and how that revolution had to take place.

So that's one problem. But not only did they have to overcome the whole daunting prospect, or reality rather, of imperialist domination and carving up China, but they also had a whole history of feudalism, of massive exploitation of the peasantry and hundreds of years – or thousands of years, actually – in which the great majority of people were just desperately impoverished and exploited. And they were coming from a society which, because it was dominated by imperialism, and because of the remaining feudalism, was not advanced technologically, or was technologically advanced [only] in a few enclaves. But then the vast part of the country and the people who lived in it were mired in a lot of enforced backwardness.

So you're coming from that, and you're trying to make leaps in terms of overcoming the poverty and the oppression of the masses of people. And you come to power, in 1949, and right away, within a year, you're thrust into a war with the U.S. in Korea – a war in which MacArthur is saying: let's take the war to China. That was his big dispute with Truman. Let's take the war to China. Let's go right to China and cross the border. Not just go near the border, but go across the border, and roll back the Chinese revolution.¹

And so right away, you barely have time to celebrate and consolidate your victory, and you're thrust into this battle with this powerful imperialist force right at your doorstep, literally. And then you fight the U.S. to a standstill, and in effect defeat it – because, in terms of its objectives in Korea, once the U.S. entered the war, they were thwarted in those, in large part because of the involvement of the Chinese in that [war].

So here you are. Now you're trying to take this country that's poor and backward, has been dominated by imperialism – you have the situation where [there was] the famous sign in a park in Shanghai, “No dogs or Chinese allowed.” This is just a stark way of expressing what their life was like, even in the urban areas, even if you were among the more educated classes, for example. So what you were referring to earlier – a lot of people did either go back to China [after the victory of the revolution in 1949], or a lot of people in China, intellectuals and others, were very enthusiastic about the new society that was being brought into being, because it was going to overcome this whole situation where China was held down and carved up by different imperialists and the Chinese people and the Chinese nation was going to be able to stand up on its feet and not be run roughshod over and lorded over by these foreign powers, and so on.

Contradictions, and Challenges, of the Socialist Road in China

But within that there's also a contradiction, that a lot of people are – it's sort of captured in Mao's thing that “Only socialism can save China.” What I'm trying to get at – this is a contradictory statement actually, because he's saying that without taking the socialist road, China cannot get out from underneath the poverty and the domination by imperialism, and so that's the only road for China. Which means that a lot of people – the reason I say it's contradictory is it means a lot of people who were not really won to the communist vision will support the revolution and will even support going on the socialist road because it is true that objectively there's no other way that the backwardness and domination by imperialism can be ended.

On the one side, there's obviously a positive aspect to that. You get a lot of people, including in the more bourgeois strata, who are enthusiastic about the socialist road because it does represent the way out for China. But, on the other side of it, they're coming at it from more like a nationalist point of view, or a more bourgeois point of view. They want China to take its rightful place in the

world – and they don't want it to be stepped on by foreigners, and so on – which is certainly legitimate, and something you can unite with. But it's contradictory.

And that phenomenon existed, not only outside the Party, but to a very large degree inside the Party in China. A lot of people joined the Communist Party in China for those kinds of reasons. And they had not necessarily become fully, ideologically communists in their outlook, and really being guided by the whole idea of getting to a communist world – and internationalism, of doing it as part of the whole world revolution and sacrificing for that world revolution when necessary – but more from the point of view: this is the only way China can stand on its feet and take its rightful place in the world. Well, a lot of those people were in the Party for a long time. A lot of them were veterans of the Long March and made heroic sacrifices, but never really ruptured completely to the communist viewpoint, which certainly encompasses the idea that China should throw off foreign domination and the poverty and backwardness of the countryside and feudalism, but is much more than that, and it goes way beyond that.

So this is one of the problems, the contradictions that were existing within and characterizing the struggle within the Chinese Communist Party right from the beginning. And then there's a whole other dimension to it, which is that everybody has the birthmarks of the womb they emerge out of, so to speak. And that was true of China in terms of the world and of the Chinese Revolution. The new society emerged out of the old one in China, and carried the birthmarks of that, the inequalities and so on.

Breaking With, Going Beyond the Soviet Model

BA continues: But it was true in another important dimension, too, which is that the Chinese Revolution was made as part of the international communist movement, in which the Soviet Union was the model of how you made revolution and how you build socialism. Well, it's interesting – here's another contradiction: Mao broke with part of that. In order to make the revolution in China, they had to break with the Soviet model, which was the idea that you centered in the cities, based in the working class, and took power in the cities and then you spread it to the countryside.

The Chinese approach to it that Mao forged, after a lot of defeats and some serious setbacks and bloodshed and bloodbaths that they suffered trying to do it in the cities and being crushed by the forces of the central government, or Chiang Kai-shek's forces,² was to finally do it the opposite way – to say we have to come from the countryside: because it's a backward country, we can start up guerrilla war in the countryside, where most of the people live, and advance to finally taking the cities. So that was the opposite of how they did it in Russia. Now, it's true that in Russia the majority of people lived in the countryside, but it was a different kind of society than China. And they didn't really have the possibility of waging guerrilla warfare from the countryside in Russia the same way that they did in China. So right there, Mao had to break with the Soviet model and forge a new model of how you make revolution in China and in countries more generally like China.

But then, when they got to actually – OK, here we are, we're in power, now we're going to build socialism – the Soviet Union existed, it was offering them a certain amount of support and material assistance in doing it. And they didn't have any other model. And they didn't right away recognize that the model of the Soviet Union first of all had problems in it anyway, and second of all wasn't necessarily suited to the concrete conditions of China. So the emphasis the Soviet Union under Stalin put on developing heavy industry, you know, to the disadvantage of agriculture and so on, was an even bigger problem for China than it was in the Soviet Union, although it caused real problems there.³ So at a certain point, Mao once again, as he did in making the revolution in the first place, comes up against the realization, after maybe a decade or so of experience in trying to build socialism in China, that this Soviet model has a lot of problems with it. You know, its over-emphasis on heavy industry. That's not the way we're going to actually get the peasantry to be on the socialist road, by sacrificing everything just to one-sidedly develop heavy industry, and so on.

So Mao was trying to break out of this model. And that's really what the much-maligned Great Leap Forward was about.⁴ Plus the Soviets, once Mao did try to break out of this model and not be under the wing of the Soviets, turned against him, supported people in the Chinese Party who wanted, if not to overthrow him, then force him to go back under the Soviet model and Soviet domination, in effect, and [the Soviets] pulled out their assistance, their blueprints, their technical aid, and so on, right when the Chinese are trying to make a leap in their economy.

So Mao is trying to forge this road in China for socialism, just as he did before, for the road for actually getting power. Now they have power. He's trying to forge a different road for socialism. But he's up against not only the Soviet Union but a significant section of the Chinese Party. On the one hand, a lot of them really didn't break out of the – as Marx said, they really didn't get beyond the horizon of bourgeois right. They really were still thinking in terms of just – as Deng Xiaoping openly implemented after he came to power – how do we make China a powerful country, even if it means doing it with capitalism? And they weren't really thinking about how to get to communism as part of the whole world struggle. So you have that phenomenon. And then you have the phenomenon that a lot of the people, to the degree that they are trying to build socialism, are doing it with the Soviet model, and with the methods the Soviet Union used (which we talked about somewhat) as the way you go about doing this. And Mao is trying to figure out how to break out of this, and how to actually have a socialism that much more brings the masses consciously into the process. Mao criticized Stalin, for example, when, in the early '60s, he was commenting on some of Stalin's writings about socialism – he said Stalin talks too much about technique and technical things and not enough about the masses; and he talks too much about the cadre and the administrators, and the technical personnel, and not the masses and not enough about consciousness.

So in those ways, too, he was trying to fight for a different model of socialism that would really bring the masses much more consciously into the process. And then, on top of that, the educational system, the culture – all that superstructure, as we describe it – was really unchanged from the old society. A lot of people, even in the Communist Party, didn't see the problem with the traditional Chinese culture, even though it had a feudal content to it, to a very significant degree, and even though it sort of uncritically repeated or adopted things that came from these imperialist countries that had dominated China. So Mao was saying: how do we break out of this mold that's not really going to lead us to where we need to go in terms of building socialism in China?

He's up against people who are not really that much motivated by transforming the whole society, you know, in terms of getting rid of all the unequal relations and oppressive divisions, but just want to build up a powerful country. He's up against people who, to the degree they even do think about that, are thinking of it in the terms of what the Soviet Union under Stalin had done (and the Soviet Union under Khrushchev⁵ was modifying but still carrying forward some aspects of it in terms of this way to build the economy). And he's up against a whole culture and superstructure that's still reinforcing the old relations from the past. And he tries various methods.

I'm saying "Mao." It's not just him all by himself, but to a significant degree, to be honest, it was him by himself. Because not that many other people in the leadership of the Party even recognized these contradictions and saw that it was going to take them somewhere other than [where] they wanted to go, and ultimately back to a form of capitalism. So to a significant degree, although there were some few others in the leadership, mainly there weren't. It was mainly Mao who was the one who was saying: We have to break through and do something different here.

And he tried things like initiating socialist education movements, that through the channels of the Party would raise the sights of the Party members and the masses more broadly as to why they needed to build socialism in China, and what that meant, and what that had to do with transforming the economic relations of people in production, and the social relations between men and women and various other important social inequalities that needed to be overcome, and the political structures and the culture. But that only got so far, and really didn't get to the heart or the root of the

problem: that there were all these forces taking China back toward capitalism, even if in a slightly different form, a combination of copying what was done in the imperialist countries, and what had been done in the Soviet Union – which, in the conditions of China, repeating that would have led back to capitalism, as Mao was increasingly recognizing.

So all this is the backdrop – the reason I’m going into this much detail – this is the backdrop for why the Cultural Revolution was necessary. And Mao said, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution: we tried various ways to solve this problem, that we were being taken back down the road to capitalism. I mean, the Soviet system – part of Mao’s criticism was it also involved things like one-man management in the factories, instead of really bringing the workers increasingly into administrative and other, similar tasks, and into the development of technology, and the planning of technology, the planning of production. They just basically froze in place the old relations, within the framework of state ownership, and they basically reproduced the same relations in that framework. That was a big problem with the Soviet model of socialism. Mao was increasingly recognizing this. And they [the Soviets] were doing other things that are familiar in capitalist society, like motivating people with piecework and bonuses, rather than trying to motivate them ideologically to want to raise production in order to advance the revolution in China and support the revolution worldwide.

So Mao’s saying: We have to sweep away this stuff, but we’ve tried doing it through the channels of the Party, through things like socialist education movements, and they haven’t really worked, because the way the Party is structured and the way that the leadership of the Party – most of the leadership of the Party conceives of socialism just in a way that’s actually going to lead away from socialism. So if we just do it through the channels of the Party, it’s just going to end up going nowhere, or end up ironically reinforcing what we’ve already got. We need something radically different to rupture out of this – to transform what’s going on in the economy, to transform what’s going on in terms of how the actual decision-making goes on in the society, transform the culture and the thinking of the people. So this is finally – Mao said finally we found the form in the Cultural Revolution, a form through which, as he put it, the masses could expose and criticize our dark aspect, our negative side, in a mass way and from below.

The Cultural Revolution: Its Aims, Its Methods, Its Contradictions

BA continues: And that’s really what they were setting out to do with the Cultural Revolution, which is – the reason I’m going into all of this background is that Mao was trying [to deal with] a really tremendously challenging, difficult thing: to rupture them off one road, really, onto another. Even though the society was still, in an overall sense, socialist, it was very rapidly heading back to capitalism because of all the pulls I’m talking about. And Mao recognized: unless we rupture it somewhere else, the process of attrition, almost, is going to wear us down back to the capitalist road.

So all that is what he was really setting out to do, and he recognized that in doing this, you can’t rely on the same channels of the Party that are sort of sclerotic and frozen in these old ways of seeing what this is all about, with this bourgeois idea of just getting China to be a powerful country playing its own rightful role in the world – and, to the degree that anybody thinks about socialism, it’s the Soviet model, which has a lot of things in it that are actually carryovers from capitalism.

So you’re not just going to be able to go through the channels of the Party to solve this problem, Mao recognized. So we have to have some upheaval that comes, as he said, from below, and in a mass way. And that’s where the whole phenomenon of the youth – who are often the force that’s willing to criticize and challenge everything, and is not just stuck in convention. They were unleashed – you know, the Red Guards – to actually challenge this whole direction, including to challenge the Party leaders and Party structures that were the machinery for carrying things in this direction that Mao recognized would go back to capitalism, for all the combination of reasons that I’m discussing. So that’s really what they were trying to accomplish, and they were trying to make

changes in the way society was administered, to draw the masses in; changes in how, for example, health care was done so that it wasn't only for the city and only for the better-off strata, but was spread out to the countryside where the masses had never had health care. All these were issues that were bitterly fought out in the Cultural Revolution.

And the culture began to put the masses of people – but, more importantly, revolutionary content – onto the stage, instead of old feudal themes, and emperors and various upper-class figures like that as the heroes.

Mass Upheavals, Revolutionary Struggles, Excesses, and the Larger View

BA continues: So this was what they set out to do. And I think a lot of these horror stories that we hear about from the Cultural Revolution – I think that there's some reality to what people describe – there were excesses. But they [these horror stories] also reflect a very myopic view where a small, more privileged section of society raises its concerns and needs above the larger thing that was happening to the masses of people in the society as a whole. I mean, I've made this analogy. Some people complain: well, intellectuals were made to go to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution; but nobody ever asked the peasants, who made up 80 or 90 percent of the population, whether they wanted to be in the countryside. It was just assumed they would be there, producing the food and the materials for clothes and so on, while other people were in the cities, having a more privileged existence, especially if they were from these strata other than the proletariat.

So that's one side of the picture. I think that there were excesses. I mean, Mao commented on a peasant rebellion that he went to investigate in China during the 1920s, at the beginning of the revolutionary process, and he made this statement: the peasants are rising up, challenging all the old authorities and overthrowing them, and some people are saying, oh, it's terrible, it's going too far. And he said: look, we basically can either try to get to the head of this and lead it, we can stand to the side and gesticulate at it and criticize it, or we can try to stand in the way and stop it. And he also, along with that, said: if wrongs are going to be righted, there will inevitably be excesses, when the masses rise up to right wrongs, or else the wrongs cannot be righted. If you start pouring cold water and criticizing and trying to tamp things down as soon as there are any excesses, then things never get out of acceptable bounds – and if things don't get out of acceptable bounds, fundamental changes don't come about. So the same thing applied in the Cultural Revolution.

There were excesses. Mao said to Edgar Snow, when he was interviewed by him in 1971, that he was very disappointed by some of the excesses that occurred and some of the ways in which people carried out struggle in unprincipled ways. And he was very disappointed that there was factionalism that developed among the Red Guards, instead of uniting people broadly around the broad themes of the Cultural Revolution as I've tried to outline them. They got into factional disputes and began to actually war with each other. Sometimes literally with arms over which was the one that was the only revolutionary force and all the others were counter-revolutionary. So you know, while he was disappointed and even expressed his disappointment with some of this, he also recognized that the same principles were at work – that if there weren't a mass upheaval, you were not going to be able to rupture things off the road they were on, and they would very quickly go back to capitalism, for all the reasons I've been trying to point to. But if you did have a mass upsurge, you would have excesses. And then Mao tried to move to correct these excesses.

But it's not possible – first of all, this isn't like the caricature they paint, like one person sits here and stage-manages the whole thing and literally presses buttons and controls [everything]. The thing is a mass upsurge. It was a revolutionary struggle. I mean, they did overthrow the established leadership of the city of Shanghai through a million people rising up, and replaced it with a revolutionary headquarters, a revolutionary committee, which brought to the fore and incorporated a lot of the masses who'd risen up in these Red Guard groups, including not just students, but workers in the city, and peasants from the countryside around Shanghai. So it was a real revolution – and real revolutions are not neat and clean.

They did issue directives that tried to give general guidelines to the struggle – including narrowing the scope of the people that were identified as enemies to a small handful of people in the Party who, as Mao put it, were people in authority taking the capitalist road; that among the intellectuals and in academia, they should draw distinctions between a handful of bourgeois academic tyrants who were trying to lord it over people and impose the old feudal and bourgeois standards, and a larger number of intellectuals who were trained in the old society and had a lot of the outlook from that society, but were people that were friends of the revolution and should be won over, even if there were contradictions there. So Mao put out guidelines to try to deal with his understanding that there would inevitably be excesses.

But it was a massive thing of hundreds of millions of people. And a lot of people jumped into it, and some people deliberately carried it to excess in order to sabotage it. People who were at the top who wanted to deflect the struggle away from themselves and what policies and lines they represented would foment factionalism and would carry things to excess deliberately, in order to discredit it, so that then they could step in and say: see it's all gotten out of hand, we have to put a stop to it.

So this is all the complexity of that. And I have no doubt that there were people who were wrongly victimized in the Cultural Revolution. It's almost inevitable in this kind of thing. Which doesn't mean it's fine, it's OK. As I said, Mao was upset about some of these things. But, on another level, if you're going to have a mass revolution to rupture the society more fully onto the socialist road and prevent capitalism – which is what they did – and even to completely restructure and revolutionize the Party in the course of that – which they also did. They basically suspended the Party and disbanded and then reorganized it on the basis of the masses being involved in criticizing Party members, and even having mass criticism meetings where the Party would be reconstituted, as part of mass meetings where the masses would raise criticisms of the Party and evaluate Party members. This was an unprecedented thing in any society, obviously, but including in socialist society. And a lot of errors were made. So that's one dimension to it.

Questions of Art and Culture, Matters of Viewpoint and Method

BA continues: Another dimension is, I do think there were some errors of conception and methodology on the part of the people leading this – maybe Mao to some degree, but especially people like Chiang Ching and others who put a tremendous amount of effort into bringing forward these advanced model revolutionary cultural works, which were really world-class achievements in revolutionary content, but also in artistic quality: the ballets, and the Peking operas and so on. But who also I think, had certain tendencies toward rigidity and dogmatism, and who didn't understand fully the distinction between what goes into, of necessity, creating model cultural works, and what should be broader artistic expression, which might take a lot of diverse forms, and not only could not be, but should not be supervised in the same way and to the same finely-calibrated degree as was necessary in order to bring forward these completely unprecedented model cultural works.

And there needed to be more of a dialectical understanding, I think – and this is tentative thinking on my part, because I haven't investigated this fully and a lot more needs to be learned, so I want to emphasize that – but I have a tendency to think that there needed to be a better dialectical understanding of the dialectical relation between some works that were led and directed in a very finely detailed and calibrated way from the highest levels, mobilizing artists in that process, and other things where you gave a lot more expression to a lot more creativity and experimentation, and you let a lot of that go on, and then you sifted through it and saw what was coming forward that was positive, and learning from different attempts in which people were struggling to bring forward something new that would actually have a revolutionary content, or even that wouldn't but needed to nevertheless be part of the mix so that people could learn from and criticize various things and decide what it was they wanted to uphold and popularize and what they didn't. So I think there's more to be learned there.

I also think there was a third dimension to this. There was an element, even in Mao – and I've

criticized this, you know, it's controversial, but I'm criticizing something that [has been pointed to] in various things I've written or talks I've given, in particular one called *Conquer the World?*⁶ – that there was a tendency, even in Mao, toward a certain amount of nationalism. And I think this carried over into some of the ways in which intellectuals and artists who had been trained in and were influenced by or had an interest in Western culture – there was somewhat of a sectarian attitude toward some of that. You know, Mao had this slogan: we should make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China. Well, in my opinion, that – particularly the second part of that – is not exactly the right way to pose it. It's not a matter of China and foreign things, it's a matter of – whether from another country, or from China, or whatever country art comes from – what is its objective content? Is it mainly progressive or is it mainly reactionary? Is it revolutionary or counter-revolutionary? Does it help propel things in the direction of transforming society toward communism or does it help pull things back and pose obstacles to that? And I think that formulation, even the formulation of “foreign things serve China” – while it has something correct about it, in not rejecting everything foreign, let me put it that way – has an aspect of not being quite correct and being influenced by a certain amount of nationalism, rather than a fully internationalist view [with regard to] even the question of culture.

MS: *That even led to some of the bizarre thing around jazz, right?*

BA: Yeah, jazz and rock 'n' roll. They didn't understand the positive aspect of that. Of course, there's a lot of garbage in rock 'n' roll in particular. They didn't really understand what jazz was as a phenomenon in the U.S., and they just – they negated it one-sidedly. And they also one-sidedly negated rock 'n' roll, which in a lot of ways had a very positive thrust at that time, in the '60s, the late '60s in the U.S. It had a lot of rebellious spirit and even some more consciously revolutionary works of art were coming forward, even with their limitations. So I think what was bound up with that was also part of what I think got involved in the way some intellectuals in China, particularly those maybe who had more inclinations toward and interest in Western culture, got turned into enemies or got persecuted in ways they should not have.

But this is tentative thinking on my part. We need to investigate it more fully. What I was trying to do, though, was to give the backdrop for why this Cultural Revolution was necessary in the first place, and what they were trying to accomplish with it, and why that was not only legitimate, but necessary and tremendously important and why and how it brought forward all these new things. It did bring forward new revolutionary culture. It did spread health care to the countryside. It did involve masses of people who'd never been involved in science before, in scientific experimentation and investigation, and even scientific theory together with scientists, and the same kinds of transformations in education, the same kinds of transformations in the workplace, where they broke down one-man management and they actually started having administrators and managers and technicians getting involved part of the time – not on a fully equal basis, but part of the time – in productive labor, and having some of the production workers getting involved in those other spheres and having, instead of one-man management, a revolutionary committee that drew in significant representatives of the workers as well as of management or more full-time management and technical personnel and Party cadre.

So there were tremendous accomplishments, including in the sphere of art, including in the sphere of education, including in the whole intellectual sphere broadly speaking. I mean, I read articles from that time in China about physics, theoretical physics, wrestling with the nature of matter and the whole – how to understand the question of motion of matter in different forms that it could assume, not just in everyday things but on a more theoretical physics construct.

So there were a lot of tremendous things that were brought forward. This was not a time when the lights went out intellectually. However, there were shortcomings, and I do believe there were some people who were wrongly persecuted in the course of this; and that, I think, gets mixed into the equation, too.

The Role of Art, and the Artist, and Their Relation to the State

MS: *I want to roll on with this. Before I get into the question of actually pursuing more of this question of intellectual and artistic freedom and dissent as a necessity in the future society, I wanted to get into a couple of things about the role of artists in particular. You know, it's interesting because, 10 years ago, Haile Gerima – I interviewed Haile Gerima, the filmmaker who made Sankofa, Bush Mama. He's an Ethiopian filmmaker, but he's been here a long time. He's kind of been steeped, he's very schooled in revolutionary theory around the world. And he was influenced a lot by the Cultural Revolution. And one of the things he had, he advanced this idea that the role of the artist in socialist society is to constantly – I'm trying to remember how he actually put it, but it's to always be opposing the ruling apparatus. He looked at it: the Cultural Revolution went so far but not far enough because this didn't actually break out that way – that the artists, they stopped short of that.*

And then more recently I had the opportunity to interview and spend some time with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, and he has a couple of things that he advances around the nature of art and the relationship between the artist and the state in any society. And one of the things that he talks about is that there's a conservative part of the state, in that it's always trying to save itself and preserve its rule and preserve itself, and then that art actually – he says that art, on the other hand, is something that's always changing. You know, it's always that – art differs from that, in that it's always trying to grasp things in their changingness. It's based on how things are developing, how things are moving and what's essential and not always what exactly is. And so he sees these two things as being in contradiction to one another, and he says that the artist actually should always be a constant questioner of the state. The artist has a role – his view of the artist in society is that the artist has the role of asking more questions than they do of providing answers, and that's something that he feels should be enshrined in any society. And I was wondering how that would fit in with your view of socialism and the role of art and the question of artistic freedom and dissent.

BA: Well, I think from what you're describing and characterizing, briefly quoting, I think there's an aspect of truth to that, but it's one-sided, it's only one side of the picture. About 15 years ago I gave a talk called "The End of a Stage, the Beginning of a New Stage,"⁷ basically summing up, with the restoration of capitalism in China following the same unfortunate outcome as the Soviet Union, that we had come to the end of a certain stage beginning with the Paris Commune, more or less, and ending with the Chinese Revolution being reversed and capitalism being restored there. And now we had to regroup and sum up deeply the lessons, positive and negative, of that and go forward in a new set of circumstances where there were no more socialist countries temporarily. And, at the end of that [talk], one of the things that I tried to set forth was certain principles that I thought should be applied by a Party in leading a socialist society. And one of those was that it should be a Party in power and a vanguard of struggle against those parts of power that are standing in the way of the continuation of the revolution. And I actually think that's a more correct way, a more correct context, or analogy, for how to evaluate the role of art in particular in a socialist society. In other words, by analogy, I think art should not just criticize that [socialist] state, it should criticize those things in the society – including in the state, including in the Party, including in the leadership – that actually represent what's old and needs to be moved beyond. Not necessarily what is classically capitalist but what has turned from being an advance into an obstacle – because everything, including socialism, does advance through stages and by digging more deeply into the soil the old is rooted in and uprooting it more fully. So things that were advances at one point can turn into obstacles or even things that would take things back, if persisted in.

So I think art needs to criticize all those things. But I think it also needs to uphold – and even, yes, to extol and to popularize – those things that do represent the way forward, including those things about the state. The state in socialist society is not the same as the state in capitalist society. It's the state that, in its main aspects – so long as it's really a socialist society – represents the interests of the masses of people, makes it possible for them, provides the framework within which, they can

continue the revolution and be defended against enemies, both within the country and the imperialists and other forces who would attack and try to drown that new society in blood from the outside. So the state has a different character, and as long as its main aspect is doing those things – is actually representing rule by the proletariat in which the proletariat and broad masses of people are increasingly themselves consciously involved in the decision-making process and in developing policies for continuing the revolution – wherever that remains the main aspect, those things should be supported and even extolled. But even within that, even where that is the case, there will be many ways in which there will be not only mistakes made but things which have come to be obstacles, ways in which in the policies of the government, and the policies of the Party, and the actions of the state, [there are] things that actually go against the interests of the masses of people – not just in a narrow sense, but in the most fundamental sense even, in terms of advancing to communism – and that actually pose obstacles. And those things should be criticized.

And I do think there is a truth to the idea that artists tend to bring forward new things – although that's not uniformly true. Some artists – the same old thing over and over, you know, very formulaic – and especially those whose content seeks to reinforce or restore the old, it often isn't that innovative. Sometimes even that is good [artistically]; often it isn't. But I do think there is some truth that there is a character of a lot of art that it's very innovative and it tends to shake things up and come at things from new angles and pose problems in a different way or actually bring to light problems that haven't been recognized in other spheres or by people who are more directly responsible for things, or by people who are more directly involved in the politics of a society. And I think there should be a lot of freedom for the artists to do that. But I also think part of their responsibility, and part of what they should take on, is to look to those things that are – that do embody the interests of people – including the state. And they should popularize and uphold that, because there are going to be plenty of people wanting to drag down and destroy that state. But I think there's not a clear enough understanding of the fundamental distinction – even with all the contradictions involved that I've been trying to speak to – the fundamental distinction between a proletarian state, a state in socialist society, and a bourgeois state which is there for the oppression of the masses and to reinforce the conditions in which they're exploited, as the whole foundation of this society, and [which] viciously attacks any attempt to rebel against, let alone to overthrow, that whole system.

So I think there is importance to drawing a distinction – and then, once you recognize that fundamental distinction, then once again, as we say, divide the socialist state into two. What parts of it are power that embodies and represents the interests of the masses in making revolution and continuing toward communism, and what parts have grown old or stand in the way of that continuation? Extol the one, popularize the one; and criticize and mobilize people, encourage people to struggle against the other.

Revolution, Leadership, State Power, the Goal of Communism, and the Importance of Dissent and Ferment – Solid Core and Elasticity

MS: *One of the things that sets you against a lot of the past experience of socialist societies, of Marxist thinkers and whatnot, is the point about not just allowing dissent, not just allowing this kind of breadth of exploration among people who work with ideas and among artists and whatnot, but actually talking about the necessity of that to exist. Why do you think that that's necessary and not just something to be tolerated?*

BA: Well, I'm currently wrestling with the question of how you can have that within the Party, and the relation between having that inside the Party and in the society at large, and how you do that without losing the essential core of what you need to hold onto in order to actually have state power when you get it, and in order to actually go on toward communism, rather than getting dragged back into capitalism. So that, to me – that's something I'm grappling with a lot. It's a very difficult contradiction.

But to go directly to your question: I think the reason you need it is because if people are going to be fully emancipated – you know, Marx said that the communist revolution involves a transition to what we Maoists have come to call, by shorthand, the “4 Alls.” He said: it’s the transition to the abolition of all class distinctions (or I think literally he said, “class distinctions generally,” but it’s the same thing) and to the abolition of all the relations of production, all the economic relations on which those class distinctions rest; the transformation or abolition of all the old social relations that correspond to those production relations – like oppressive relations between men and women, for example – and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations. So if you look at those “4 Alls,” as we call them, and the objective is to get to those “4 Alls,” then that can only be done by masses of people in growing numbers consciously undertaking the task of knowing and changing the world as it actually is, as it’s actually moving and developing and as it actually can be transformed in their interests. So if that’s the way you understand what you’re after and how fundamentally that’s going to be brought about – and not by a few people gathering everybody in formation and marching them in a straight road forward in very tight ranks – then you understand that a lot is going to go into that process. The socialism that I envision, and even in a certain way the Party that I envision, is one that’s full of a lot of turmoil, one that would give the leaders of it a tremendous headache, because you would have all kinds of stuff flying in all kinds of directions while you’re trying to hold the core of all that together and not give up everything.

I had a discussion with a spoken-word artist and poet, and I was trying to describe these things I’m characterizing here – what I’m grappling with as it applies to the arts and lots of other things – and he finally said to me, and I thought it was a very good insight: he said, it sounds to me like what you’re talking about is a solid core with a lot of elasticity. I said yeah, well, that’s very good – because he put together in one formulation a lot of what I was wrestling with.

But it is – how do you keep that solid core so you don’t lose the revolution? Let me be blunt. You need a vanguard, you need a Party to lead a revolution and to be at the core of a new society. When we get there, we’re not going to hand power back and we’re not going to put power up for grabs or even up for election. We’re not going to have elections to decide whether we should go back to the old society. In my view that should be institutionalized in a constitution. In other words, the constitution will establish: this is a socialist society going toward communism. Will establish what the role of the Party is in relation to that, and will establish what the rights of the masses of people [are] and what the role of the masses of people is in fundamentally carrying that out – including, as I see it, having some elections on local levels and some aspects of elections from local levels to a national level, which are contested elections within that framework of going forward through socialism to communism and having spelled out, in some fundamental terms (not in every detail), what that basically means and doesn’t mean, in a constitution, in laws, that the masses of people increasingly themselves are formulating and deciding on.⁸

But we’re not going to just say: “OK, we’ll have socialism and then we’ll give it back to them [the capitalists] and see if the people want it [socialism] again. If you do that, you might as well not bother to make a revolution. Because think about everything we were talking about earlier, and everything you have to go up against – if you’re going to have an attitude like that, you don’t have any business putting yourself forward to lead anything, because you’re not serious. To make a revolution is a wrenching process, and to continue on the road forward toward communism and to support the world revolution in the face of everything that will get thrown at you is going to be an extremely arduous and wrenching process, and you have to have a core of people who understands that, even as that core is constantly being expanded. I’ve set forth – when I say “set forth,” I don’t mean to make it sound like a proclamation, this is what I’m thinking about, this is what I’m wrestling with – that there’s four things that this core has to accomplish, four objectives. You have to maintain power, at the same time as you make that worth maintaining. And the four objectives I’m talking about are:

One, that core has to hang on to power and lead the masses of people to not be dragged back to the

old society – not hang on all by itself, but it has to be determined to hang on to power and mobilize the forces in society that could be won at any given time to seeing that you have to hang on to power and hang on to the revolutionary direction forward.

Two, it has to be constantly expanding the ranks of that core, so you're not just talking about the same relative few – even if you're talking about hundreds of thousands or millions, the same relatively small section of the population relative to say a country like this. But is it constantly expanding, constantly in waves drawing in broader ranks to be part of that core of this process?

Three, that it is guided constantly by the objective of eventually moving to where you don't need that core anymore, because the distinctions that make it necessary have been overcome.

And four, that at every point along the way there's the maximum elasticity that you can have without destroying that core.

So this is what I am wrestling with in terms of this process. And to me this the furthest thing from everybody marching forward in tight formation, although there are times when you have to do that – when you're directly under military attack, you have to tighten your ranks up. But, in general, I see it as a very wild and woolly process, if you will, where people are going in different directions and the responsibility of the leadership, of this leading core, is to try, as I put it before, to get your arms around all that – in the sense of an embrace, not in the sense of squeezing it and suffocating it – keeping it going toward where it needs to go and drawing more and more people into the process of doing that.

So seen in that way, this is a very tumultuous thing. And I think there's even a way in which the Party has to be like that. That this principle of “solid core with a lot of elasticity” has to apply even within the Party, because I've been wrestling with the question: can you really have ferment, intellectual ferment, artistic creativity and ferment and experimentation in a society, in a socialist society at large, if you don't have it within the Party that's at the core of it? I don't think you can. If the Party doesn't have that, then it's gonna suffocate it in the society. It's going to be too much uniformity coming from the Party, which has a lot of influence, and so it's going to tend to stifle and suppress that [creativity and ferment]. So how do you have a solid core and elasticity even within the Party in general, over policy but also as applied to the arts and to the intellectual sphere in the broadest sense, and so on? And, to draw an analogy from physics here, even a solid core – you know, everything is contradiction and whatever level you go to it's contradiction – so a solid core is solid in one sense, but within it, it also has elasticity. Because if everything is packed together too tightly in your core, so to speak – to continue to torture this metaphor – but if it's all packed together too tightly in the core, then you don't have any life in there, so you can't have the elasticity.

So I see this as a very moving, tumultuous thing. On the one hand, we're not giving power back and we're not putting that up even for a vote – and, on the other hand, we're also not all marching everybody straight down the road, but we're having all kinds of tumultuous struggle, including within that people who want to go back to capitalism throwing their ideas into the ring. While we supervise the overthrown exploiters and curtail their political activity, and while people who have been demonstrated – through legal processes shown – to be active counter-revolutionaries, in the sense of their actually taking up concrete acts of sabotage, or what we would now call “terrorism,” against the new society (blowing up things, assassinating people, or actively, not in some vague sense, but actively plotting to do that), that's one thing. I think you need a constitution, laws and procedures to deal with those people. But beyond that, in the realm of ideas, even people who argue that capitalism is better than socialism – those ideas need to be in circulation, and people who want to defend those ideas have to be able to do so, so that the masses of people can sort this out.

And we have to defeat them in the realm of ideas as well as in practice. Right now, we do that all the time. Our attitude now is somebody wants to defend capitalism – bring on all comers, let's have a debate. We can't get these [bleep] to debate us! That's what's frustrating to us. So my attitude is:

yes, things are changed [once you get to socialist society]; there is a new set of circumstances; we are going to be at the core of leading the masses of people. That's our responsibility. But we shouldn't be any less anxious to have those debates and to thrash those things out, and to get many more people in them. Why should we fear that then in a way that we don't now? We welcome it now, so why shouldn't we welcome it [then]?

I will tell you that, as I envision this, it gives me a headache because I can see how hard it would be to keep all this going in the forward direction it needs to go. But if you aren't willing to risk that, then I don't think we can get where we need to go.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Korean War began June 25, 1950 and ended July 27, 1953. General Douglas MacArthur led the United Nations Command in the Korean War from 1950 to 1951. U.S. President Harry S. Truman removed him from command in April 1951.
2. Chiang Kai-shek was a U.S.-backed general who led the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) against the communist revolutionary forces beginning in approximately 1927. The war for liberation went through different and often complex stages, and finally ended in victory on October 1, 1949.
3. See "On Communism, Leadership, Stalin, and the Experience of Socialist Society," an excerpt from an interview Michael Slate conducted with Bob Avakian in 2005. The excerpt was published in *Revolution* #168, June 21, 2009, revcom.us/avakian/on_communism-en.html.
4. See "We ARE Setting the Record Straight... on China's Great Leap Forward (1958-1960)," at Set the Record Straight, thisiscommunism.org.
5. Nikita Khrushchev was head of state in the Soviet Union from 1956, when capitalism was restored, until 1964.
6. *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will* is a talk Bob Avakian gave in 1981. It was published in *Revolution* magazine #50. See revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld/index.html.
7. Bob Avakian's "The End of a Stage – The Beginning of a New Stage" was published in *Revolution* magazine, Fall 1990. It is online at bobavakian.net/articles/end_beginning.pdf.
8. In this connection, see *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)* from the Revolutionary Communist Party, RCP Publications, 2010. See revcom.us/socialistconstitution/index.html.

Vilifying Communism and Accommodating Imperialism

The Sham and Shame of Slavoj Žižek's "Honest Pessimism"

by Raymond Lotta

(This polemic was originally published in Revolution newspaper no. 256 January 15, 2012.)

The December 2011-January 2012 issue of *The Platypus Review* features an interview with philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek.¹ It is a fusillade of distortion of the historical experience of revolution and socialism in the 20th century, accompanied by an egregiously uninformed and unprincipled attack on Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism.

Žižek's musings about communism are dressed up as new and nuanced thinking, but on display is a rather old and clunky anti-communism of a piece with the dominant bourgeois narrative of communism as "failure" and "horror." Žižek portrays himself as "anti-capitalist," but on parade are apologetics for capitalist-imperialism.

This is the fruit of what Slavoj Žižek calls his "honest pessimism."

In what follows, I respond to Žižek's central claims and misrepresentations. But at the outset I call on Slavoj Žižek to take part in a public debate with me about the nature of imperialism, and the history and prospects of the communist project.

I. Real Stakes, Real Alternatives, and Real Responsibilities

The world is a horror. An environmental emergency threatens the very ecosystems of the planet; neocolonial wars waged by Western imperialism produce death, destruction, and dislocation; malnutrition and hunger stalk one billion human beings; women, half of humanity, are objectified, shrouded, trafficked, and degraded. The development of technology and the accumulation of human knowledge have brought human society to a threshold in which it is now possible to put an end to this and provide for a decent material and rich cultural life for all of humanity – and yet the profit-above-all system of world capitalism constrains and chokes this potential.

Growing numbers of people, from Egypt to the Occupy movements, are resisting and questioning the existing social order. People are raising their heads and searching for solutions and alternatives.

The responsibility of revolutionaries and all radical thinkers in relation to these movements is, most definitely, to unite with and work to build them in their overwhelmingly positive thrust. But it is also crucial to engage the obstacles and contradictions that these movements and struggles face – and work to provide direction to divert things onto a more fully and consciously revolutionary path. At the same time, there is pressing need to demarcate between genuinely radical and revolutionary discourse and politics – and that which would consign us to the world as it is.²

There is a way out of the suffering and madness of this world. It is revolution, communist revolution. The first attempts in modern history to create societies free of exploitation and oppression – the Soviet revolution of 1917-56 and the Chinese revolution of 1949-76 – were led by visionary vanguard parties and instantiated new liberating economies and governing institutions, new social relations based on cooperation and overcoming inequality, and tackled old ways of thinking – all against incredible ideological and material obstacles.

These revolutions represent historic watersheds for oppressed humanity. Their accomplishments were both unprecedented and monumental. At the same time, there were problems and shortcomings in conception, method, and practice – some quite serious, some even grievous. How should all this be evaluated? This first wave of communist revolution was eventually defeated and capitalism restored. What were the underlying causes and factors?

Bob Avakian has produced a body of work that in summing up the overwhelmingly positive but also

negative lessons of this first wave of revolution, while also drawing from diverse spheres of human experience and endeavor, opens new pathways to go further and do better in a new stage of communist revolution. This is a new synthesis of communism. A radically transformative communism...that is unflinching in its determination to lead millions to take power through determined revolutionary struggle once the conditions emerge to do so...and that aims at nothing less than using that power to emancipate humanity and achieve a world where human beings can truly flourish.

There is a monumental challenge, but a real basis, to fight for and to bring into being such a world. The stakes are real, as are the intellectual responsibilities. Professor Žižek shrinks from this challenge. What we get instead is his ill-founded and misdirected dabbling in analysis unmoored from the struggle to radically transform reality, a studied stance of "let's not take ourselves too seriously," and, ultimately, conciliation with this world with all its misery.

II. Refusing to Engage While Irresponsibly Attacking Bob Avakian's New Synthesis of Communism

Early in the *Platypus* interview, Žižek comments on Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism: "there is no theoretical substance: it doesn't do the work."³ Do the work? There is not a shred of theoretical engagement from Žižek in this interview with critical elements of the new synthesis, with:

- Issues of philosophy. In works such as *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* and *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Avakian has further ruptured with some teleological and semi-religious notions that have been carried into communism, along with some pragmatist and empiricist tendencies, and has put communism on a more scientific foundation.
- What it means to be an internationalist in the world in which we live today. In works as early as *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will* (1981), Avakian has explored how the overall global dynamics of the imperialist system set the terms for what goes in each individual country. He has developed orientation for how revolutionaries have to approach everything, including making revolution in the countries in which they live, from the standpoint of the world revolution first, and how – and why – the leaders of the first stage of communist revolution strayed from and even at some junctures acted counter to this understanding and orientation.
- Vital new understanding of the nature of socialism as a transitional society and with what is needed to go from the deeply rooted inequalities and disparities of the world today to a communist society and world without classes and class distinctions, without the oppressive institutions that enforce them, and without the ideas that flow from and reinforce those divisions. While deeply learning from Mao, Avakian has recognized and emphasized the need for a greater role for dissent, a greater fostering of intellectual ferment, and more scope for initiative and creativity in the arts in socialist society. He has criticized a one-sided view in the communist movement toward intellectuals – toward seeing them only as a *problem*. This bears profoundly on the search for the truth, on the transformative character of the communist project, and overcoming the ages-old divide between intellectual and manual labor.

How the new synthesis re-envisioned socialism as a vibrant period of transition is elaborated in such works by Avakian as "The End of a Stage – the Beginning of a New Stage," *Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition to Communism* and "Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom."

- Revolutionary strategy and the need for communist movements to resist the pull to become just another part of the political scenery of bourgeois society, instead of working to make

revolution. *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity* is a critical work in this regard. The RCP has developed a strategy that speaks to the real problems and difficulties of making revolution in an imperialist country like the U.S. This includes the existence of a large middle class in the U.S.; overcoming deep divisions, racial and sexual, among different sections of the people; bridging gaps and effecting positive synergy between intellectuals and those on the bottom of society; and the challenge of hastening the development of a revolutionary situation at a time when there is no revolutionary crisis while preparing people to seize the opening when it does occur.

- Fitting the masses to change the world and themselves. Avakian has stressed that communist revolution must be carried out with the orientation that the masses must be the driving force but as "emancipators of humanity." This is not a revolution about revenge or changes in position in a "last shall be first, and the first shall become last" framework – this revolution is about transforming the entire world, so there will no longer be a division of society into "first" and "last."

What does Slavoj Žižek have to say about these elements of the new synthesis? Nothing.

Žižek charges that Avakian and the RCP "always have the answers: no questions, only answers."⁴ In other words, he would have readers believe, there is no grappling with difficult and vexing contradictions on the part of the RCP – only self-knowing certitudes. He brands us as "perverts," claiming that we seek to impose on others what their desires are or should be.

This, it must be said, is an astounding "perversion" of truth. An entire section of Bob Avakian's *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon* speaks precisely to this contradiction, particularly as it is posed in socialist society between the fundamental interests and needs of the masses of people, on the one hand, and what some of the people may want at any given time, on the other – and the challenges involved in handling this contradiction, with its many complexities, in a way that continues the advance toward communism while at the same time fundamentally relying on the masses of people to consciously carry forward this struggle.

Indeed, the whole of the above-cited work, along with *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, are rich examinations by Avakian of many of the key contradictions and complexities involved in making revolution – and doing so in any particular country as part of the overall struggle toward the ultimate goal of communism worldwide.

Žižek also accuses Bob Avakian and the RCP of simply talking about taking power and then dealing with the problems, and not addressing how all this will come about and "what it will mean in regard to the masses." This is yet another hollow charge. In addition to the works I've already mentioned, the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)* and the RCP's statement "On the Strategy for Revolution" are highly relevant in speaking to these issues.

From Žižek there is neither substantive engagement with nor principled criticism of the new synthesis – just cheap distortions of Avakian's work and the line of the RCP. But Professor Žižek, have another go at it, let's debate communism and the new synthesis in a public forum.

III. Rabid Anti-communism Masquerading as New Thinking

In the *Platypus* interview Žižek tells us that "the lessons [of the 20th century] are only negative." He speaks of socialism in the Soviet Union and the Stalin period as "brutal direct domination."⁵ In his introduction to a Verso edition of several of Mao's essays on philosophy, Žižek charges Mao with "reducing people to a disposable means."⁶ In his October talk at Occupy Wall Street, Žižek obsesses that "communism failed absolutely."⁷

It is hard to discern what is more at work here: willful disregard for historical accuracy, or anti-communist pandering to the powers that be. In any case, Žižek's declarations are wrong and cause great harm. To get at the truth of the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions, I would commend to readers writings by Avakian, some of my research and speeches, the Set the Record Straight website, and the polemic "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation': A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World." But a few points of specific response are in order:

Go to thisiscommunism.org, the website of Set the Record Straight, whose mission is "to factually refute the lies spread in the media, mass-market books, and mainstream scholarship about the Soviet and Chinese revolutions – upholding the overwhelming achievements and pointing to problems and shortcomings."

- "Only negative"? The Soviet and Chinese revolutions achieved amazing things in liberating women, overcoming national inequalities, moving with decisive resolve to address the material needs of the people, seeking to forge new values and culture. The Cultural Revolution in China of 1966-76 effected unprecedented transformations in education, in industrial-management practices, in healthcare, in grass-roots governance, and in the arts. In no society in the world has there been such conscious political struggle and transformation.
- Žižek's screed against Stalin and what he labels "Stalinism" is stunning for the absence of materialist analysis. No sense of unrelenting encirclement and threat, or the effect of persisting social divisions and other remnants of the old society, and the continuation of classes and class struggle within the conditions of the new Soviet state. Nor the real and decisive questions and struggles of line and program: the policies and road that Stalin represented and fought for, and the lines and policies that others in leadership stood and struggled for – and the consequences of this for the direction of society. Instead we get Stalin the despot.
- Žižek pronounces the Great Leap Forward in China of 1958-60 to be a "mega-tragedy."⁸ Never mind what the Great Leap Forward was actually about *and* actually accomplished in terms of collectivizing agriculture, overcoming urban-rural inequalities and technological-cultural gaps, developing a more decentralized system of economic planning, challenging feudal and family tradition, and, yes, contributing to solving China's historic food problem. Žižek would have the unwary reader believe that this so-called "mega-tragedy" (he's referring to famine deaths that Mao supposedly perpetrated) is "demonstrated" by "archives being opened." Nonsense! What is widely circulating in the name of "archival research" is organized vilification of Mao and sensationalistic history by body count based on all manner of spurious extrapolation and flat-out lies.

For Slavoj Žižek, a defining component of "new" and "innovative" radical theorizing is repudiation and slander of the historical experience of communist revolution.

IV. Žižek's Anti Anti-Imperialism

Žižek proposes to "rethink the critique of political economy" in light of today's global capitalism. Where does *his* "rethinking" lead him? Let's consider some of his findings:

- "The biggest result of the Bush presidency is that the U.S. is becoming merely a local superpower."⁹ Am I hearing this right? Sadly, yes. Now it would be one thing to "credit" George W. Bush with leading U.S. imperialism into serious difficulties, but to claim that the U.S. is no longer a true hegemonic power, and is reduced to being merely a local superpower, not only flies in the face of reality but actually disorients and disarms people in fully recognizing, and opposing, the reality of what U.S. imperialism does in the world. And I would be eager not only to debate Žižek's assessment of U.S. imperialism but also his excuses for Nelson Mandela's conciliation with imperialism and objective betrayal of the

masses of South Africa, as well as prettification of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in the name of supposed opposition to Islamic fundamentalism.¹⁰

- In the same *Platypus* interview Žižek makes the claim that "in today's global capitalism...there is no longer the metropolis screwing the Third World countries."¹¹ The global network of sweatshop labor, export processing zones, and child labor in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that are integral and critical to the profitability of Western capital – somehow this has disappeared or lost its significance in the political economy of Slavoj Žižek. The minerals and raw materials often mined in slave-like conditions in vast regions of the Third World, international property rights that keep medicines out of reach of the world's impoverished, Western agribusiness that destroys peasant agriculture – these apparently are artifacts of a receding neocolonialism. For Žižek, the great, oppressive, and enforced divide between imperialism and the oppressed nations is no longer one of the most profound contradictions marking the world.
- Žižek cannot let go of bourgeois democracy. He offers this paean to leaders of the bourgeois revolution: "radical bourgeois freedom fighters were well aware that freedom comes only insofar as it is truly social freedom."¹² He tells Charlie Rose that he is not "blindly anti-capitalist" and appreciates the fact that "so many people lived such relatively free lives and safe lives, in relative welfare as...in Western Europe in the last fifty to sixty years."¹³ There you have it: while communism "absolutely failed," imperialism is a partial success. Žižek can only be bedazzled by consciously blinding himself to the reality that bourgeois freedoms and social welfare stand on a platform of super-exploitation, wars of aggression and conquest, and a system of neocolonial rule that includes the propping up of viciously repressive client regimes the likes of Saudi Arabia.

I would encourage people to contrast Žižek's social-chauvinistic views on imperialism and democracy, views by the way that are consistent for their lack of any scientific understanding of the relationship of the superstructure to the material base of society and the world system, with such works by Bob Avakian as *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy* and, once again, *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*.

V. Conclusion: A Reckoning and a Call for Sharp and Honest Debate

Slavoj Žižek wrongly and unscientifically negates the whole experience of communist revolution. He agonizes over "no easy solutions" and "honest pessimism" but can comfortably align himself with imperialism. It is political and moral capitulation writ large. It has everything to do with why Slavoj Žižek does not acknowledge – and quite possibly does not, and cannot, recognize – what is in fact new and of decisive importance in the new synthesis of communism brought forward by Bob Avakian. In a world that cries out urgently for radical change, this new synthesis is both viable and vital for carrying forward the struggle for the emancipation of humanity.

Once again, and in closing, I challenge Slavoj Žižek to publicly debate these questions.

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

We call on readers of *Demarcations* to help make this debate a reality by circulating this polemic far and wide, and contributing their voice to the public call for such a debate.

NOTES

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- 1 "The Occupy movement, a renascent Left, and Marxism today: An interview with Slavoj Žižek," The Platypus Review (42) December 2011-January 2012.
- 2 It is worth noting that in his discussion of the upsurge in Egypt, Žižek contents himself with tailing this movement, even making a principle out of some of its weaknesses and narrow aspects, including (so far at least) the neglect, or negation, to too far a degree of the Palestinian question. See Žižek interview, p. 4.
- 3 Žižek interview, p. 2.
- 4 Ibid., p. 2.
- 5 Ibid., p. 5.
- 6 Slavoj Žižek Presents Mao: On Practice and Contradiction (New York and London: Verso Books, 2007), p. 10.
- 7 "Slavoj Žižek at OWS Part 2," October 9, 2011.
- 8 Žižek interview, p. 2.
- 9 Ibid., p. 3.
- 10 In the Platypus interview, p. 4, in his commentary on anti-Iraqi war protests, Žižek faults the U.S. left for not working with the Iraqi left, particularly the Iraqi Communist Party. This utterly revisionist party took part in the elections for the first post-invasion government – elections that were carried out under the auspices and in the service of U.S. occupation. Žižek notes the participation of the Iraqi Communist Party and goes on to say: "The standard narrative was that the Iraqi people should liberate themselves, without the U.S. occupation. But they had the same problem, and got into a deadlock. With attacks on the Green Zone: which side should you take, there? I was not ready to do what some did, to claim that, since they opposed the American occupation, they should side with the resistance. I don't think these radical Islamists should ever be supported." \ Under the mantle of not giving quarter to Islamic fundamentalism, Žižek is effectively legitimizing the U.S. invasion and occupation. Contrast this social-chauvinist position with the orientation of the RCP, USA, which is based on the internationalist stand and analysis of Avakian. This analysis a) points to the existence of "two outmodeds": imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism; b) identifies both as being reactionary; c) calls for bringing forward a genuine revolutionary movement in opposition to both; while d) making it crystal clear that, of these "two outmodeds," it is imperialism, and above all U.S. imperialism, that does greater harm to, and constitutes a far greater obstacle to the emancipation of, the masses of people in the world. See Bob Avakian, "Bringing Forward Another Way."
- 11 Ibid., p. 4. By contrast, see my discussion of the persistence of the savage contradiction between the imperialist metropolises and the Third World in Part 1 of the series "Shifts and Faultlines in the World Economy and Great Power Rivalry."
- 12 Ibid., p. 4.
- 13 "Charlie Rose with Slavoj Žižek," October 26, 2011.

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

The same degree of attraction to and spontaneity toward socialism that characterized that period is not part of the

i It is also true that the generally correct analysis put forward by Mao was marred by an understanding associated with Lin Piao 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, 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).

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 “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 “blinders”, 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 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

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.

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 Shaochi 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” in 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

- 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>

Dear editors,

I'm writing to make two points about the *Demarcations* article on Alain Badiou – one critical point, one a suggestion for future articles.

Overall, I agreed with the article. More than agreed, I thought it was timely, correct, and I was blown away by the scope and depth of analysis of Badiou's political project. But I thought the tone was a bit unbalanced. Badiou is a philosopher of world stature who has stubbornly – and even courageously – defended the Cultural Revolution. He's done this at a time when those who defend the Cultural Revolution are treated with the same scorn and contempt that is heaped (deservedly) on Holocaust deniers. And I believe he has played a significant role in opening up a space (at least in Western academic circles) for discussion of the Cultural Revolution and the nature of revolutionary communism. This should have been acknowledged and given some weight.

It is true, as the article shows in detail, that his defense of the Cultural Revolution distorts the aims, methods and theory of Mao and the revolutionaries grouped around him, who fought and in many cases died to defend socialism in China and to find a way to move it forward towards the goal of world-wide communism. It is also true that Badiou's "idea of communism" is no communism at all, but rather a return to the bourgeois democratic ideals of the 18th century – ideas that were radical in their time, but whose time has long since passed. This "looking backwards" is part of a widespread trend that has followed upon the defeat of the first wave of communist revolution, and Badiou's role in not only spearheading this trend but cloaking its reactionary nature by trying to give it the name "communism" deserved every line of the critique it was subjected to in your article. But I believe the critique would have been better received if it had come with a more balanced view of Badiou's impact on the current political climate.

My second point is that I would like to see more about Badiou's use of set theory in future articles in *Demarcations*. I think it was correct to avoid this in the first *Demarcations* article, not only because the article was already approaching book length, but because to add a discussion on set theory would have confused the nature of the article. Badiou's political project is clear – and in my view clearly wrong – and it deserved to be treated on its own. A discussion of Badiou's use of set theory would be on the cutting edge of contemporary philosophy. Of its nature it would be speculative and more prone to error – but also, because of this, it could be very productive in the struggle to get an ever deeper understanding of materialism and dialectics.

Badiou's use of set theory is closely tied to his understanding of the main struggle of the Cultural Revolution in the area of philosophy: the struggle between the reactionary line of "two combines into one" and the revolutionary line of "one divides into two". The thesis that he derives from this, that "the one is not", which is the starting point for his use of set theory, is also tied in with the struggle to separate out the idealism and teleology of Hegel's philosophical system from its revolutionary dialectical kernel, a process begun by Marx and Engels, but continuing on through Lenin, Mao, Avakian, and in the academic arena, through Badiou's philosophical mentor, Louis Althusser. I think it would be exciting to see a series of articles dealing with this from a revolutionary communist perspective. My own opinion is that Badiou's use of set theory is interesting and even exciting, but ultimately disappointing. I would welcome a chance to explain why.

A reader

A Response from the Editors

Thank you for your letter and thoughtful comments.

We welcome – and would consider for publication – a commentary or review on Badiou’s philosophy that touches on the themes you mention. Philosophy has been an integral aspect of communist theory and science since their inception, and profoundly intertwined with junctures and developments – both advances and retreats – in the ideological and political sphere. Our inaugural issue featured a major article called "Crises in Physics," Crises in Philosophy and Politics by Bob Avakian.

In what follows, we address your “critical point” that the polemic against the political philosophy of Alain Badiou that appeared in the inaugural issue of *Demarcations*, Alain Badiou's "Politics of Emancipation": A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World by Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A. lacks “a more balanced view of Badiou’s impact on the current political climate.”

Many have raised similar questions and doubts, and we want to take this opportunity of your letter to address this issue. As stated in the polemic, Badiou is popularly perceived – especially in progressive and radical circles – as a radical and courageous thinker putting forth and nurturing tender shoots of communism in a hostile, sometimes virulently, anti-communist world. So why this polemic – isn’t Alain Badiou helping revolutionary communism – even if indirectly?

The answer is no, and we say this for three interrelated reasons.

First, as you recognize, Badiou defends and upholds NOT the Cultural Revolution as it was, but as he reads, recasts, and redefines it. Badiou sees the Cultural Revolution as a mass democratic upsurge that Mao initially directed against the leading position of the communist party in the revolutionary state. You speak correctly of Badiou’s distortion of Mao’s “aims, methods and theory.” This stems from and is consistent with a framework which rejects – as oppressive – what Badiou and others term the “party-state”: proletarian revolutionary state power as a transition to communism, with the institutionalized leading role of the party through the whole process.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) sought to prevent capitalist restoration and to advance revolutionary China on the socialist road – as a means of and with the conscious goal of transforming the party, the masses, and all aspects of society (economy, culture, social relations, world outlook, education, etc.) in the process. But through Badiou’s prism, the GPCR is reduced, distorted, and redefined as a popular movement – not against those high-ranking elements of state and party that sought to take China down the capitalist road – but against the "party-state" itself, that is, against the leading role of the vanguard party in socialist society. In this re-telling, Mao ultimately thwarted the mass movement, and the Cultural Revolution came to defeat when the institutions of party-state asserted their dominance.

At a time when anti-communism is concentrated in the verdict that the “party-state” has been – and is – an oppressive bureaucratic-authoritarian power over the masses, rather than one of

emancipation, Badiou merely reinforces this verdict. This is both fundamentally untrue and very harmful, because, as shown in the polemic against Badiou, without the “party-state”, there is no emancipating humanity.

Second, and very related, Alain Badiou is NOT “opening up space” for “discussion of the Cultural Revolution and the nature of revolutionary communism.” Rather, he is contributing to further locking in place a discourse – with its content, methodology, limits, and constraints - that essentially writes off as “no good,” the whole rich revolutionary and emancipatory history in the first wave of communist revolutions that took place in the Soviet Union and China.

At a time when rampant and gross distortions of the Cultural Revolution, and the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions overall, are the order of the day, what is greatly needed is going “against the tide” and struggling for the real truth about these experiences – with its genuine achievements and shortcomings. What is not needed is giving further impetus and rationale to the common-sense verdict and conventional-wisdom that these were, in Badiou’s words, “bureaucratic”, “authoritarian” and defined by “police coercion.” As noted in the polemic, Badiou completely elides what was most defining of these experiences: the establishment of a non-exploitative socialist economy that meets the basic needs of the people, and the radical and unprecedented liberating transformations wrought by these revolutions in the realm of politics, culture and social relations.

One feature of the anticommunist ideological barrage of the last few decades has been “a ganging up on communism by some intellectuals who should know better, and some of whom once did know better,” as Bob Avakian has recently commented. (1)

This is the context in which Alain Badiou has advanced his “politics of emancipation,” consistent with and reinforcing dominant anti-communist prejudices, and doing so under the moniker of communism. Most significantly, Badiou has “un-burdened” himself of the first wave of communist revolutions in the Soviet Union and China. Coming from someone who has a reputation as “a critic” of this system and who seemingly defends aspects of communist history and theory, it is *disorienting, confusing, and harmful*.

Is the door being opened to exploring revolutionary communism and the instrumentalities, the vanguard party and proletarian state, most needed for the emancipation of humanity? No. In fact, people are being led down a dead-end, minds are fundamentally unchanged...leaving the world “as is.”

Badiou’s unscientific summation of the GPCR, a summation shot through with anticommunism, is not the “opposition” we need to the more mainstream anti-communist narratives. Indeed, it is a false dichotomy to posit that these are the only poles out there. In fact, Badiou’s theses on the Cultural Revolution stand in stark contrast and opposition to a thoroughly scientific analysis of what the GPCR represented – and how humanity can go further and do better – as concentrated in the work of Bob Avakian. (By the way, this issue of the journal features an interview with Bob Avakian on the GCPR.)

Creating space for genuine revolutionary communism (including and especially in Western academic circles), requires challenging the dominant discursive framework of what this first wave of communist revolutions and socialist societies embodied. Creating space requires

breaking through the discursive limits that rule out discussion of communism as a project of human emancipation. It requires putting forth the truth and seizing every opportunity to wage epistemological, ideological and political struggle on these questions, wielding the most advanced concentration of communist science and theory, Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism.

Third, it is very hard – if not impossible - to open a space for discussion of genuine revolutionary communism, on the basis of having explicitly and firmly rejected the fundamentals, from Marx onwards – as Badiou has done. Instead as you correctly point out, he looks backwards “to the bourgeois democratic ideals of the 18th century.” How does a new generation of young people discover revolutionary communism when he tells them “the age of revolution is over” and that the conquest of state power is neither desirable nor feasible.

Further, Alain Badiou has lent his name to and helped sponsor high-profile conferences across continents that further advance this (his) “Idea of Communism” that has nothing to do with revolutionary communism. These conferences are not only vehicles for promoting unscientific and anti-communist views. They have also excluded the genuine revolutionary communist viewpoint: there has been no formal and invited participation or representation of Bob Avakian's new synthesis.

Now having said all of this, it is also important to affirm that diverse channels of intellectual activity can indeed help open space for a genuinely liberatory, communist discourse.

For instance, there are some scholars in Soviet and Chinese studies doing valuable historical research about the achievements of and contradictions faced by the Soviet and Chinese revolutions in waging struggle against patriarchy. This work can contribute to a more favorable atmosphere for people to “rediscover” historical truth and deepen historical understanding of what communism actually represents. But to maximize the positive effect requires that the pole of revolutionary communism be exerting far greater influence. There are also some progressive scholars in various fields who, recognizing the importance of genuine communism being in dialogue and debate with diverse currents of thought, have made efforts to facilitate exchange. And, pivotally, as increasing numbers of radical thinkers feel moved and compelled to engage with and respond to Avakian's new synthesis, the terms of intellectual-political debate over what is possible and what is desirable in today's world will change. All of this will be interacting with and influenced by shifts, dislocations, and struggles in society and the world, like Egypt and Occupy.

But this is quite different from “the Badiou effect.” He is “opening” people's eyes to a highly-worked out and refined position of opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the leading role of a vanguard party...in the guise of “carrying the torch” of Maoism.

Finally, a word on polemics. Polemics matter because ideas matter. In this regard, a statement attributed to Zhang Chunqiao, one of the great revolutionary leaders of the Cultural Revolution and one of the so-called “gang of four,” is highly relevant: “Theory is the dynamic factor in ideology.” People learn theory not only by directly studying the science of communism, but also by observing and engaging in the contention between different lines and worked out ideas. It is through this fierce contestation that people deepen their understanding and grasp of theory,

heighten their ability to compare and contrast opposed lines, and learn better how to demarcate what is correct from what is wrong, what will lead to emancipation from what will not.

- 1 An interview with Bob Avakian, "What Humanity Needs, Revolution and the New synthesis of Communism," *Revolution*, 267, May 1, 2012.