

Editors Note

On The Occasion of Publication of *Communism Or Nationalism?*, a polemic from the *Revolutionary Communist Organization, Mexico*

Updated as of Sep 2, 2014

In July 2013, Ajith, the Secretary of what was then the CPI (M-L) Naxalbari¹, an Indian Maoist party, published a polemic titled “*Against Avakianism*.” It appeared in *Naxalbari*², the theoretical journal of the party.

“Avakianism” refers to Bob Avakian’s new synthesis of communism, given a pejorative twist here by Ajith. The polemic by Ajith is an attempt at an all-round refutation and rejection of the advance in the science of communism that the new synthesis represents. Ajith claims to be waging his polemic from ostensibly, and in his own words, a Maoist position (referred to in the polemic and the Naxalbari journal as “MLM”, or Marxist-Leninist-Maoist).

Ajith alleges that Avakian’s new synthesis of communism is “liquidationist and revisionist.” He calls for its rejection as “an urgent, necessary step that must be taken immediately even while one reserves the responsibility of thorough examination and refutation at one’s convenience,” to quote the words of Naxalbari’s editorial introducing Ajith’s polemic. In other words, reject first, examine later, especially “when,” as the same *Naxabari* editorial continues, “it is declared that MLM must be replaced with Avakianism³.”

Demarcations, in line with our mission statement – “as 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”--solicited and received a number of draft submissions in polemical response to Ajith’s article.

We are very excited to announce the publication of a contribution from the *Revolutionary Communist Organization, Mexico* (OCR, Mexico) titled ***Communism Or Nationalism?***. This polemic draws out the nationalism that runs through Ajith’s attacks on a critical component of the new synthesis of communism: *internationalism*. Avakian has not only upheld but also deepened the understanding of proletarian internationalism. More specifically, he has profoundly conceptualized the relationship between the world arena and revolution in any single country, and the tasks of communists in both the imperialist countries and oppressed nations.

While Lenin laid the foundations for internationalism in the era of imperialism, the historical experience of communist revolutions since then has been marked, in secondary but significant ways, by departures from this approach. Bob Avakian’s new synthesis of communism represents a real advance in the understanding of internationalism since the time of Lenin. It is marshaled,

¹ A joint declaration, May First 2014 - *Merger Declaration of CPI(Maoist) and CPI(M-L) Naxalbari Hail the Merger of the Maoist Parties in India into a Single Party!* dated May 1st, 2014, announced that the CPI (M-L) Naxalbari has merged with the Communist Party of India (Maoist), and has ceased to exist as a separate party. While this declaration has been announced on sites such as <http://icspwindia.wordpress.com/2014/05/10/hail-the-merger-of-the-maoist-parties-in-india-into-a-single-party/> and <http://maoistroad.blogspot.com/2014/05/pc-1-maggio-merger-declaration-of.html> (retrieved as of July 28, 2014) and in the press, the editors of *Demarcations* are not aware of any further official confirmation or elaboration of the status of this merger.

² Ajith, “Against Avakianism”, Naxalbari, No. 4, July, 2013, available at <http://thenaxalbari.blogspot.com/2013/07/naxalbari-issue-no-4.html>, retrieved as of July 28, 2014

³ *Editorial, The Challenges before the Maoists*, Naxalbari, No. 4, July, 2013, available at http://thenaxalbari.blogspot.com/2013/07/naxalbari-no-4-editorial_7820.html, retrieved as of July 28, 2014

applied, and brought alive in this polemic by the OCR, Mexico.

Polemics matter because ideas matter. In this regard, a statement attributed to Zhang Chunqiao, one of the revolutionary leaders of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and one of the so-called “gang of four,” is highly relevant: “Theory is the dynamic factor in ideology” in changing how people approach, understand, and view the world. 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.*

While this debate has originated in the international communist movement--especially the Maoist movement as it developed from the time of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s and spread throughout the world--the questions being debated have broad and urgent implications.

The world is in turmoil, “a period of transition with potential for great upheaval”⁴. At a time when the planet is in peril and the horrors for billions of humanity intensify, and at a time characterized by periodic upsurges and long-standing rebellions--the question of the moment is objectively posed: is there a *solution out of all this madness?*

With the trumpeted ‘death of communism’ and the dominance of the universalisms of Western-style bourgeois democracy and religious fundamentalism, precious few think *a radically different world is possible, desirable, or viable.* But there IS a real alternative to capitalism-imperialism. What does that alternative look like, and how to get there? This – in a framework that is materialist, visionary, and concrete - is what Avakian’s new synthesis of communism tackles and answers. And that is precisely what is under attack by Ajith. This debate is an urgent debate, involving radically different approaches to knowing and changing the world.

While people righteously rise up, fight or rebel against oppressive rule, the ultimately decisive question is: what is guiding this, with what perspective are people struggling, and where is it all leading? In fact, for most of the communist movement, most of the time, these questions of communism, and the socialist transition, are, paradoxical as it might seem, often “out of sight, out of mind”--while the activists in the movement, including revolutionaries with *the sincerest of intentions and the greatest of sacrifices,* are busy doing something else. This “something else” often has little connection, even in people’s own thinking and conception, let alone in actual impact, with the overall effort to bring a completely different social system to birth. Just “keep on keeping on,” as the song goes.

Through this process of polemics and compare-and-contrast on “problem/solution,” we at *Demarcations* aim to draw in a broader audience - *all those seeking a better world* - into a deeper understanding of and engagement with communism, as a critical, revolutionary, and living science, and its most advanced expression in the new synthesis.

A decisive question for the emancipation of humanity is *the method and approach* to reality and its transformation. What will become clear through these polemics – and we seek to draw a consistent thread throughout- is that there are two radically different approaches and two packages in contention here: the emancipatory communism of Avakian’s new synthesis versus what Ajith concentrates.

⁴ Bob Avakian, *The New Situation and The Great Challenges*, Revolution #036, February 26, 2006, posted at revcom.us. <http://revcom.us/a/036/avakian-new-situation-great-challenges.htm>

“As Bob 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 has developed since its founding by Marx up to the present time.”⁵ (*from Communism as a Science, the Appendix to the Constitution of the RCP, USA*)

A scientific method and approach seeks to understand, at the deepest level, *why* things are the way they are and *how* they develop, seeking causes in the material world and with evidence, and applies that to reality and its transformation. Radically changing the world, in the fundamental interests of the vast majority of humanity, the billions in misery and despair, requires revolutionary theory founded on a scientific method and approach and in a continuous dialectic of theory-practice-theory.

In opposition to this integral and living scientific approach to communism, there has always been a secondary tendency of dogmatism and religiosity within the international communist movement, of reducing communism itself--including the breakthroughs represented by Marx, Lenin, Mao--to “a set of precepts” or even scriptures. This quasi-religiosity includes a teleological approach to History (with a capital H, with purpose, leading to a pre-destined goal) and a “belief” in the “inevitability” of communism, instead of a thoroughly scientific historical materialist approach.

Profoundly antithetical to the spirit and content of communism, which represents a radical rupture from and with all religious viewpoints, this package, as concentrated by Ajith, is necessarily accompanied by pragmatism in practice, going with ‘what works’ and yields “immediate results.” Instead of scientifically confronting the big challenges that the communist revolution faces at this historical juncture, we have a retreat into an ultimately brittle dogmatism, religiosity, and pragmatism.

The stakes are sharply etched: what kind of international communist movement will there be, *one rooted in science and proceeding from the world as it is, or one that proceeds from "narratives" that force-fit reality into a reassuring belief system?* To further grasp and contextualize this, let’s step back to the historical moment that is shaping this debate.

The Historical Moment – The End of A Stage, the Beginning of A New Stage of Communist Revolution

The historical moment is best understood as the ‘end of a stage, beginning of a new stage’ of communist revolution.

Marx, with Engels, forged a breakthrough in the scientific approach and understanding of society – and with that, the possibility of transforming a world of oppression and exploitation to a radically different one beyond the “4 Alls”--meaning beyond *all* classes, *all* underlying exploitative production relations, *all* oppressive social relations and antagonisms, and *all* the traditional ideas that go with all that.

This transition to a communist world has had two major and large-scale manifestations in the first wave of revolutions and socialist societies: first, the October Revolution in Russia in 1917; and then going further and taking yet another leap, the Chinese revolution of 1949, in particular the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976. This first wave, which began with the short-lived Paris Commune of

⁵ *Appendix: Communism as a Science, Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2008), pp. 42, Online at <http://revcom.us/Constitution/constitution.html>

1871, came to an end in 1976 with the overthrow of socialism and the restoration of capitalist rule in China, some twenty years after proletarian rule was overthrown in the Soviet Union in the 1950s after the death of Stalin.

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.

What led to these defeats and the restoration of capitalism in both the SU and China? How do we scientifically approach and sum up the lessons and legacy of these revolutions? What do we make of the rich experience of exercising state power towards the transition to communism? Is communist revolution and proletarian state power still necessary, possible, viable, and desirable? What is the theoretical framework for going forward?

The approach to the 'end of a stage' and to these questions (which are objectively posed by the fact that this first wave did come to an end), has divided the international communist movement.

In contrast to Ajith, for whom these questions deserve no serious consideration, nary a mention, these are the world-historic questions – along with the experience of forging and leading the process of making revolution in the U.S. - that have animated Bob Avakian's work and given life over the last three decades to what has been forged as the new synthesis of communism. This represents not only the synthesis of communist theory and experience from the founding of communism until the present time. Avakian's new synthesis of communism also incorporates understanding drawn from developments and breakthroughs in diverse intellectual, scientific, and artistic fields more broadly, as well as a scientific approach to major changes that have taken in the world.

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."⁶

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 re-envisioned 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.

As the Manifesto, *Communism: The Beginning of A New Stage*, points out, Bob Avakian's new synthesis objectively stands in opposition to two seemingly opposed but in fact *mirror-opposite conceptions* 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.

The first conception clings uncritically, in a dogmatic and religious way, to previous socialist experience and theory – thus ranging itself against a scientific approach to historical summation of

⁶ *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2008), p. 24, Hereafter cited as *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage*. Online at <http://www.revcom.us/Manifesto/Manifesto.html>

the past, and to the further advance of communist theory. This dogmatic position, often accompanied by crass nationalism opposed to communism, is brittle and often flips into a more open bourgeois democracy.

The second 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." Intertwined with this is the wholesale adoption of pragmatism and empiricism, the worship of bourgeois democracy, either explicitly or in the form of "new" thinking (such as with Ajith and his embrace of key elements of "post-modernism").

Starting in the 1970s, there has been an ebbing worldwide of revolutionary and national liberation struggles that has given strength to these trends...as has the relentless imperialist-bourgeois ideological assault on the communist experience.

As we shall see in the polemics we are publishing, or soon will be publishing, the Ajith "package" is an unfortunate eclectic⁷ amalgam of communism with these "mirror-opposites" (dogmatism on the one hand and bourgeois democracy on the other) – all under the moniker of Maoism.

A Point of Clarification on the Ajith Package, the New Synthesis and Maoism – One Divides Into Two

In May 2012, the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP) issued a letter to the parties and organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) the international grouping formed in 1984 as the "embryonic center of the world's Maoist movement." This letter, expressing the RCP's understanding of the content, origins, and history of the two-line struggle that was developing in the international communist movement pointed out: "The crisis of RIM and the ICM more generally arose because the understanding on which the movement was based, what we have called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, is 'dividing into two': its revolutionary, correct and scientific kernel is both validated and is advancing to new levels while secondary but nonetheless real and damaging errors in politics and theory have been identified and can and need to be struggled against as part of making the leap that is required."⁸

⁷ The term eclectic here is used as a scientific term, a method that serves to obscure the principal aspect of a contradiction. As Bob Avakian has described it: "Here it is important to emphasize that the essence of eclecticism (and the way in which it serves revisionism, when it is communists, or those professing to be communists, who adopt and apply such eclecticism) is not simply to pose things in terms of "on the one hand 'this,' and on the other hand 'that'"—but to do so in a way that obscures the essence of the matter, and specifically undermines what is in fact the principal and defining aspect of the contradiction. . . For example, take the statement: "True, imperialism involves the intense and vicious exploitation and oppression of people in many parts of the world; but it has also led to the development of many beneficial forms of technology and to a high standard of living for significant numbers of people." Both aspects here—what precedes the semicolon (before the word "but") and what follows after that—are true. But which aspect is principal, defining, and essential? Clearly, it is the former: the highly exploitative and oppressive nature of imperialism, and the very negative consequences of this for the great majority of humanity. But the way this sentence is formulated, it blunts that essential truth by, in form, putting the secondary aspect (as embodied in the second part of the above sentence) on an equal footing with the principal aspect. This serves, at least objectively, as an apology for imperialism. . . . All eclectic approaches have the same basic character and effect: They serve to muddle things and to deny or undermine the principal aspect and essence of things." From Bob Avakian, "Crises in Physics," *Crises in Philosophy and Politics* , Revolution #161, April 12, 2009, http://www.revcom.us/avakian/Out%20into%20the%20World/Avakian_Out_into_World_pt5-en.html

⁸ *Revolutionary Communist Party, USA: Letter to Participating Parties and Organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, available in Issue #3 of Demarcations, http://demarcations-journal.org/issue03/letter_to_participating_parties_of_rim_revolutionary_communist_party_usa.pdf*

In this sense only, Ajith's article *Against Avakianism* serves a useful purpose in the ongoing two-line struggle in the international communist movement. As will be demonstrated through the polemics, what Ajith is arguing for is a highly concentrated expression, and salvo, of this trend of taking those “secondary but nonetheless real and damaging errors” in method and conception, systematizing them, and raising them to the level of overall political line.

This alchemy masquerades as “Maoism.” In fact it is an empty shell. Its content has little in common with what Mao fundamentally and principally brought forward, represented, and defended. Instead what Ajith crystallizes, theorizes, and polemicizes for is captured in the Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, in its characterization of the features shared by the mirror-opposite tendencies that have developed in fundamental opposition to the new synthesis⁹:

» Never taking up—or never engaging in any systematic way with—a scientific summation of the previous stage of the communist movement, and in particular Mao Tsetung’s path breaking analysis concerning the danger of and basis for capitalist restoration in socialist society. Thus, while they may uphold—or may in the past have upheld—the Cultural Revolution in China, they lack any real, or profound, understanding of why this Cultural Revolution was necessary and why and with what principles and objectives Mao initiated and led this Cultural Revolution. They reduce this Cultural Revolution to, in effect, just another episode in the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat— or, on the other hand, reinterpret it as some kind of bourgeois-democratic “anti-bureaucracy” movement which in essence represents a negation of the need for a communist vanguard and its institutionalized leading role in socialist society, throughout the transition to communism.

» The common tendency to reduce “Maoism” to just a prescription for waging people’s war in a Third World country, while again ignoring, or diminishing the importance of, Mao’s most important contribution to communism: his development of the theory and line of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and all the rich analysis and scientific method that underlay and made possible the development of that theory and line.

» Positivism, pragmatism, and empiricism. While again, this may take different expressions in accordance with different particular erroneous viewpoints and approaches, what is common to them is the vulgarization and degradation of theory—reducing it to a “guide to practice” only in the most narrow and immediate sense, treating theory as, in essence, a direct outgrowth of particular practice, and attempting to establish an equivalence between advanced practice (which itself, especially on these people’s part, involves an element of subjective and arbitrary evaluation) and supposedly advanced theory.

A scientific communist, materialist and dialectical, viewpoint leads to the understanding that practice is the ultimate point of origin and point of verification of theory; but, in opposition to these narrow, empiricist distortions, this must be understood to mean practice in the broad sense, encompassing broad social and historical experience, and not simply the direct experience of a particular individual, group, party, or nation. The very founding, and the further development of, communist theory itself is a powerful demonstration of this: From the time of Marx, this theory has been forged and enriched by drawing from a broad array of experience, in a wide range of fields and over a broad expanse of historical

⁹ *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage*, pp. 32-33

development, in society and nature. Practice as the source of theory and the maxim that “practice is the criterion of truth” can be, and will be, turned into a profound untruth if this is interpreted and applied in a narrow, empiricist, and subjective manner.”

Ajith and other opponents of the new synthesis of communism have focused on a “different Mao”: one with some elements in common with Mao the communist revolutionary, but ripping the scientific and Marxist heart out of Mao. They have made a principle out of defending, upholding, and even making central the errors that were in Mao only secondary shortcomings--while further loading their own bourgeois democracy, nationalism, pragmatism, and other deviations onto this false and disfigured Mao.

Both the new synthesis of communism and Ajith’s line represent “developments” of previous communist theory, although in opposite directions. Avakian defends and builds upon the basic stand, viewpoint, and method of Marxism, including as it has developed through Leninism and Maoism, while identifying and criticising secondary errors. Through this process, Avakian has brought the science of communism to a whole new level. Ajith, on the other hand, rejects the scientific essence of Marxism. He seeks to replace it with a qualitatively different, non-scientific, ideology while keeping certain secondary features and external appearances of Marxism.

With “common ancestry” in Maoism, Ajith and Avakian go in radically different directions.

The Polemics In Response to Ajith – A Compendium in Response to A Package

Ajith’s attack on Avakian’s new synthesis has a number of key threads:

- In the realm of ***epistemology*** (the realm of philosophy dealing with questions of knowledge, truth, and how we get to it): whether truth is objective or depends on social position and has a “class nature”; whether communism is a science, an ideology, or both; the role of what Ajith terms “simple class feelings” in the struggle to make revolution and radically transform society; and Marx’s breakthroughs in historical materialism and whether “communism is inevitable.”
- Avakian’s conception of “***solid core with a lot of elasticity***” leading the process towards communism, and in relation to past conceptions in making revolution and leading socialist societies: the nature, purpose and character of this transition to communism, what Marx originally conceived as the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- Proletarian ***internationalism***, the basis for it in today’s world, the tasks of communists in both the imperialist countries and the oppressed nations, and the relationship between the world arena and revolution in any single country.
- In the realm of political economy: do the laws of capitalist accumulation interact with and set the primary framework for the class struggle? What is ***the principal form of motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism*** – and why is that decisive in understanding the motion and development of human society in this epoch, the kinds of changes that have taken place in the world, especially over the last 50 years, and the ground on which revolution is made?
- Additionally, along with some other secondary threads, there are attacks on the RCP, USA’s role in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), the erstwhile international grouping of Maoist forces, which included both Ajith’s group and the RCP, USA.

Along with the polemic by OCR, Mexico being published with this Editors Note, we have previously published three articles that form part of the polemical response to Ajith and his attack on Bob Avakian’s new synthesis of communism. These three articles address different aspects of

content and method and approach of the new synthesis, and Bob Avakian's role in the international communist movement. They are:

- [On the "Driving Force of Anarchy" and the Dynamics of Change, A Sharp Debate and Urgent Polemic: The Struggle for a Radically Different World and the Struggle for a Scientific Approach to Reality by Raymond Lotta](#). Lotta's essay did not explicitly mention Ajith as the object and target of theoretical polemic, posing the issue more generally as a controversial question of contemporary Marxist political economy. However, the questions, approach, and line of thinking taken up in this polemic exactly correspond to the Ajith package, including the specific attacks in his latest work, *Against Avakianism*.
- [The \(new\) Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist and the Crossroads Facing the International Communist Movement, by Robert Borba](#). This polemic, in a significant sub-section, documents and examines Ajith's response to both the revisionist turn taken by the original Maoist party that led the ten-year People's War in Nepal from 1996 to 2006, and the lack of a decisive rupture by and continuing revisionism within the new party, the (new) CPN-M—in the context of this historical moment, and the crossroads facing the ICM.
- [Letter to Participating Parties and Organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA](#). This letter was originally distributed privately on May 1, 2012 to parties and organizations that participated in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), the international grouping formed in 1984 as the "embryonic center of the world's Maoist movement." The letter stands as the essential refutation of Ajith's main slander, distortions, and mis-information about the RCP's role in this movement. In summing up this experience, the letter from the RCP approaches major struggles from the high plane of ideological and political line, embodying Mao's emphasis on the decisiveness of line.

In the near future, *Demarcations* plans to publish a major polemical response to Ajith's attacks on the new synthesis in ***the realm of epistemology***. We are also considering submissions on Ajith's line on the role of religion and religious fundamentalism; his all-round attacks on the historic contributions of Lenin and his posing of Mao against Lenin; and the deafening silence of Ajith in *Against Avakianism* on the emancipation of one half of humanity, women.

In the context of the latter, Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism includes a deepened understanding of why and how ***the emancipation of women*** is fundamental and pivotal to the communist revolution and getting beyond the "4 Alls" (referred to earlier). A compendium of relevant excerpts and works, [Break ALL the Chains! Bob Avakian on the Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution](#) is now available on revcom.us. We are now publishing a selection from this compendium "*The New Synthesis and the Woman Question: The Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution—Further Leaps and Radical Ruptures*" Part III of *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution (2009)*. This seminal work critically reviews the historical experience of socialist societies and the communist movement as it relates to women's emancipation, and sets forth the need and the basis for a further leap and radical rupture, in conception and practice.

We invite correspondence, proposals, and submissions on these and related questions.