

EDITORS' NOTE, ISSUE 4, January 2015

As we look forward: rising to the challenges of advancing the cause of communist revolution in the New Year.

> We are pleased to publish as our lead article a polemic submitted to *Demarcations* by Ishak Baran and KJA: "Ajith—A Portrait of the Residue of the Past." Baran and KJA are two adherents of Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism, and their article is a very important contribution to the response to *Against Avakianism* by Ajith. (At the time this was published, Ajith was secretary of what had then been the CPI (M-L) Naxalbari.)

Demarcations has previously published a number of articles that speak to and refute different dimensions of Ajith's attack on the new synthesis of communism that Bob Avakian has brought forward and that provides the theoretical framework to initiate a new stage of communist revolution. To understand the larger backdrop of this sharpening debate in the international communist movement, and a listing of the articles in response to Ajith's attack on the new synthesis, readers should look at our [Editors' Note](#) of September 2, 2014.

Here we want to provide the reader with some compass points for getting into the extensive and wide-ranging piece from Ishak Baran and KJA.

The focus of their polemic is philosophy, specifically epistemology (the branch of philosophy concerned with issues of knowledge and truth) and methodology. As pointed out in their introduction, this is a topic that at first sight might appear abstract and distant from the urgent problems of today's world. But as they go on to explain, these philosophical issues have everything to do with putting an end to the madness and horror of our times – with the ability of oppressed humanity and all who yearn for a world worthy of our humanity to *understand* the world (that is epistemology) precisely in order to *change* it (through revolution).

It should come as no surprise that issues of philosophy are very much at the core of Ajith's attack on Avakian. The key breakthrough of the new synthesis has been to put communism on a more scientific foundation, with further emphasis on a thoroughly scientific method and approach – and how all this relates to, and is critical to getting to communism. The two-line struggle in the international communist movement crucially involves radically different approaches to knowing and changing the world.

"Ajith – A Portrait of the Residue of the Past" discusses what science is and why communism is in fact a science, which Ajith categorically rejects. The polemic takes up the question of why truth – whether we are talking about knowledge of the natural world or of human society – is objective, is discoverable and verifiable through the scientific method. It is not the case that the proletariat has *its* truth and *its* special ability to acquire truth (as Ajith argues). The authors discuss what it means to gain a scientific

understanding of the motion and development of human society and of the emancipatory historical mission of the proletariat. And they get into the role of revolutionary theory and the development of revolutionary consciousness among the oppressed and exploited.

The polemic moves on to address Ajith's defense of the idea of the "inevitability" of communist revolution – that human development is leading inescapably to the triumph of communism. This has been a very influential mode of thinking in the international communist movement. But consoling as it may be, this is not scientific; it is quasi-religious belief. As Baran and KJA point out, there is monumental necessity for communist revolution and there is a real basis in the development of human society for overcoming scarcity and the division of society into classes...but this revolution must be consciously made, and is not guaranteed or inevitable.

The authors take on Ajith's embrace of postmodernism and related schools of thought. Again, this involves critical issues of science and the knowability of objective reality and the postmodern attack on science as dangerously "totalizing" and intrinsically oppressive. Baran and KJA also confront Ajith's ugly rationalization of religion and fundamentalism in the oppressed nations of the global south, which he attempts to pull off by attributing anti-imperialism to the oppressive and outmoded outlook and program of Islamic fundamentalism.

We plan to extend and deepen the polemical response to Ajith, and we welcome your comments and contributions.

Additionally, to ensure the widest accessibility for an international online readership, we are striving to provide, as much as possible, online links to the original source references such as the excerpts in this polemic quoted from the essays and articles in *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, by Bob Avakian, Insight Press, 2005. Many of these articles are available at revcom.us, and links will be provided on this site shortly.

> We are excited to announce that [Phoneme Publishers](#) of Delhi, India has republished *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* by Bob Avakian. This is a welcome event. It brings Avakian's 1986 text – the most comprehensive Marxist treatment of democracy – to a much wider audience in India and elsewhere. For this new printing from Phoneme, Raymond Lotta has written a special introduction, which we are making available in this issue of *Demarcations*.

Is democracy, or "true" democracy, the pinnacle of human social organization? Almost every oppositional force in the world today (outside of reactionary Islamic and other fundamentalisms) accepts the view that we cannot do better than democracy – that, in fact, within the tenets of democratic theory itself lies the path to a better world. And within the communist movement there has been a marked tendency to conflate the communist project with the democratic project, to see socialist revolution as the fulfillment or deepening or "perfection" of democracy.

Avakian argues that there is something far more subversive of the status quo, something far more liberating, than democracy. *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* takes on heightened relevance in today's world.

> We feature an excerpt from a 2009 talk by Bob Avakian, [Ruminations and Wranglings: On the Importance of Marxist Materialism, Communism as a Science, Meaningful Revolutionary Work, and a Life with Meaning](#). 2009.

There is rich analysis here that takes in issues of how different classes and social forces approach and understand the problems of the world and how to solve them. Avakian discusses the sweep of communist revolution as a "total revolution;" that there is a social base for this revolution in today's world; and the challenges of leading a complex revolutionary process that involves the interplay of and struggle between different outlooks, lines, and programs representing different classes and class interests.

Each class seeks to remake the world in its image. But Avakian calls attention to the stark fact that the proletariat, unlike all other classes, cannot make the revolution that corresponds to its historic class interests and mission – to do away with all exploitation and oppression, and the very division of society into classes – by relying on spontaneous understanding and struggle. This underscores the critical importance of line and leadership. And in this excerpt, Avakian also speaks to what is the essence of communist leadership – and the unprecedented challenge of making and leading a revolution that does not aim to replace one set of exploiters, one small group of rulers or leaders, with another.

A hallmark of the new synthesis is the emphasis on the ways in which intellectuals and intellectual ferment play a vital, an indispensable role in the revolutionary process. Now there is the phenomenon of the incredible swings of the democratic intellectual (whose class standpoint is that of the petit bourgeoisie, or "middle class"). At times, owing to the inequities of society, these intellectuals become receptive, even attracted, to the communist project and its leading representatives. But also, when presented with the depth and thoroughgoingness of the communist revolution, with what it means to truly rupture out of bourgeois society, the democratic intellectual is given to spasms of shock, disappointment, and active opposition. It is a class and social phenomenon that finds repeated expression and that requires materialist analysis to understand – and lead through the process of making revolution and getting to communism. This includes, as a critical element, the great need to struggle to win and inspire people – not only from the basic masses but also from among the intellectuals and the educated youth – to be communists and emancipators of humanity.

> Finally, the New Year is upon us and we take note of a truly remarkable event of the past year. This was the historic dialogue in New York City between Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, and Cornel West, the prominent public intellectual and revolutionary Christian, on the theme of *Revolution and Religion: The Fight for Emancipation and the Role of Religion*. Approximately 1900 people – from

all sections of society, including significant numbers from the neighborhoods of the oppressed, those rising up in struggle against police murder of Black and Latino youth, and students – filled Riverside Church for this Dialogue.

This was a rare and riveting public appearance by Bob Avakian.

The question of revolution and religion matters deeply, and is of enormous consequence, to billions on this planet. It is also a matter of sharp contention within the international communist movement, including in Ajith's attack on the new synthesis.

There is the need to do ideological work and wage sharp struggle for people to cast off the mental shackles of religion, and adopt a scientific not religious world view and method: to unchain the mind and radically change the world. At the same time and on this basis, and with what Avakian has termed 'broad arms,' there is the real need for communists to unite politically and practically with people propelled by religious morality and conviction to stand against injustice and oppression – and lead the whole process towards communist revolution.

Avakian deeply and powerfully conveys the important role that morality, and the struggle over morality, plays in fighting for a radically different and better world and forging liberating new social relations and values – and he illumines the content and materialist basis of communist morality in a world that could be, without oppression, exploitation and all the ideas, antagonisms and divides corresponding to capitalism-imperialism and commodity production and exchange.

All this comes alive in the Dialogue between Avakian and West, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, as they deepen their unity even while struggling over differences, with love and humor, and in their chemistry with each other and the audience. We encourage readers to watch and study the video of the extraordinary dialogue between Bob Avakian and Cornel West. It can be viewed at revcom.us.