

Ruminations and Wranglings

On the Importance of Marxist Materialism, Communism as a Science, Meaningful Revolutionary Work, and a Life with Meaning

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[Editors' note: The following is an excerpt from the text of a talk by Bob Avakian, Ruminations and Wranglings. The text of the talk has been edited and footnotes have been added for publication. The entire talk can be found online at revcom.us/avakian/ruminations/BA-ruminations-en.html.]

"And This Semblance Seduces the Democrats"

Going back to how individuals in society exist not purely as individuals, but in a more fundamental sense as part of social groupings, and how this is grounded in certain definite social and fundamentally production relations, I want to return to some points that have to do with what Marx sharply gets at in his essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, specifically on the question of democratic intellectuals and their relation to the petite bourgeoisie (the "middle class"). Let's begin with the following from the polemic against K. Venu ("Democracy: More Than Ever We Can And Must Do Better Than That") which was written more than 15 years ago now but remains very relevant (this polemic is also included as an appendix in the book *Phony Communism Is Dead...Long Live **Real Communism!*** – in the second [2004] edition of that book). I will first give the passage in full, and then comment on certain parts of it which are particularly salient in relation to what is going on today:

"Here the following insights of Marx are very relevant. Commenting, significantly, on a variant of petit-bourgeois social-democracy that, in a different context and somewhat different form, also advocated 'the transformation of society in a democratic way, but a transformation within the bounds of the petite bourgeoisie,' Marx goes on to say that:

"...one must not form the narrow-minded notion that the petite bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general* conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petite 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...." (See *Phony Communism is Dead...Long Live **Real Communism!***, 2nd (2004) edition, pp. 209-210, emphasis in original)

In examining this further, let's focus first on the very insightful observation by Marx that the petite bourgeoisie "believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general* conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided." How often nowadays, much to our frustration, do we see this phenomenon played out in politics and other spheres of society? The petit bourgeois, and in particular the petit bourgeois intellectual, continually gravitates toward, and gives expression to, the notion that the narrow interests, and illusory "solutions," that correspond to the spontaneous strivings and inclinations of people in this ("middle class") position can somehow be imposed on all of society, and will fix society's ills, or at least ameliorate and mitigate the objectively profound contradictions which rive society and repeatedly give rise to antagonistic conflict, in which this "middle class" generally finds itself caught...in the middle.

And Marx goes on: "Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers." Marx is a dialectical, not a vulgar, materialist. He makes clear:

"According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petite 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..."

Note that: to the same problems and solutions. Not only the same solutions, but the same problems and solutions. Even with regard to how they see the problems, as well as the solutions which they believe they have found, these democratic intellectuals come up with ideas and theoretical propositions which ultimately are in line with where "material interest and social position drive the latter [the shopkeepers] practically."

And then follows a very important conclusion: "This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent...." Here again, Marx is putting forward a correct understanding of the way in which ideas are a reflection of material reality and more specifically of a certain social position – but they are not crudely that, they're not that in a reductionist, one-to-one sense. Ultimately, he stresses, the ideas of the democratic intellectuals do not escape the bounds within which the practical petite bourgeoisie, if you will, is confined by its economic interests and its social position. This is a very profound and very important point. But, again, this is not a linear "one-to-one" relation. To help illustrate this, it is worthwhile referring to a report I read of a discussion relating to how I had applied this statement by Marx to the role of someone like Amy Goodman. In this discussion, one person said, "Well, Amy Goodman, she's a shopkeeper." No...a-a-a-h [laughing, making the sound of a "buzzer" in a game show, when a wrong answer is given]. That misses the whole point. The point is the relation between democratic intellectuals and shopkeepers – the dialectical relation – and how, in the working out of their ideas, these intellectuals may proceed very differently than how the shopkeeper thinks about practical problems all day long, or even the way the shopkeeper thinks about politics, but that the democratic intellectuals – as representatives, in the realm of ideas, of the petite bourgeoisie – don't escape the framework, and the limits, within which the (if you will) more practical activities of the petite bourgeoisie are confined. And this, in its full meaning – and its living application of dialectical materialism, as opposed to mechanical materialism and idealism – is extremely important to understand.

The next paragraph from Marx's "Eighteenth Brumaire," which is also cited in "Phony/Real," further elaborates on and sheds further light on this point. This paragraph begins: "But the democrat, because he represents the petite bourgeoisie, that is, a *transition class*, in which the interests of two classes are

simultaneously mutually blunted, imagines himself elevated above class antagonism generally."

Here Marx is speaking to the fact that the petite bourgeoisie is a class which has no future, as such, and is incapable of ruling society, as such, although representatives of the petite bourgeoisie may actually come to preside over society, or lead society, on behalf of the proletariat or on behalf of the bourgeoisie – "moving over," so to speak to take up the class standpoint and interests of the one or the other of these two fundamentally and antagonistically opposed classes. This is why Marx refers to the petite bourgeoisie as a *transition class*, in which the interests of two classes – that is, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – "are simultaneously mutually blunted." It is for this reason that the petit bourgeois democrat "imagines himself elevated above class antagonism generally."

How often have we heard this viewpoint expressed, including in relation to the recent election and the triumph of Obama in that election?! For example, recently someone wrote to our newspaper complaining about our exposure of Obama and declaring: I think people are in a mood more for healing than they are in a mood for conflict.

This is a classical expression of the class outlook of people in the petite bourgeoisie – who, as Marx so graphically and insightfully puts it, commonly imagine themselves "elevated above class antagonism generally." They imagine that they can wave the magic wand of petit bourgeois idealism and eliminate objective class conflicts and the antagonism and struggle to which these conflicts give rise, repeatedly, in one form or another.

Marx goes on:

"The democrats concede that a privileged class confronts them" – you see, Marx is very sophisticated and nuanced in his understanding – "The democrats concede that a privileged class confronts them, but they, along with all the rest of the nation, form the *people*. What they represent is the *people's rights*; what interests them is the *people's interests*. Accordingly, when a struggle is impending, they do not need to examine the interests and positions of the different classes." (emphasis in original)

Once again, this is extremely insightful and extremely important. It is very worthwhile going back to this repeatedly and drawing more and more out of it, precisely in relation to developing reality and the ways in which this constantly gets posed – including the ways in which it is posed in very sharp terms now. While this phenomenon finds repeated expression every time there's an election in a bourgeois democracy – and in the U.S. in particular – it has been very acutely expressed with this recent election, around Obama, which has had by far the highest quotient of illusion, deceit and especially self-deceit of any election in quite a long time. It has set a very high standard for illusion, deceit and self-deceit, even for bourgeois elections.

Along with this, the following quote from the *Grundrisse*, also cited in "Phony/Real," penetrates beneath so much of the outer appearance of things and the obfuscation by so many (consciously or not) of fundamental and essential reality:

"In the money relation, in the developed system of exchange (and this semblance seduces the democrats), the ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc. are in fact exploded, ripped up (at least, personal ties all appear as *personal* relations); and individuals *seem* independent (this is an independence which is at bottom merely an illusion, and it is more correctly called indifference), free to collide with one another and to engage in exchange within this freedom; but they appear thus only for someone who abstracts from the *conditions*, the *conditions of existence* within which these individuals

enter into contact (and these conditions, in turn, are independent of the individuals and, although created by society, appear as if they were *natural conditions*, not controllable by individuals).... A closer examination of these external relations, these conditions, shows, however, that it is impossible for the individuals of a class etc. to overcome them *en masse* without destroying them." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated with a foreword by Martin Nicolaus, Penguin Books/New Left Review, "The Chapter on Money," pp. 163-64, emphasis in original.)

Here, because Marx has put it within parentheses, it is possible to miss, or to fail to take full note of, an extremely important observation: In the developed system of exchange embodied in the money relation, the semblance of things – the outer and non-essential appearance of things – seduces the democrat into believing that the various individuals who are related to each other through this system of exchange are actually independent and autonomous, when in reality they are enmeshed, and confined, within definite production relations, of which the developed, money-based system of exchange is a subordinate expression. In a significant aspect – and this is true even while the degree to which this is consciously thought out varies – such democrats view the capitalist system, and its mode of exchange, in contrast with the feudal system, in which ties of personal dependence, distinctions of blood, education, etc., are openly determinants and markers of social status. By contrast, in capitalist society such non-market distinctions are, at least to a large degree and in essence, torn down and, as Marx puts it, personal ties all appear as personal, not as fixed by custom and tradition, or even law. This too is part of what "seduces" the democrat.

But what, really, is this much-vaunted independence and autonomy of people enmeshed in capitalist market relations? As Marx caustically characterizes it, this independence is more correctly called indifference, for capitalist relations not only allow but require and compel people to be fundamentally indifferent to the situation and fate of others – and the freedom people have, within these relations, is, as Marx puts it, essentially the freedom to collide with one another.

At base, as Marx also makes clear, the independence and autonomy that is so often proclaimed as an essential feature of bourgeois society, marking it as superior to all other forms of society, is an illusion. In fact, the situation people find themselves in, and the "freedom" they actually have, is defined, and confined, by "the conditions of existence within which these individuals enter into contact" – once again, fundamentally the relations of production of capitalism, and the corresponding relations of exchange and of distribution – which, as Marx emphasizes, are independent of the individuals. What the democrats typically do – again, reflecting the position and outlook of the petite bourgeoisie, understanding that in a dialectical, and not a mechanical, materialist sense – is precisely "abstract" the situation of individuals from these fundamental and essential relations and conditions. At the same time, they are taken in by the appearance that social conditions – conditions which are a result of the historical development of society and what that development has led to, the conditions and relations society embodies and is characterized by, at any given time – are "natural conditions," conditions which are simply "given" by nature, or which conform to the "nature of things," so to speak, and more specifically to a supposedly essential(ist) and unchanging "human nature."

How many times have we heard people say, "Yes, I agree with you, there are many things wrong in society – but that's just the way people are – that's human nature, that's why things are the way they are, and that's why they can never really be changed"?

For these reasons, the democrats – and others, so long as they adhere to this outlook – are not capable of recognizing this most fundamental truth: Not only are different individuals "situated" within a larger

system of production and social – and, in class society, class – relations, which are historically evolved and fundamentally independent of the wills of individuals, as individuals, but even though some individuals may be able to change their social-class status within capitalist society, the masses of people – and in particular the exploited masses in the lower sections of the proletariat, and others in oppressed social groups whose oppressed status is integral and indispensable to the prevailing capitalist society – cannot do so within the existing conditions and relations. As Marx very correctly, and profoundly, insists, they can do so, en masse, only by destroying these conditions and relations – only by overthrowing the system which embodies, and enforces, these conditions and relations.

That, of course, is why a radical transformation of society, a revolution, is necessary in order for the individuals en masse – in other words, for the masses of exploited and oppressed people, trapped in these social relations – to overcome them and bring into being radically different social conditions and relations, a radically different economic base and superstructure: to advance to communism and achieve the "4 Alls."

So, from all this, we can see the extreme relevance of these statements by Marx, from the *Grundrisse* and "The 18th Brumaire," in relation to – and as dissection and refutation of – commonly held notions that prevail in society today, whether in the form of more developed theories and philosophies, or simply popular prejudices and misconceptions, about the nature of things, and "human nature" in particular, and about the possibility – or, as it is often spontaneously conceived, the impossibility – of revolution and communism.

Each Class Seeks to Remake the World in Its Image – But Only One Class Cannot Do This by Relying on Spontaneity

This brings me to the next point, which is how – without, in fact, falling into reductionism and reification – it is a very important phenomenon in all of social life, and particularly in social struggle, that each class will try to remake the world in its image. Especially in every revolution, but in every major social transformation or social movement, different class forces seek to seize the reins and impose their solutions, in accordance with how they see the problems. More specifically, it is important to understand how bourgeois and other reactionary class forces seek to do this, especially in the context of any major social upheaval and social struggle, and most especially in the context of an approaching revolution. Let's examine briefly some examples of this.

** Iran in the 1978-79 revolution, where there was a mass upheaval in which different class forces were contending, and in which, unfortunately, the representatives of the exploited and oppressed masses and, in particular, the proletariat – that is, the communists – were weak, relative to other class forces, especially because of the vicious repression that had been carried out against the communist movement under the reign of the Shah, backed by U.S. imperialism, for several decades. In the swirl and roiling of that revolution, the class forces representing the interests of the bourgeoisie – and in some aspects feudal relations – maneuvered, and didn't just maneuver but were given powerful backing, to seize the reins of that revolution and to turn it into the horror that it has since become, with the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its existence for nearly three decades now.

More still needs to be learned about this, but enough is known to be clear that the U.S. imperialists, who initially backed the Shah, even in the face of this massive upheaval, then maneuvered, through their contacts within the existing Iranian army and in other parts of the ruling structures in that society, to prevent the revolution from ripening more fully. They moved to cut short a process through which the masses would be able to more fully test out in practice, as well as wrangling on the level of line and

theory with, different programs and different forces representing different solutions. Instead, the U.S. imperialists, and elements they could work through, maneuvered things so that the forces grouped around Khomeini would, in fact, get the necessary backing to be able to seize and consolidate power. It was the calculation of the imperialists that they could better deal with that than a continuously developing revolutionary situation – a situation in which the communists, assuming that they had been able to find their bearings and more thoroughly grasp and apply a genuinely communist and revolutionary line, would have been able to win increasing numbers of the masses through that social upheaval, through the masses testing out different programs and seeing which ones really were leading in a direction that was in their fundamental interests, and which were stopping halfway, seeking to hold things back and keep things confined within an oppressive framework.

Once again, this is something that needs to be more fully explored – although in significant measure it has been explored, particularly by our Iranian communist comrades. I'm merely seeking to sketch out a basic picture here, to illustrate this extremely important point about how different class forces enter into the fray and, especially in the context of major social upheavals and more particularly with impending revolutions, seek to seize the reins and impose their solutions – and what the consequences are when different class forces are able to do this. (For further, and more specific, analysis in relation to this, see the article "30 Years after the Iranian Revolution" from A World to Win News Service, February 23, 2009.)

** The situation in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s. There was a tremendous revolutionary upsurge in that country in that period, particularly in the urban shantytowns but spreading also to the bantustans and among the masses of black people throughout South Africa. And at a certain point, especially with larger changes in the world, including profound changes in the Soviet Union and its erstwhile bloc – first the ascension by Gorbachev to the head of the Soviet party and state, and then the demise and dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fracturing apart of its former empire, as such – the U.S. imperialists, in league with the white supremacist ruling class in South Africa, recognized that they had not only necessity but also freedom to change the form of rule in South Africa: to abolish the apartheid system, and even to allow the majority African population to vote in elections and to choose black South Africans as the leaders of the country, beginning with Mandela.

But, once again, the result of this was that the revolutionary process was aborted. There are times, and situations, where abortions are good, and times and circumstances where they are bad. This was one that was very bad – an aborted revolutionary process. Despite what is constantly preached at us these days – including by the "liberals" and "progressives" in the ruling class, and those who follow in their wake – it is not by any means always bad (or, "at best," a "necessary evil") to abort a fetus. But it is very bad to abort a revolutionary process – and this is what happened in South Africa. And part of the whole arrangement there, worked out under the commanding influence of the U.S. ruling class, was that South Africa would remain within the framework of imperialist domination, and even of IMF (International Monetary Fund) structures and dictates, and so on. This was clear and explicit.

A number of people have analyzed this, at least partially, but the essential point is this: The whole way in which Mandela was brought to the fore by the imperialists, and by their allies within the ruling structures of South Africa, not only did not fundamentally improve the conditions of the masses of oppressed and exploited African people in that country, but in many ways this new arrangement has led to their conditions worsening, especially economically, but even socially and morally, if you will, so that now, and for the time being, a mass revolutionary upsurge and the whole sense of purpose and the whole sense of a fight for a better future, and all the uplifting elements that go along with that, have been replaced to a large and growing degree by crime, particularly among the same kinds of youth

who, a couple of decades ago, would have been the backbone of a revolutionary struggle. And this has led to demoralization, to confusion, to illusions that have not only been fed and taken hold among the masses in South Africa but whose influence has been spread to oppressed people in other parts of the world.

And this was, again, a very conscious policy – a very consciously adopted series of steps on the part of the imperialists and the white elite strata in South Africa, but also on the part of certain bourgeois strata among the oppressed black people in South Africa whose aspirations did not go any further than an arrangement of this kind, because their interests, as a social group (class), were in fact largely in line with merely abolishing certain forms of formal segregation (apartheid) and the oppression that went along with that, while leaving intact the fundamental relations of oppression and exploitation – which has in fact led to even worse consequences in many ways over the nearly two decades since apartheid was abolished.

This is a profound lesson that must be deeply grasped and driven home, if masses of people, not only in South Africa but throughout the world, are really going to be able to consciously fight for their emancipation and the emancipation of humanity as a whole.

** Another illustration of this is the contrast between India and China in relation to the end of old-line colonialism and the emergence of a new (or not-so-new) society in the one country and the other. Here we are speaking of two fundamentally opposed paths: one born out of revolutionary struggle and, yes, revolutionary war, with the overall leadership of Mao and the Chinese Communist Party, resulting in the overthrow of the existing system, a rupture from imperialist domination, and embarking on a path of radically transforming society toward the objective of finally eliminating all relations of exploitation and oppression and the institutions and ideas that go along with and reinforce them; and, on the other hand, the path in India, represented by Gandhi and some others, of seeking conciliation with imperialism – seeking the end to formal colonialism but maintaining things within an oppressive framework, both in terms of the international relations in which India is enmeshed and oppressed, and in terms of the economic and social relations inside India itself, not the least being the horrendous oppression of women as well as the caste system, the outrages continually committed against the so-called "Untouchables," and so on. In the one case and the other, it is a matter of particular class forces – very different and fundamentally opposed class forces – moving to achieve certain solutions, in line with their interests and their outlook and, accordingly, how they see the problems.

** Or we could take the struggle within the Chinese Communist Party itself, especially once it came to be the leading force within the socialist state, after the seizure of power and the overthrow of imperialist domination and reactionary rule in China in 1949. Especially as this struggle, within the Chinese Communist Party, came to a head through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), in the decade from the mid-1960s until the death of Mao in 1976, it became clear that there were two sharply opposed viewpoints and programs representing not just individuals but social forces – that is, different class forces – which both existed within, and had positions of authority and leadership within, the Chinese Communist Party itself. This is why Mao made the pathbreaking analysis that is encapsulated in his statement, popularized during the GPCR: You are making revolution but don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right within the Communist Party. The capitalist roaders (within the Party) are still on the capitalist road.

Some points concerning the role of intellectuals and the revolutionary process

This was not just a matter of bureaucrats in the Chinese party and state having grown fat or power hungry as a result of holding positions of authority – it was not essentially a matter of bureaucracy. This

was a matter of different people who, yes, were intellectuals, but (going back to the insights of Marx) intellectuals who in their contrasting modes of thinking, and in the policies and programs that they developed – in their lines, in other words – represented two fundamentally opposed classes (think again of Marx's very important observations about the relations between classes and the political and literary representatives of those classes). Or, to put this another way, the question, over which there was antagonistic struggle, was: In the image of which social class should that society (and ultimately the world) be remade? In the image of the proletariat – not in a reductionist or reified sense but in the sense of its interests as a social class, which lie in ultimately resolving the contradictions of capitalism, in particular its fundamental contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation, and moving on to abolish all class distinctions and the production relations, social relations, ideas and institutions that go along with that (in short, achieving the "4 Alls")? Or should society (and ultimately the world) be remade in accordance with the viewpoint of that stratum which had taken a concentrated form within the Chinese Communist Party, which sought merely to make China a powerful country, and which was determined that the best way to do that was to institute what are objectively capitalist economic relations and to implement policies that would give further life to and reinforce all the relations that go along with capitalist economic relations, and would place China squarely within the overall framework of imperialist domination and exploitation on a world scale?

This is not a question of "power struggles" among individuals or cliques. This is a matter of different classes – or of people and groups objectively representing different classes – perceiving more or less correctly their interests as a social force, as a class, and then striving to influence and to utilize the struggle and the aspirations of the masses to change society, to shape society in accordance with those class interests. It was in the interests of this stratum which was constituted, in a real sense, of intellectuals, but intellectuals who had taken up the outlook of the bourgeoisie – once again, political and literary representatives of the bourgeoisie, as Marx spoke to this – it was in the interests of that class, it was in accordance with their aspirations as a class, to institute these capitalist relations, to bring China back within the framework of overall imperialist domination, exploitation and oppression in the world. And this was in direct opposition to those leading people within the Party – again, a group of intellectuals, broadly speaking, but intellectuals who had taken up the viewpoint and were fighting for the revolutionary interests of the proletariat, as a class – who were on the socialist road, as a transition toward the final aim of communism, worldwide. This battle – between the socialist road, and those leading forces representing that road, and on the other hand the capitalist road and those representing it – went on very intensely, even with some partial ebbs and flows, over the whole decade of the GPCR, and it resulted, unfortunately, shortly after the death of Mao in 1976, in the victory of those class forces representing the program of capitalism and imperialism, and the defeat of those representing the program of communism and the ultimate abolition of relations of exploitation and oppression.

In speaking of this battle as taking a concentrated form as the struggle between intellectuals (party leaders) representing, respectively, the socialist road and the capitalist road, I do not mean to, in any way, ignore or downgrade the importance of the role of the masses in all this – to present things as if they were mere spectators, or pawns of contending leading groups, in all this. No, one of the hallmarks of the GPCR was the degree – truly unprecedented in history – to which masses of people, literally in the hundreds of millions, were involved in this massive social upheaval, with at least tens of millions doing so with an unprecedentedly high consciousness of the terms and stakes of this struggle. But the point is, as Lenin summarized (in *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*):

Everyone knows that the masses are divided into classes;...that usually...classes are led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are directed by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are

elected to the most responsible positions and are called leaders. All this is elementary. (As cited in the polemic against K. Venu. See the Appendix to the second [2004] edition of *Phony Communism Is Dead...Long Live **Real** Communism!*, p. 204.)

Even if one is only speaking of self-proclaimed Marxists, it may be the case that Lenin was overly optimistic in asserting that "Everyone knows" this; yet the fact remains that indeed "All this is elementary." But what is more complicated – and this will remain a significant phenomenon so long as the masses are divided into classes, and until the unequal and oppressive social relations bound up with class divisions, including in particular the division between mental and manual labor, are overcome – is that leaders are generally people who, as one of their essential qualities, have a more developed ability to work with ideas (who, generally speaking, are intellectuals). This objective fact, and the gap between such intellectuals and the masses of people, particularly those who are not intellectuals, will be real and have real implications and ramifications, regardless of whether those intellectuals (leaders) themselves come from backgrounds and circumstances that are, generally speaking, those of the petite bourgeoisie, or whether they are drawn from the proletariat and other basic masses.

One of the distinguishing features of intellectuals is that – because of their particular circumstances and the nature of their role in working with ideas – as individuals (and even in a certain sense as a broader social phenomenon) they have relatively more freedom and capacity to "attach themselves" to one class or another, and even to "detach themselves" from one class and "attach themselves" to another. In other words, they can take up the world outlook and come to represent the interests of one class or another. Now, it is generally the case – and this is what Marx is speaking to in discussing the democratic intellectuals and their relation to the shopkeepers – that intellectuals spontaneously, and rather strongly, gravitate to the outlook and interests of the petite bourgeoisie, because that most corresponds to the social position and circumstances of the intelligentsia, as a general rule. But, as we know, certain intellectuals (or even groups of intellectuals) can become high functionaries, and even political leaders, of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, some intellectuals – including intellectuals who come forward in the revolutionary ranks out of the basic masses and develop the ability to work with ideas, to formulate line and policy, on a high level – can and do take up the outlook of and become fighters for the interests of the proletariat. This generally becomes more of a social phenomenon in times of social upheaval, particularly when revolutionary currents are more powerful among the masses of people and in their influence in society overall.

But for those intellectuals who are drawn to the revolutionary cause of the proletariat, in the most fundamental sense, there is the very real challenge of consistently applying the outlook and method of dialectical materialism and not only embarking, but persevering, through all the difficulties, on the road of revolution and, in a real sense, giving over their intellectual capacities, as well as their hearts, to the cause of this revolution and its emancipatory goals. Beyond that, and more especially for those who come to occupy positions of leadership in the vanguard of the proletarian revolution, they face the challenge of not simply providing leadership to that revolution but more specifically doing so in a way that, increasingly, masses of people, particularly from the most exploited and oppressed sectors of society, are enabled to more and more consciously take part in this revolutionary struggle. To put this another way – to speak to another key dimension and profound contradiction characterizing the proletarian-communist revolution and the ways in which it must be fundamentally different from all previous revolutions in human society (and this was spoken to, more than a decade ago now, in "Strategic Questions"¹): All revolutions are led by a small part of society – and in a concentrated way by a leading group which is quite small, relative to the masses of people it is ultimately leading – a leading group which will, in fact, be mainly constituted of people who are intellectuals, generally

speaking, regardless of where those intellectuals come from, in terms of their "social origins." In a very important aspect, this is true of the proletarian revolution, and not simply revolutions led by people embodying the outlook and representing the interests of exploiting classes. The profound, truly world-historic challenge for the proletarian-communist revolution, and for those who lead it, is to bring about the radical leap and rupture beyond the situation – characteristic of all previous revolutions, waged ultimately in the interests of exploiting classes and led by people representing those classes – where the masses are the main fighting force in the revolution (or, to put it more bluntly, do the bulk of the sacrificing and dying in this struggle) but the fruits of this struggle and sacrifice are reaped by forces which are in reality exploiters and oppressors of the masses, where society is once again "remade in the image" of an exploiting class, even if there are certain changes with regard to the particular mode in which this takes place.

To accomplish the radical leap and rupture beyond this involves, and requires, overcoming the mental/manual contradiction as a crucial aspect of achieving the "4 Alls." But this will require a whole historical epoch and can only be achieved on a world scale; and throughout this whole transition, wherever power is seized, the dictatorship of the proletariat established and the revolution continued under this dictatorship, there will be the complex, and at times very intense, contradictions bound up with the fact that overcoming the mental/manual division, and achieving the "4 Alls," must be not only a long-term goal but something that is being concretely "worked at," at every stage of the process, even while, at least for a very long time into this transition, the mental/manual contradiction will remain a very pronounced phenomenon. Handling all this correctly, in the living process of advancing the revolution, with all its complexity, is one of the great challenges of our revolution and its ultimate aim of communism, throughout the world.

Different interests of different class forces in the struggle against the oppression of Black people in the U.S.

As another illustration of the basic point here – regarding the phenomenon of different classes seeking to "remake the world in their image" – we can look at the role of the Black bourgeoisie (and even sections of the Black petite bourgeoisie, but in particular the Black bourgeoisie) in the U.S., in relation to the long struggle of Black people, particularly in the period from shortly after World War 2 up until the present. There are those individuals and groups among Black people who have sought to identify that struggle as nothing more than – and to confine and shape that struggle into – a reformist struggle for, as they put it, "civil rights." In some important ways, there is a parallel here with what happened in South Africa with Mandela. These forces have sought to (mis)direct the struggle into one limited to eliminating certain formal and legal barriers of discrimination and segregation – although such barriers have been far from removed in reality, and in some ways are reinforced more than ever in the schools, in housing and employment, in health care, and in many other spheres. Now, of course, striking down formal laws and codes embodying discrimination and segregation is in the interests of the broad masses of Black people (and the broad masses of people of all nationalities). But the point is that it is in the interests of a section of the bourgeoisie among Black people – and not in the interests of the masses of people – to keep the struggle from breaking out of the bounds of reforms within the existing system. These bourgeois forces have seen that these reforms could offer them the possibility – given the ways in which they are now situated in this society and, relative to the masses of Black people, their more privileged position – to have a more favorable opportunity to improve their situation within the existing framework, to "move on up" within this framework, even in some cases to achieve high positions within this system. Now, in reality and whether or not they recognize it (some may and some may not, but the reality is) this is condemning – and so long as this is what holds sway, it will condemn – the masses of Black people, and indeed Black people as a people, as an oppressed nation within the U.S.,

to continue to suffer horrendous oppression.

It is not so simple as saying that these Black bourgeois forces don't care about that. The fundamental and essential point is that – to go back to Marx's formulation – this is how they see the problem and the solution. Their perspective is that eliminating these formal barriers and allowing people in their position to advance, even perhaps to achieve the pinnacle as has now happened with Obama – to become the leading functionary of the imperialist state with all of its horrors – is the best way that Black people – or at least Black people "in their image" – will be able to advance and "realize the dream." They see their own aspirations and interests as the highest expression of the general good. In a certain sense, this is true of all classes and their representatives: they see the class interests they uphold as representing the general interests, and the general good, of all. The fundamental question is whether this is true or not – and the fundamental difference is that this is true of the proletariat, as a class, in a way that it is not true, and never has been true, of any other class: conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat, from its exploited and oppressed situation, are in fact the necessary and essential conditions for the general emancipation of humanity, the abolition of all relations of exploitation and oppression, throughout the world. But – there is a certain irony in this – precisely with the elimination of certain formal barriers of discrimination and segregation, it is the case that the interests of the Black bourgeoisie, as a class, are objectively (and however they perceive it) in sharp conflict with the interests of the masses of Black people, particularly the masses crowded into and confined and brutalized in the inner cities, as well as the interests of the oppressed and exploited masses in the U.S. and throughout the world in general.

To be clear, this does not mean that the Black bourgeoisie – or at least many among that class – cannot be won to the side of revolution, as things unfold, and through a great deal of struggle; it is both possible and necessary, as a matter of strategic orientation, to win as many as possible among that class to the side of the revolution. And certainly that is true of the Black petite bourgeoisie. But what is crucial and essential to grasp – for the vanguard and for the masses who will be the backbone of the revolutionary struggle – is that forces representing the Black bourgeoisie, or even the Black petite bourgeoisie – the outlook and the interests that correspond to the social positions of those class forces – cannot be in the leading position, or the struggle will not go where it needs to go, in order to achieve the general emancipation of the oppressed and exploited masses, of all nationalities, and the ultimate emancipation of humanity as a whole, throughout the world. Only a vanguard representing and fighting for the interests of the proletariat, as a class, can lead the struggle to achieve such a general emancipation.

All these examples discussed here – which I've only been able to sketch out briefly and in broad strokes – demonstrate the fundamental truth that different class forces contend according to their understanding of the problem and the solution. And, in turn, their different understandings of the problem and solution are essentially shaped by the decisive relations in society – most fundamentally the production relations, but also the social relations and the political relations – and by the differing places and roles of different social groups, or classes, within those overall relations.

But an additional complicating factor, and problem, is that under the rule of exploiters and oppressors – and specifically today under the rule of the imperialists and bourgeois forces – the heavy weight of habit, tradition, and the spontaneity this gives rise to, all go in the direction of exerting a powerful influence in line with the interests and aspirations of the exploiting classes. This is why it requires a conscious rupture on the part of the exploited and oppressed – and on the part of those intellectuals and others who seek to represent them – in order to be able to first of all even recognize, and then to act on the recognition of, the fundamental interests that the exploited and oppressed masses have, in contrast

and in conflict with those of the bourgeoisie, and even more privileged, if not strictly speaking bourgeois, strata, in terms of how the representatives of those strata are pulled to see the problems and the solutions.

The Decisive Importance of Leadership, Leadership Concentrated as Line

All this underlines the crucial importance of line – and leadership – in relation to the question of what kind of change is going to happen, what kind of transformation of society. It is certain that there will be change. There is always change, of one kind or another, and there has been and will again be major change in the world and in human society. Society, like all material reality, cannot and does not stay as it is. It goes through changes, including at certain points major, even qualitative, changes. But the question of line and leadership is decisive in determining ultimately what kind of change, what kind of transformation of society and fundamentally what kind of revolution is going to be possible, even if and when the masses do rise up and demand and fight for radical change.

Lines and social bases – a dialectical relation

In this connection, it is important to re-emphasize a point that we've touched on before, which is the relation, the dialectical materialist relation, between lines and social bases. That is, on the one hand lines reflect certain social bases. Or to put it another way, they represent certain classes. This is a point I've been touching on through the various examples I have discussed here, and in other ways so far in this talk. Lines are a concentration of the fundamental interests and aspirations of different classes; different lines represent different class forces. Again, especially in bourgeois society but even in socialist society, the one class interest which cannot be represented, at least in any full way, spontaneously is that of the proletariat, which in an overall sense represents the interests of the exploited and oppressed masses in general. All other class interests, and the lines representing them, can – under the domination of the bourgeoisie and its ideology and with the whole history of exploiting class rule and the influence of the ideology of exploiting classes – have a lot of spontaneity going with them. But it requires a conscious rupture with spontaneity in order for a line to be brought forward, and in order for masses to recognize and take up a line, that actually represents their fundamental interests as exploited and oppressed classes and masses of people.

So, on the one hand, lines reflect different and opposing social bases or classes. And in a fundamental and essential sense – though not in a straight line, and not all at once – different lines bring forward different social bases. The reason I am giving emphasis to "not in a straight line, and not all at once" can be seen by looking again at the example of the Iranian revolution. One of the decisive things about a revolutionary upheaval – and this is shown, by negative example, in the Iranian revolution – is that the more that it develops, and is not cut short by some sort of an "arrangement at the top," the more the masses are able to become aware of and test out different lines and the programs that are associated with them – different interests and aspirations that are concentrated in these lines and programs. (In other words, in talking about lines I'm speaking of worldviews and programs for social change – or to oppose social change – which correspond to those worldviews.) In a real social upheaval, and especially one that develops to revolutionary dimensions, the people directly involved, and those more broadly who are significantly affected, become increasingly aware of and test out different lines and programs, and over time masses of people more and more gravitate toward those lines and programs that they come to see as basically in line with not only their deeper interests but also their more immediately and acutely felt needs and which, at the same time, offer a realistic means of radically changing things when radical change is what growing numbers of the masses come to see as necessary.

This is directly related to Mao's very correct and much ignored – and, even among some alleged communists, often maligned – insistence that the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line of a communist vanguard is decisive: whether in its outlook and its program and strategy it really represents the interests of the proletariat and other exploited and oppressed masses, and a means for radically transforming society through revolution to begin uprooting exploitation and oppression, together with the same struggle throughout the world; or whether it represents, in one form or another, the reinforcement (or at most a slight adjustment within) those relations of exploitation and oppression. That, in essential terms, is what is meant by the principle that the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line is decisive. As we know, revolutions are very complex processes, and there is no possibility of radically transforming society in the actual interests of the masses of oppressed and exploited people without the leadership of a force which has – and which continually fights to maintain and develop and apply – a correct ideological and political line. This is in fact decisive, no matter how much derision may be poured down on this fundamental concept.

What is communist leadership?

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 – and in particular communist leadership – is, as I have been speaking to, 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 one is leading to themselves increasingly develop their ability to do all this. This is the essence of communist leadership.

It is not a matter of being physically present among this or that group of the masses. I have read reports which recount how people say: "How do we know Avakian really is everything you say he is, why can't we talk to him – how can we tell if he's really all that, if we're not able to see him, or if he's not right out here in our midst?" Among other things, this reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of what communist leadership is and of the practical realities as well as the strategic orientation involved in building a movement for revolution. We are aiming to build a revolutionary movement of millions, toward the goal of actually taking hold of the reins of society and radically transforming it, when the conditions for that have come into being. As much as it is genuinely a great thing to be able to talk to masses, and to learn from them as well as to struggle with them, is it really conceivable that a leader (or any number of leaders, for that matter) of such a revolutionary process, and of the party leading that revolution, could mingle among and talk personally with all those millions of people who must ultimately make up the ranks of the revolution? If we were just thinking in terms of small little circles, and we were not really thinking about transforming society and ultimately the world as a whole, well then, OK, maybe it would be a realistic thing to demand that the small numbers of people who would then be involved be able to have personal contact ("face time") with the leader of that. In that case, however, who cares – it wouldn't have anything to do with what we are supposed to be, and really must be, all about: making revolution and advancing toward the final goal of communism throughout the world. If we are really thinking about millions of people being involved – and, yes, being led – and at the same time learning from those millions of people, and synthesizing all this in a scientific way, in the service of the kind of revolution that is actually needed, then we have to understand that communist

leadership means something radically different from notions of direct, one-to-one contact between leadership and all the masses of people who must be involved in that.

The following (an excerpt from the talk last year, "Out Into the World – As a Vanguard of the Future," which was recently published in *Revolution*) touches on important aspects of this:

"First, the purpose of my writings and talks, and indeed of everything I do as a communist leader, is to apply the outlook and method of dialectical materialism to continue developing a scientific understanding of the world **and to provide leadership in radically transforming it toward the goal of revolution and the final aim of communism.**

"In this connection, while I should, and do, hold myself to a very high standard in terms of intellectual integrity and rigor, and while I respect those who apply the same standards in the realm of academic work, my purpose and approach is not the same as academic scholars who do not play the role of communist leaders. My responsibility, in my particular leadership role, involves (although it is not limited to) addressing the most fundamental contradictions and the most pressing problems in relation to actually making revolution and advancing toward the final goal of communism, and giving leadership to others in doing so. One aspect of this is to continually make, and popularize, an analysis and assessment of the ever changing 'political terrain' – the objective conditions and the role of different political and social forces in relation to those objective conditions. Another key dimension of this is to speak to the questions on the minds of proletarians and other basic masses, as well as people of other strata, particularly with regard to things that may weigh on them and pose obstacles in relation to their seeing both the necessity and the possibility of communist revolution, and acting on that understanding – questions which most academics largely ignore and which many are frankly ignorant of. In a larger sense, with regard to theory and intellectual work, my particular role is not only to strive myself to meet the pressing and profound needs in the realm of developing theory, line and strategic orientation, to serve the goal of revolution and the ultimate aim of communism, but also to inspire – and, yes, to provoke – others in this regard and more generally in terms of taking initiative in working with ideas and wrangling in the realm of theory, broadly speaking; to help provide a continually deepening foundation and developing framework for those seeking to apply the outlook and method of communism to engage in theoretical and analytical work, covering a broad range of fields; and to challenge others, beyond the ranks of communists, to seriously engage with such a communist method and approach and the theory and analysis that results from the application of that method and approach." ("On The Role Of Communist Leadership And Some Basic Questions Of Orientation, Approach And Method," in *Revolution* #156, February 15, 2009, emphasis in original)

The Social Basis for Revolution

This brings me to some other very important statements by Marx, which were cited in the book *Ghana: End of an Illusion*, by Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer. This book was written more than 40 years ago, analyzing the rise and fall of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and the larger social and international relations bound up with this. In speaking about the partial revolution – or, in fact, reforms within the system of imperialism and exploitation that people grouped around Nkrumah were seeking to carry out in Ghana – Fitch and Oppenheimer quote Marx to contrast that experience with a "total revolution,"

that is, a real revolution that involves the radical transformation of society. Fitch and Oppenheimer themselves put it this way:

"Another characteristic of a 'total' revolution is that the class which forms the basis of the revolutionary movement must be one which has 'radical chains' to break.... Marx says that it must be a class in but not of civil society." (Fitch & Oppenheimer, *Ghana: End Of An Illusion*, Monthly Review Press, 1966, p. 24, emphasis in original)

And then, in elaboration of this point, they quote Marx directly, emphasizing that the basis of the revolution must be a social group, or class, which represents a

"sphere of society which has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done to it is not a particular wrong but wrong in general. There must be formed a sphere of society which claims no traditional status but only human status, a sphere which is not opposed to particular consequences but is totally opposed to the assumptions of the...political system." (As cited in Fitch & Oppenheimer, p. 24)

This relates back to – it is in a sense another way of stating – what was discussed earlier in relation to Marx's observations in "The 18th Brumaire," and specifically the profound differences in how different class forces and their political and literary (or intellectual) representatives see the problems and solutions. The Black bourgeoisie in the U.S., the forces grouped around Mandela in South Africa, Gandhi in India, the forces around Khomeini in Iran, and so on, see (or saw) things not in a universal way, but in a particular way; what they advocate and strive for embodies a particular or a partial redress, or change, not a universal redress – not a sweeping, radical transformation of the existing system. They represent, in fact, a traditional status – not, as the proletariat does (as it becomes a revolutionary force, on the basis of its fundamental interests as a class) a sweeping away of tradition's chains.

Ghana: End of an Illusion also cites Marx speaking to what he refers to as a "partial, merely political revolution." "What is the basis," Marx asks, of such a "partial, merely political revolution?" Marx answers as follows:

"Simply this: *a fraction of a civil society* emancipates itself and achieves a dominant position; a certain class undertakes, *from its particular situation*, a general emancipation of society. This class emancipates society as a whole, but only on condition that the whole of society is in the same situation as this class, for example, that it possesses or can acquire money or culture." (As cited in Fitch & Oppenheimer, p. 23, emphasis in original)

Now of course, Marx's statement here embodies irony: he doesn't actually mean that under the leadership of such a class, and in the remaking of society in the interests and the image of this class, all of society can actually do this (put itself into the same position as this class). The essential point is that this is how these more privileged and even exploiting strata and classes see the remaking of society, even when they are driven toward that objective: they believe, and insist, that the general conditions of society should conform to their particular interests and way of approaching things – in other words, their particular status and aspirations – rather than there being a "springing into the air" and a radical transformation of society as a whole, leading to the abolition of tradition and tradition's chains.

Also, as something of an aside but definitely related to this, there is a very interesting and in some ways humorous observation by Engels which is cited in this same book, *Ghana: End of an Illusion*. Speaking

about the counter-revolution which drowned in blood the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, Engels wrote,

"...when you inquire into the causes of the counter revolutionary successes, there you are met on every hand with the ready-made reply that it was 'Mister This' or 'Citizen That' who betrayed the people. Which reply may be very true or not, according to the circumstances. But under no circumstances does it explain anything, not even how it came to pass that the people allowed themselves to be thus betrayed. And what poor chance stands a political party whose entire stock in trade consists in the knowledge of the solitary fact that 'Citizen So-and-So' is not to be trusted." (As cited in Fitch & Oppenheimer, p. 10)

How much has this kind of "analysis," which Engels so rightly ridiculed, been repeated since then, including right around us today!

This, in turn, calls to mind that very insightful and concentrated observation by Lenin which for very good reason we have many times cited:

"People always were and always will be the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit," [note very well: "and self-deceit"] in politics until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. The supporters of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling classes." (Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," as cited in *Phony Communism is Dead...Long Live Real Communism!*, second [2004] edition, p. 122, emphasis in original)

How profoundly true – and how profoundly relevant once again these days!

Indeed, this kind of approach, on which Lenin is critically commenting, is very pronounced today, especially when among the oppressed and exploited masses – and, in fact, among all strata of the people, including notably the intelligentsia – there is almost everything but a materialist understanding of things, and especially of society and its historical development. There is a glaring lack of understanding – and a crying need for people to understand – that there is a system whose basic contradictions and dynamics set the terms of things in a fundamental sense; and for people to be given, in a living and compelling way, a materialist analysis and a materialist estimate, as Lenin put it, of how this system actually works and of the role of different classes and social forces in relation to all this.

And here, speaking again about different social forces, their understanding of the problem and their aspirations towards a solution, there is a very relevant observation by Jack Belden in his book *China Shakes the World*, which was cited in a report by a leading comrade of our party recently:

"No social revolution, either good or bad, ever took place without the existence of a great mass of disinherited people who could furnish a new group with a base of support. In the women of China, the Communists possessed, almost ready-made, one of the greatest masses of disinherited human beings the world has ever seen. And because they found the key to the heart of these women, they also found one of the keys to victory over Chiang Kai-shek."

This recalls the crucial analysis that is contained in the passage that was cited earlier from Marx, speaking to what is necessary in order to have a "total revolution."

What a revolution really is...and really is not

This question is not only important in a general and fundamental sense, but it takes on particular

significance in relation to the current "Obama phenomenon," and some of the deeper emotions his candidacy – and still more his election (and inauguration) – have called forth, and the ways in which, sad to say, this has blinded some people to what Obama is really all about and the actual nature of the system of which he's a part, of which in fact he is now the chief executive and commander-in-chief.

In this connection, perhaps the following story will shed some light. Back in the '70s when Idi Amin was still the head of the government in Uganda, I went to a party that was held at the house of one of our comrades, and there were some masses from the local area there, including a number of Black people. I was going around and listening to different conversations and just enjoying myself, but also seeking to find out what people were talking about, and in one corner there was a very lively discussion and debate about Idi Amin: One of the Black people there was vigorously upholding and defending Idi Amin, who in reality was both a flunky of imperialism and a brutal oppressor in his own right. And, finally, after listening for a while, I kind of broke in and said: "I understand, I saw that picture of Idi Amin making those British citizens carry him around on all fours. I understand the feelings that evokes. I understand why that made you feel good. But we have to get beyond that to see what Idi Amin really is." And then we began to talk about what Amin really represented – and did not represent.

The desire for revenge (for "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first") and to see one of "your own" actually "make it to the top" – this, especially under a system like this and with the pull of its ideology and the notion that the point of change is for oppressed individuals to "have their chance" to be in a position of privilege and power, is understandably, even if very wrongly, quite strong. And, to come up to the present situation in the U.S., we hear of many people, particularly Black people, saying things like: "We've had a revolution, it's a new America." No, we haven't had a revolution, and it's not a new America. There is something different going on: You have a different kind of president who comes from a different place, and has a different color, if you will. But that is not a revolution, and it is not a new America. It's the same old America, the same old imperialist state, trying to get over better in the world, as well as among people in the U.S. – including Black people in particular – with its murderous and brutally oppressive program.

Malcolm X, even with certain definite limitations in his outlook and understanding, had many important insights, and among them was the way in which he made the point that revolutions are not just a change within the existing system, and that revolutions are not made through the ballot box. As he put it, revolutions overturn systems. This is not what's happened with the election of Obama. What system has been overturned? What fundamental relations in society and the world have been radically changed, in the interests of the masses of people? None. A change of face, a change of color, is not a revolution and it does not a "new America" make.

In a very concise and scientific way, Mao Tsetung spoke to what a revolution is, when he pointed out that a revolution means nothing less than the overthrow of one class by another. A revolution means that the hold of a reactionary ruling class over society – as concentrated in that class's monopoly of political power, embodied in a state (armed forces, courts and prisons, bureaucracies, etc.) representing and serving the interests of that ruling class – is broken and thoroughly dismantled, through a determined struggle of masses of people, organized around a program of radical change – and a new state, representing the interests of a rising revolutionary class, is established in place of the old state. It means that a whole different system is brought into being.

Which class in America has been overthrown, by which other class, with the election of Obama? What new state has been brought into being? What new system? None. It's the same class ruling and the same system, being presided over by a new face with a new color. It's not even "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last." It's just one of those who looks like the "last" joining, and heading up, the "first" to

keep the "last" last.

The revolution we need – a real revolution, and in particular a revolution aiming for the final goal of communism – has to set its sights on first bringing into being a radically new state, which represents the revolutionary interests of the proletariat in finally abolishing all relations of exploitation and oppression. And then the revolution must be carried forward from there. The long-term and fundamental aim of this revolution is uprooting and eliminating class antagonisms, indeed all class divisions, and everything bound up with this; and in achieving this, throughout the world, the conditions will be created for the withering away of the state – as an instrument of organized, forcible class suppression – and its replacement by forms of association and functioning among the people that enable them to make decisions affecting their interaction with the rest of nature, and their interaction with each other, without class distinctions or any oppressive divisions. This obviously involves something radically different and better than "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last." But the election of Obama is not even that.

Revolutions are called forth fundamentally by contradictions in the economic base – by the way in which people are exploited and the way in which the functioning of the economy proceeds through certain relations among people which have become outmoded, which can no longer meet the needs of society in a fundamental sense. This – through many different channels and not directly one-to-one, but nevertheless in an overall sense – calls forth the need for radical change in society, and people more or less consciously come to an understanding of this and act to bring about changes in accordance with their understanding.

At the same time, as I have emphasized before, while they proceed from, or are called forth by, contradictions in the economic base of society – with the outmoded character of the fundamental economic relations, and the way in which they are a fetter on society, becoming particularly acute – revolutions are not made in the sphere of production. They are made in the realm of the superstructure of politics and ideology, through a struggle which ultimately takes its highest and most concentrated form in the all-out struggle to determine who – that is, which class, representing which economic and political and social system and relations – will actually rule society and transform society in accordance with how its most conscious representatives understand the problems and the solutions. That is what a revolution is. Measure that against the election of Obama and see how his election stands in relation to that.

The communist revolution is a radically different revolution from all previous ones, in that it is made in the interests of, and fundamentally by, the class – that is, the proletariat – whose interests lie not simply in changing positions within society (let alone just changing some faces) but in radically transforming society to abolish all economic, social and political relations, and all ideas and culture, which embody and enforce exploitation and oppression – not just in one place or one part of the world, but throughout the world as a whole. It involves and requires the advance to a society, a world, not divided into classes and into oppressors and oppressed, a communist society and world.

Winning people to be communists, emancipators of humanity

In light of that, I want to speak once again to the crucial importance of bringing forward and continually strengthening the communist solid core of, in turn, a broader revolutionary movement – a movement aiming for revolution and nothing less. This stresses once again the great importance of struggling to win people to the whole orientation of being emancipators of humanity, in opposition to notions of revenge – "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last"; "this is my chance to have a go at being in the top position," and so on – which is, to a large degree, the spontaneous way in which people

see the question of change in society, when and insofar as they think about this. So there has to be a struggle for people to break out of, to rupture with, that outlook, and to become emancipators of humanity – to be striving consciously for the abolition of not just this or that particular oppressive relation, and not just a change of place within the framework of oppression and exploitation, but the abolition of all oppression and exploitation throughout the world.

This underlines why it is so crucial to pay so much attention, now, to questions of the communist outlook, orientation and aims, in contrast to outlooks and programs representing the interests and aspirations of other classes, and particularly in contrast to the outlook and interests of the bourgeoisie and to what is concentrated in the phrase "bourgeois right": the notion of "right" (or rights) within the framework of bourgeois society, a society dominated by an exploiting class, a society founded on, embodying and enforcing relations of exploitation. There is a crucial importance to this if there is ever going to really be a revolution and if that revolution is actually going to lead to a radically new world.

At the same time, while it is important to wage this struggle among basic masses – the exploited proletarians and others held down at the base of society – there is also the crucial importance of winning over a section of intellectuals – and, more broadly speaking, educated youth – to the vision but also the actual goal of communism. Repeatedly, we see that the strivings of youth for a better world, even to the degree that they do get spontaneously expressed, become diverted, and perverted, degraded and vitiated by the ruling class. And, again, Obama's role is a concentrated example of that. We see a lot of youth today, for example, rallying to Obama's broad call to do "service" to the country in one form or another – not simply military service, but even service in other ways – in education or in terms of the infrastructure or other needs of the country, as these are perceived and framed by the ruling class that Obama is a representative of and serves. What Obama is calling for is service to imperialism – to the bloody system which crushes, degrades and brutalizes, and literally slaughters millions of people, year after year, decade after decade, in the service of exploitation, and to reinforce oppressive relations, including those between oppressor and oppressed nations and peoples, and the oppression of women.

There is, with Obama, this whole echo today of John Kennedy's [speaking in New England accent]: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Obama is very consciously echoing this with his call to service. And, as an article in issue number 153 of *Revolution* pointed out, this is being directed, distorted and perverted toward service to U.S. imperialism. This is something people learned back in the 1960s. One very significant manifestation of this occurred with people who went into the Peace Corps and then found out what imperialism was actually doing and what they were being directed and led to do as part of an imperialist agency – and who then came back and formed groups like Returned Volunteers, which were explicitly anti-imperialist. They learned in those times, in a situation where people were rising up against imperialism around the world, what the actual relations were that they were being called on to give service to, by being part of imperialist agencies like the Peace Corps. They learned that things like the Peace Corps were an "adjunct" to, and part of the same overall apparatus as, the U.S. military, the CIA, and other instruments of violent, life-crushing imperialist domination and exploitation – and they rebelled against that. This underscores how crucial it is that people break out of the imperialist-constructed framework in which they are conditioned to see the possibility of making contributions to a better world: the ways in which that is distorted and perverted to the literally bloodthirsty aims of imperialism – yes, as represented by Obama, no less than Clinton, no less than "W" Bush, and all the others.

At the same time, we see how in the world today there is the growing phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism, an outmoded world-view, representing outmoded relations, highly oppressive relations, including the enslavement of women in many different forms. People are drawn to that

because they see it as a force actually opposing the dominant imperialist powers of the West (however they understand that), represented above all by the U.S. In this connection it is worth recalling again the comment made by a bourgeois observer about people in England who carried out what were objectively acts of terrorism there, on the basis of being influenced by this Islamic fundamentalist ideology. He noted that a generation ago these people, or many of them, would have been Maoists. Now, as I've stressed before, the point is most decidedly not that Maoists carry out the same kind of tactics as Islamic fundamentalists – clearly communists have a very different world outlook and different fundamental objectives and, flowing from that, very different tactics – but the essential point here is that a few decades ago, in circumstances where, in the world overall, revolutionary communism had a much more powerful impact and influence, such people, or many of them, would have been in a radically different and much better place, being drawn to a radically different and truly liberating world outlook and a whole different strategy for changing the world that relies upon and draws forward the masses of people, women no less than men, and aims to uproot all relations of exploitation and oppression, and doesn't seek to terrorize sections of the people into accepting a new form of oppression, or a slightly altered form of oppression.

In this context it is also worth recalling a front page article in the *New York Times*, on December 24 of last year (2008), where it quotes a youth in a Middle Eastern country, saying that the Islamic fundamentalist movement is for youth like him what Pan-Arabism was for his parents' generation.

This general phenomenon is something that I've pointed to and analyzed in some depth in the book *Away With All Gods! – Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World*. But one thing that was not sufficiently spoken to there (I have spoken to this elsewhere but I actually wish I had spoken to it more in that book...but I'll speak to it here [laughs]) is that, besides the phenomenon of masses of poor people from the countryside – peasants and so on – being uprooted and thrown into the urban areas, and in particular the shantytowns, in countries throughout the Third World, there is also the phenomenon of educated youth who are, however, educated (as one bourgeois commentator put it) on a certain narrow foundation: people who go to college to become engineers or technicians or similar occupations, but find their aspirations for that thwarted by the corruption of the governments in those countries (this is how many of these youth spontaneously see this), but fundamentally by the fact that the economy of those countries and their role within the overall framework of imperialism cannot provide an outlet for these aspirations – to put it simply, cannot provide enough positions and jobs for people who do get the education and training in these spheres. This is one of the sources that is feeding organized Islamic fundamentalist trends and movements within many of these countries. And this is feeding Islamic fundamentalism – and other religious fundamentalism – in today's world more broadly.

In opposition to this, there is a need to much more broadly and deeply capture the imagination of people generally, basic masses but also educated youth – to inspire them with the vision of communism and win them to its truly liberating outlook and goals, win them to truly be emancipators of humanity seeking to abolish all shackles, mental as well as economic, social and political, that hold down the masses of people – as a key part of building the overall movement for revolution, toward the final aim of a communist world. This is an extremely important point, and something I'll come back to: the attractiveness of what is represented by communism, and the need to much more boldly and vigorously put this forward and fight for it among educated youth, as well as among basic masses, and other sections of the people.

- 1 *Strategic Questions* was a talk by Bob Avakian in the mid-1990s, and selections from it were published in the *Revolutionary Worker* (now *Revolution*) in issues #881 and #884-893 (November 1996 through February 1997) and in issues #1176-1178 (November 24 through December 8, 2002). These selections can also be found online at revcom.us/avakian/avakian-works.html.