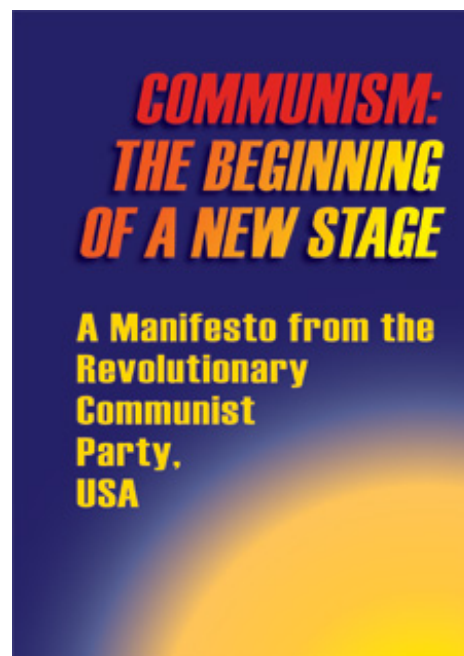


THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STAGE A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

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COMMUNISM:
THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STAGE

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Despite what is constantly preached at us, this capitalist system we live under, this way of life that constantly drains away—or in an instant blows away—life for the great majority of humanity, does *not* represent the best possible world—nor the only possible world. The ways in which the daily train of life has, for centuries and millennia, caused the great majority of humanity to be weighed down, broken in body and spirit, by oppression, agony, degradation, violence and destruction, and the dark veil of ignorance and superstition, is *not* the fault of this suffering humanity—nor is this the “will” of some non-existent god or gods, or the result of some unchanging and unchangeable “human nature.” All this is the expression, and the result, of the way human society has developed up to this point under the domination of exploiters and oppressors...but that very development has brought humanity to the point where what has been, for thousands of years, no longer has to be—where a whole different way of life is possible in which human beings, individually and above all in their mutual interaction with each other, in all parts of the world, can throw off the heavy chains of tradition and rise to their full height and thrive in ways never before experienced, or even fully imagined.

I.
The Long Darkness— and the Historic Breakthrough

Exploitative economic and social relations, including the systematic domination of women by men and the division of human society into different classes with conflicting interests, have not always existed among human beings. A situation in which a small group monopolizes not only wealth but the very means to live, and thereby forces far greater numbers to slave under their command, in one form or another, while that small group also monopolizes political power and the means of enforcing this exploitation and dominates the intellectual and cultural life of society, condemning the vast majority to ignorance and subservience—this has not always been part of human society. Nor is this destined to remain the way human beings relate to each other, so long as human beings continue to exist. These oppressive divisions arose thousands of years ago, replacing early forms of communal society, which themselves had existed for thousands of years, and which were made up of relatively small groups of people holding in common their most important possessions and working cooperatively to meet their needs and to raise new generations.

The break-up of these early communal societies was not due to some “natural inclination” of people to seek a superior position above others and to “get ahead” at the expense of others, nor to some supposed “genetic predisposition” of men to subjugate women or of one “race” of people to conquer and plunder other “races.” No doubt there were conflicts at times when people in early communal societies encountered each other and were not able to readily reconcile the differences between them, but these societies were not characterized by institutionalized oppressive divisions with which we are all too familiar today. To people in those communal societies the idea of some people within these societies establishing themselves as the masters over others, and seeking to acquire wealth and power by forcing others to work for them, would have seemed strange and outrageous. Rather, the emergence of class divisions and oppressive social relations among people was owing to changes in the ways human beings interacted with the “external” natural environment, and in particular changes in the ways these human beings carried out the production of the material requirements of life and the reproduction and rearing of new generations.

In particular, once the organization of this production and reproduction began to be carried out in such a way that individuals, instead of society as a whole, began to control the surplus produced by society, above and beyond what was necessary for mere survival, and especially once people settled more or less permanently on specific segments of land and began to carry out agricultural production on the land they settled, then the long night was ushered in, in which human beings have been divided into masters and slaves, the powerful and the powerless, those who rule and those who are ruled over, those whose role is decisive in determining the direction of society, and those whose destiny is shaped in this way, even while they have no effective role in determining that destiny.

Throughout these thousands of years of darkness for the great majority of humanity, people have dreamed of a different life—where slavery, rape, wars of plunder, and a lifetime of alienation, agony, and despair would no longer constitute “the human

condition.” This yearning for a different world has found expression in different forms of religious fantasy—looking beyond this world to a god or gods who supposedly control human destiny and who supposedly will, in some future existence, if not in this life, finally reward those who have endured endless suffering during their time on earth. But there have also been repeated attempts to actually change things in this world. There have been revolts and uprisings, massive rebellions, armed conflicts, and even revolutions in which societies, and the relations between different societies, were transformed in major ways. Empires have fallen, monarchies have been abolished, slave owners and feudal lords have been overthrown. But for hundreds and thousands of years, while many people’s lives were sacrificed, willingly or unwillingly, in these struggles, the result was always that the rule of one group of exploiters and oppressors was replaced by that of another—in one form or another, a small part of society continued to monopolize wealth, political power, and intellectual and cultural life, dominating and oppressing the great majority and engaging repeatedly in wars with rival states and empires.

All this remained fundamentally unchanged—the light of a new day never appeared for the masses of humanity, despite all their sacrifice and struggle... Until, a little more than 100 years ago, something radically new emerged: people rising up who embodied not only the desire but the potential to put an end to all relations of exploitation and oppression and all destructive antagonistic conflicts among human beings, everywhere in the world. In 1871, amidst a war between “their” government and that of Germany, working people in the capital city of France, long exploited, impoverished, and degraded, rose up to seize power and established a new form of association among people. This was the Paris Commune, which existed only in that one part of France, and which lasted for only two short months, but which represented, in embryonic form, a communist society in which distinctions of class and oppressive divisions among people would be finally abolished. The Commune was crushed by the weight and force of the old order—with thousands slaughtered in a valiant but ultimately vain attempt to keep the Commune alive. But the first steps had been taken toward a new world, the path had been opened, the way shown, if only fleetingly then.

Even before the events of the Paris Commune, the possibility of a radically new world, without exploitation and oppression, had been scientifically established through the work of Karl Marx, together with his contemporary and collaborator, Frederick Engels, the founders of the communist movement. As Marx himself put it, only a few years before the Commune:

Once the inner connection is grasped, all theoretical belief in the permanent necessity of existing conditions breaks down before their collapse in practice.¹

And that is what Marx had done: He had scientifically excavated and brought to light not only the “inner connections” of the system of capitalism, which had become the dominant form of exploitation in Europe and was increasingly colonizing large parts of the world, but also the “inner connections” between capitalism and all previous forms of

human society—and in so doing he had shown that there was no “permanent necessity” either for the continuation of capitalism or for the existence of any other society based on the exploitation and oppression of the many by the few. This was a profound breakthrough in human beings’ understanding of reality, which established the theoretical basis for a world-historic breakthrough in practice, for an unprecedented revolutionization of human society and the relations among people, all over the world.

The most fundamental discovery that Marx made was that the character of human society, and the relations among people in society, is not determined by the ideas and the wills of individuals—either individual human beings or fantastical supernatural beings—but by the necessity people face in producing and reproducing the material requirements of life *and* the way in which people come together, and the means they utilize, to meet that necessity. In today’s world, with the highly sophisticated technology that exists—and, in particular, for those who are more removed from the actual process of producing the basic requirements of life—it can be easy to forget that, if the productive activity is not carried out to meet these basic requirements (food, shelter, transportation, and so on), and if human societies are not capable of reproducing their own populations, then life will soon come to a standstill, and all the things that go on in society, whose functioning is more or less taken for granted so long as things are proceeding “normally,” will no longer be possible. To penetrate beneath all the complex layers of human historical development and social organization to this underlying foundation and essential core of human social functioning was a great achievement and invaluable contribution of Marx.

But Marx also showed that, at any given time, whatever the means are with which people carry out the production and reproduction of the material requirements of life—whatever is the character of the *forces of production* (the land and raw materials, the technology, whether simple or more complex, and the people themselves with their knowledge and abilities)—will basically and ultimately determine the way in which people are organized, the *relations of production* into which people enter, in order to best utilize the productive forces. Again, Marx showed that these relations of production are not a matter of the will, or the whims, of individuals, no matter how powerful, but must, of necessity, basically conform to the character of the productive forces at any given time. For example, if the information technology and related processes of production that are pivotal in today’s modern economies were introduced into societies made up of small groups of people foraging and hunting over large areas (relative to the size of their populations), which was the way of life in early communal societies, the introduction of this technology would bring about dramatic changes in the character of those societies: their way of life would be disrupted and changed in significant ways. Nor, for example, could modern technology be efficiently utilized in the plantation agriculture that was the backbone of the way of life in the southern United States, during the period of slavery and for nearly a hundred years after literal slavery was abolished through the Civil War in the 1860s. That plantation agriculture was marked by a low level of technology but very labor-intensive work carried out, first, by large numbers of slaves and then by sharecroppers and farm laborers: back-breaking toil from “can’t see in the morning till

can't see at night." And in fact, in the period after World War 2 in particular, the introduction of new technology into southern agriculture—especially tractors and mechanized planting and picking machines, on an increasing scale—undermined the old plantation system and was a major impetus in driving many Black people, who had been formerly chained to the land in one form or another, *off* the land and into the cities of the North as well as the South. And this, in turn, constituted an important part of the material basis on which the struggle was waged to end legal segregation and open terror by the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacists—a struggle which, through tremendous sacrifice and heroism, brought about very significant changes in U.S. society, and in the position of Black people in particular, even while it did not, and could not, put an end to the oppression of Black people, which has been, and today remains, an integral and essential element of the capitalist-imperialist system in the U.S.²

This illustrates another crucial fact brought to light by Marx: On the foundation of the existing production relations at any given time, there will arise a *superstructure* of politics and ideology—political structures, institutions and processes, ways of thinking, and culture—which in a fundamental sense must and will correspond to, and in turn serve to maintain and reinforce, the existing production relations. And Marx further demonstrated, since the time that changes in the productive forces led to the emergence of production relations characterized by subjugation and domination, society has been divided into different *classes*, whose position in society is grounded in their differing roles in the process of production. In class-divided society, it is the economically dominant class—that group in society which monopolizes ownership and control of the major means of production (technology, land and raw materials, etc.)—which will also dominate the superstructure of politics and ideology. This economically dominant class will exercise a monopoly of political power. This monopoly of political power is embodied in the *state*—particularly the instruments of political suppression, including the police as well as the army, the legal system and penal institutions, as well as the executive power—and it assumes a concentrated expression in the monopoly of “legitimate” armed force. So, too, the dominant ways of thinking that hold sway in society, including as this is expressed in the culture, will correspond to the outlook and interests of the dominant class (as Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, so long as society is divided into classes, the ruling ideas of any age are ever the ideas of its ruling class).

Then what is the fundamental basis, and what are the underlying, driving forces, of *change* in society? Marx analyzed how, through the activity and innovation of human beings, the productive forces are being continually developed, and at a certain point the new productive forces that have been developed will come into antagonism with the existing relations of production (and the superstructure of politics and ideology that corresponds to those production relations). At that point, as Marx characterized it, the existing production relations have become, in an overall sense, a fetter, a chain, on the productive forces; and when this situation emerges, a revolution must be carried out whose fundamental aim is to revolutionize the production relations, to bring them into line with the productive forces, to bring about a situation where the production relations are now more an appropriate form for the development of the productive forces, rather

than a fetter on that development. Such a revolution will be driven forward by forces representing a class which embodies the potential for carrying out this transformation of the production relations, to bring them into line, essentially, with the way in which the productive forces have developed. But this revolution must, and can only, take place in the *superstructure*—in the struggle for political power over society, through the overthrow and dismantling of the old state power and the establishment of a new state power—which then makes possible the transformation of the production relations, as well as the superstructure itself, in line with the interests of the new ruling class and its ability to more fully unleash and utilize the productive forces.

Of course, revolution is an extremely complex process, involving many different people and groups with a diversity of views and aims, and those who carry out such a revolution may be more or less conscious of what are the underlying contradictions—between the forces of production and the relations of production—whose development has established the need and given rise to the dynamics that make such a revolution possible, and necessary. But ultimately the influence of these contradictions and dynamics will bring to the fore those who can and do act essentially in accordance with the need to transform the production relations to bring them into line with the development of the productive forces. This is what happened, for example, in the French revolution of the late 18th century and early 19th century, the most radical of all bourgeois revolutions: Many different class forces and social groups took part in that revolution, but in the final analysis it was political forces who proceeded to establish the capitalist system, in place of the old feudal system, who were able to entrench themselves in power, fundamentally because this transformation of the economy, and of the society as a whole on that foundation, represented the necessary means for bringing the relations of production into line with the way in which the productive forces had developed.

The American Civil War also provides an illustration of the basic principles and methods that Marx developed and applied to human historical development. This Civil War came about fundamentally as a result of the fact that two different modes of production—characterized by different systems of production relations: capitalism and slavery—had come into antagonistic conflict with each other, and could no longer co-exist within the same country. And the result of this Civil War was that, with the victory of the capitalist class, centered in the North, the slave system was abolished and the capitalist system became dominant in the country as a whole—even though, especially after a brief period of Reconstruction following the Civil War, the southern landowning aristocracy and developing capitalists in the South were re-integrated into the ruling class of the country as a whole, and in fact have had a major influence within that ruling class, while the former slaves were subjugated once again, in forms of exploitation and oppression hardly less onerous than slavery (and some forms of actual slavery continued to exist, particularly in the South, long after slavery was legally and formally abolished).

From these historical examples, it can be seen how, in the revolutions that have brought about qualitative changes in society but have nevertheless only led to the establishment of a new exploiting class in the dominant position, the pattern has repeated itself that the masses of oppressed people sacrifice (or are sacrificed) in these revolutions (for example, 200,000 former slaves fought on the side of the North in the U.S. Civil War, once they were allowed to do so, and they died in much greater percentages than others in the Union army) yet, in the final analysis, exploiters of the masses, new or old, reap the fruits of this sacrifice. This is the way it has been since the time that class divisions, and domination by exploiting classes, have emerged in and have characterized human society. This was all that was possible...*Until now.*

The most significant, and liberating, thing that Marx brought to light is that the development of human society, as a result of the dynamics which he unearthed, has led to a situation where a radically different world is possible. We have reached the point where, through all the complex development that has only been sketched out here in very basic terms, the productive forces now exist which make it possible to create, and to continually expand, an abundance which, in fundamental terms, can be shared among humanity as a whole and utilized to meet the material needs of people everywhere, while also providing for an ever-enriched intellectual and cultural life for everyone. It is not only that the technology has developed which makes this possible in a general sense, but also that this technology can be—and in fact must be—used by large groups of people working cooperatively. Marx revealed the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist system which dominates the world today, at such great cost and with such great peril for humanity: the contradiction between the socialized way in which production is carried out, and the fact that this process of production, and what it produces, is controlled and appropriated privately, by a small number of capitalists. As the *Constitution* of our Party emphasizes:

[I]n today's world the production of things, and the distribution of the things produced, is overwhelmingly carried out by large numbers of people who work collectively and are organized in highly coordinated networks. At the foundation of this whole process is the *proletariat*, an international class which owns nothing, yet has created and works these massive socialized productive forces. These tremendous productive powers *could* enable humanity to not only meet the basic needs of every person on the planet, but to build a new society, with a whole different set of social relations and values...a society where all people could truly and fully flourish together.³

To achieve this—to resolve, through revolutionary means, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, and to move beyond the division of human beings into exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled—is the aim of the communist revolution. This is a revolution that corresponds to the most fundamental interests of the proletariat, which carries out, under conditions of capitalist domination and exploitation, socialized production and which embodies the potential to bring the relations of production into line with the productive forces, and to further unleash those productive forces, including the people themselves. But, unlike all previous classes which have carried out a revolution in their

interests, the revolutionary proletariat does not aim simply to establish itself and its political representatives in the ruling position in society; it aims to *move beyond* the division of society into classes, to uproot all oppressive relations, and with that to eliminate all institutions and instruments through which one part of society dominates and suppresses others. As Marx succinctly summarized it, this revolution aims for—and will be concluded only once it has achieved—what have come to be called the “4 Alls”: the abolition of all class distinctions, of all the production relations on which those class distinctions rest, of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations. Marx also succinctly and powerfully captured the essence of this in emphasizing that the proletariat can emancipate itself only by emancipating all humanity.

All this is why the communist revolution represents the most radical, and truly liberating, revolution in human history.

In surveying the immense historical experience that went into the conclusions he drew, Marx pointed to the profound understanding that indeed people make history, but they do not make it in any way they wish. They make it on the basis of the material conditions—and in particular the underlying economic conditions and relations—which they have inherited from previous generations, and the possible pathways of change that reside within the contradictory nature of these conditions. As Bob Avakian, the Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has pointed out in “Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity” (Part 1):

We can make an analogy here to evolution in the natural world. One of the points that is repeatedly stressed in the book on evolution by Ardea Skybreak is that the process of evolution can only bring about changes on the basis of what already exists.... Evolution in the natural world comes about, and can only come about, through changes that arise on the basis of, and in relation to, the existing reality and the existing constraints (or, to put it another way, the existing necessity).⁴

This provides the basic answer to those who raise: Who are you to say how society can be organized, what right do you communists have to dictate what change is possible and how it should come about? These questions are essentially misplaced and represent a fundamental misunderstanding of the dynamics of historical development—and the possible pathways of change—in human society as well as in the material world more generally. This is akin to asking why birds cannot give birth to crocodiles—or why human beings cannot produce offspring that are capable of flying around the earth, on their own, in an instant, leaping tall buildings in a single bound, and having x-ray vision that can see through solid objects—and demanding to know: Who are you to dictate what can come about through reproduction, who are you to say that human offspring will have particular characteristics and not others? It is not a matter of “who are you” but of what the material reality is and what possibilities for change actually lie within the—contradictory—character of that material reality. The point here is twofold:

For the first time in the history of humanity, the material conditions have come into being that make possible the final abolition of relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation; and the theoretical understanding to guide the struggle toward that goal has been brought into being on the basis of drawing from the material reality, and its historical development, that has brought this possibility into being.

At the same time, this world-historic transformation of human social relations can only come about on the basis of proceeding from the actual material conditions and the contradictions that characterize them, which open up this possibility but which also embody obstacles to the achievement of this radical social transformation; and it requires a scientific understanding of and approach to these contradictory dynamics—and the leadership of an organized group of people that is grounded in this scientific method and approach—in order to carry through the complex and arduous struggle to achieve this transformation through the advance to communism throughout the world.

II. The First Stage of Communist Revolution

The Paris Commune was a first great attempt to scale the heights of human emancipation, and it was a harbinger of the future, but it lacked the necessary leadership and was not guided by the necessary scientific understanding to be able to withstand the inevitable counter-revolutionary onslaughts of the forces of the old order and then to carry out a thoroughgoing transformation of society, in all spheres: economic, social, political, cultural, and ideological. Some who approach the experience of the Commune with a romanticized, instead of a scientific, outlook and method like to cite the lack of an organized vanguard leadership, unified on the basis of a scientific, Marxist viewpoint, as one of the virtues of the Commune. But the fact is that this was one of its greatest weaknesses and one of the main factors contributing to its defeat, after only a very short period of existence. The lack of such a leadership—and the attempt to immediately implement measures which would essentially eliminate any institutionalized leadership—is one of the main reasons why the Commune did not sufficiently suppress organized forces which were determined to wipe out the Commune and to ensure that the specter of communist revolution—so terrible from the standpoint of exploiters and oppressors—would never rise again. In particular, as Marx pointed out, the Communards failed to march immediately on the stronghold of the counter-revolution, in the nearby city of Versailles; and so the counter-revolution was able to gather its strength, march on Paris, and deliver the death-blow to the Commune, slaughtering thousands of its most determined fighters in the process.

But beyond the immediate consequences that flowed, to a significant degree, from the shortcomings and limitations of the Paris Commune, the reality is this: Had the Commune defeated the attacks of the counter-revolution and survived, it would then have faced the even greater challenge of reorganizing and transforming the whole society, and not just the capital of Paris, where it held power for a brilliant but all too brief period. It would have had to create a radically new and different economy, a

socialist economy, in a country still made up largely of small farmers (peasants), and it would have had to overcome profound and tradition-steeped inequality and oppression, in particular the chains that have bound women for thousands of years. And here again the weaknesses and limitations of the Commune stand out: Women played a vital and heroic role in the creation of the Commune and the fight to defend it, but they were nonetheless maintained in a subordinate position within the Commune.

In less than 50 years after the defeat of the Paris Commune, beginning in the midst of the first world war among imperialists, a much more sweeping and deep-going revolutionary transformation was carried out in what had been the Russian empire. This revolution overthrew the Tsar (Russian monarch) who was the hereditary ruler of this empire, and then overthrew the capitalist class which attempted to step into the "vacuum of power" and seize control of society once the Tsar had been toppled. Through this revolution, which was led by V.I. Lenin, the Soviet Union was brought into being as the world's first socialist state; and although Lenin himself died in 1924, for several decades after that socialist transformation was carried out in the Soviet Union, even as it faced relentless threats and repeated attacks from counter-revolutionary forces, inside and outside the country, including the massive invasion of the Soviet Union by the imperialist Nazi Germany during World War 2, which cost the lives of more than 20 million Soviet citizens and brought great destruction to the country.

In leading the Russian revolution, in its first great step of seizing and consolidating political power and embarking on the road of socialist transformation, Lenin proceeded on the basis of the scientific breakthroughs that Marx had achieved, and he continued to develop that living science of Marxism. He drew important lessons from the Paris Commune, as well as from the historical experience of human society, and the natural world, more broadly. Of great importance, Lenin systematized the understanding that a vanguard communist party was essential in order to enable the masses of people to wage an increasingly conscious struggle to overthrow the rule of the capitalists and then carry out the radical transformation of society toward the ultimate goal of communism, worldwide.

Lenin also applied and developed the understanding forged by Marx, on the basis of summing up the bitter lessons of the Paris Commune, that in carrying out the communist revolution, it is not possible to lay hold of the ready-made machinery of the old state, which served the capitalist system; it is necessary to smash and dismantle that state and replace it with a new state: In place of what is in reality the dictatorship of the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie), it is necessary to establish the political rule of the rising, revolutionary class, the dictatorship of the proletariat, as a radically different kind of state, which will increasingly involve the masses of people in carrying forward the revolutionary transformation of society. This revolutionary dictatorship is necessary, Lenin emphasized, for two basic reasons:

1) To prevent exploiters—old and new, within the country and in other parts of the world—from defeating and drowning in blood the struggle of masses of people to bring a radically new society, and world, into being, to advance toward the achievement of the “4 Alls.”

2) To guarantee the rights of the people at every point, even with the inequalities that will remain, to varying degrees, between different sections of the people during various phases of the socialist transition to communism, at the same time as the goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to continue to uproot and eventually move beyond such social inequalities and to reach the point, throughout the world, where oppressive social divisions can no longer arise, and the state, as an institutionalized instrument of enforcement of laws and of rights, will no longer be necessary, and the state itself will be replaced by the self-administration by the people, without class distinctions and social antagonisms.

To quote once again from the Preamble to the *Constitution* of our Party:

All previous states have served the extension and defense of relations of exploitation; they have enforced the domination of exploiting classes, and have fortified themselves *against* any fundamental changes in these relations. The dictatorship of the proletariat, by contrast, aims at the eventual abolition of the state itself, with the abolition of class distinctions and all antagonistic social relations leading to exploitation, oppression, and the constant regeneration of destructive conflicts among people. And, in order to continue advancing toward that objective, the dictatorship of the proletariat must increasingly draw the masses of people, from many different sections of society, into meaningful involvement in the process of running society and carrying forward the advance toward the ultimate goal of communism throughout the world.

In the few short years during which Lenin headed the new Soviet state, he led it in embarking on the transformation of the economy, and the society as a whole, and in giving theoretical guidance and active support to the revolutionary struggle throughout the world. But, with the death of Lenin in 1924, the challenge of leading this process forward, in a hostile world dominated by powerful imperialist countries and other reactionary states, fell to others in the Soviet Communist Party, and in particular to Joseph Stalin, who emerged as the leader of the Soviet Communist Party. This was an unprecedented historical experience: For several decades, the economy as well as social relations broadly—including the relations between women and men, as well as between different nationalities—and the political institutions and the culture of the society and the worldview of masses of people underwent profound changes. The standard of living of the people improved greatly and in all spheres, including health care, housing, education, and literacy. But more than that, the burden of exploitation and the weight of age-old tradition began to be lifted from the masses of people. There were great achievements in all spheres of life and society, but not surprisingly also very real limitations, shortcomings, and errors—some of them owing to the situation the Soviet Union found itself in, as the world’s only socialist state for several decades (until after

World War 2), and some of it owing to problems in the outlook, approach, and method of those leading this process, in particular Stalin. With the necessary historical perspective, and the application of a scientific, materialist and dialectical, approach and method—and in opposition to the seemingly endless emission of distortions and slanders spewed forth against socialism and communism—the conclusion can, and must, be clearly drawn that the historical experience of socialism in the Soviet Union (and even more so in China, after socialism was established there) was decidedly positive, even with undeniable negative aspects—all of which must be deeply learned from.⁵

It was Mao Tsetung who led the revolutionary struggle in China over several decades, culminating in the victory of the first stage of this revolution with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. To understand the immense importance of this, it is necessary to keep in mind that conventional wisdom, including within the communist movement, held that, in a country like China, a revolution could not be made that would lead to socialism and become part of the worldwide struggle aiming for the ultimate goal of communism, in the way this was actually done with Mao's leadership. It was not only that China was a backward, largely peasant country (this had been true of Russia as well, at the time of the 1917 revolution there), but China was not a capitalist country itself; it was dominated by other, capitalist-imperialist countries, and the economy and the society overall in China were bent to the imperatives of foreign imperialist domination and capitalist accumulation serving those imperialists. Along with that, the revolution Mao led in China did not immediately aim for socialism but instead built a broad united front against imperialism and feudalism (and bureaucratic capital linked to imperialism and feudalism); and this revolution was carried out not by centering it in the cities, among the small working class there, but through waging a protracted revolutionary war, based among the peasantry in the vast countryside, surrounding the cities from the countryside and then finally defeating the reactionary forces in their strongholds in the cities and winning power throughout the country, completing the first stage of this revolution and opening the road to socialism.

Yet, as Mao himself emphasized, as important and historic as this victory was, it was still only the first step in a long march. The challenge had to be immediately faced of moving forward on the socialist road, or even the initial victories of the revolution would be lost—the country would come under the domination of exploiting classes and of foreign imperialist powers once again. But that was not all: As the process of building a socialist economy and carrying out corresponding changes in the other spheres of society was undertaken, and as Mao summed up this initial experience, he increasingly came to the realization that it was necessary to develop a different approach to socialist transformation than the “model” of what had been done in the Soviet Union. Mao's approach to this gave more initiative to people on the basic levels and to the local areas, and above all it put emphasis not so much on technology—although the development of more advanced technology was recognized by Mao as very important—but, first and foremost, on the conscious initiative of the masses of people. This became concentrated in the slogan *grasp revolution and promote production*, which provided the basic guideline for carrying out economic construction in a way that would strengthen the basis for the

continued advance on the socialist road and would be mutually reinforcing with the revolutionary transformation of the production relations and the political and ideological superstructure.

All this was related to, and part of the process of development of, Mao's most important and decisive contribution to the cause of communist revolution: the theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, toward the final goal of communism, and Mao's leadership in translating this theory into a powerful revolutionary movement of masses of people, during the course of the Cultural Revolution in China, for a decade beginning in the mid-1960s. Breaking once again with the "received wisdom" of the communist movement, Mao made the pathbreaking analysis that throughout the socialist period there would remain the material conditions that would pose the danger of defeat for the socialist revolution. Contradictions within the economic base, in the superstructure, and in the relation between base and superstructure of the socialist countries themselves, as well as the influence, pressure, and outright attacks from the remaining imperialist and reactionary states at any given time, would give rise to class differences and class struggle within a socialist country; these contradictions would constantly pose the possibility of society being led on *either* the socialist *or* the capitalist road, and more specifically would repeatedly regenerate an aspiring bourgeois class, within socialist society itself, which would find its most concentrated expression among those within the Communist Party, and particularly at its highest levels, who adopted *revisionist* lines and policies, which in the name of communism would actually accommodate to imperialism and lead things back to capitalism. Mao identified these revisionists as "people in authority taking the capitalist road," and he pinpointed the struggle between communism and revisionism as the concentrated expression, in the superstructure, of the contradiction and struggle in socialist society between the socialist road and the capitalist road. Mao recognized, and emphasized, that so long as these material conditions and their ideological reflections existed, there could be no guarantee against the reversal of the revolution and the restoration of capitalism, no simple and easy means of preventing this, no solution other than to continue the revolution to restrict and finally, together with the advance of the revolution throughout the world, uproot and eliminate the social inequalities and other vestiges of capitalism that gave rise to this danger.

Again, it is hard to overstate the importance of this theoretical analysis by Mao—which cleared up a great deal of confusion as to whether, and why, there was a danger of capitalist restoration in socialist society, and which provided fundamental guidance in mobilizing masses to advance on the socialist road in opposition to revisionist forces whose orientation and actions were leading precisely toward such a capitalist restoration. The Cultural Revolution in China was the living embodiment of such a mass revolutionary mobilization, in which tens and hundreds of millions of people debated and struggled over questions bearing decisively on the direction of society and of the world revolution. For ten years, this mass upsurge succeeded in holding back, and putting on the defensive, the forces of capitalist restoration, including high officials in the Chinese Communist Party such as Deng Xiaoping. But shortly after the death of Mao in

1976, those forces—headed, ultimately, and for a time from the background, by Deng Xiaoping—succeeded in carrying out a coup—wielding the army and other organs of the state to suppress revolutionaries, killing many, many thousands, and imprisoning many more—and proceeded to restore capitalism in China. This was, unfortunately, a living demonstration of the very danger that Mao had so sharply pointed to, and whose basis he had so penetratingly analyzed.⁶

III.

The End of a Stage—And What Conclusions Should, and Should Not, Be Drawn from this Historical Experience

With the revisionist coup and the restoration of capitalism in China, following after the rise to power of revisionists in the Soviet Union 20 years earlier,⁷ the first wave of communist revolution came to an end. In the basic and plain language of our Party's *Constitution*: "it has now been decades since the revolutionary proletariat held power in any country—whatever the labels, there are no socialist countries today."

What is more, this setback for socialism and the cause of communism—and the demise of the Soviet Union itself, long after it had actually ceased to be a socialist country—has led to a shark-like frenzy among reactionary forces which all along have hated, to the depths of their heartless beings, the communist revolution and the radical transformation of society it embodies, and which have consistently sought, by whatever means they could, to contribute to the defeat and destruction of this revolution. They have further intensified their efforts to pile as much dirt as they can on communism and the liberating transformation of society that it represents—distorting and slandering this revolution in a relentless ideological assault, in the effort to see that it will never rise again; proclaiming the capitalist system as irreversibly triumphant; painting the dream of a radically different and better world—and specifically the communist revolution aiming for that world—as a nightmare, and picturing the real and seemingly endless nightmare of this present system as the highest embodiment of human possibility.

Imagine a situation in which Christian fundamentalist creationists have seized power, in the academies of science and in society overall, and have proceeded to suppress knowledge of evolution. Imagine that they go so far as to execute and imprison the most prominent scientists and educators who had insisted on teaching evolution and bringing knowledge of this to the public, and they heap scorn and abuse on the well-established scientific fact of evolution, denouncing and ridiculing it as a flawed and dangerous theory which runs counter to well-known "truth" of the biblical creation story and to religious notions of "natural law" and the "divinely ordained order." And, to continue the analogy, imagine that in this situation many intellectual "authorities," and others following in their wake, jump on the bandwagon: "It was not only naïve but criminal to believe that evolution was a well-documented scientific theory, and to force that belief on people," they declare. "Now we can see that it is 'common wisdom,' which no one questions (so why should we?), that evolution embodies a worldview and leads to actions that are

disastrous for human beings. We were taken in by the arrogant assurance of those who propagated this notion. We can see that everything that exists, or has existed, could not have come into being without the guiding hand of an 'intelligent designer.'" And, finally, imagine that in this situation, even many of those who once knew better become disoriented and demoralized, cowed into silence where they do not join in, meekly or loudly, in the chorus of capitulation and denunciation.

The temporary defeat of socialism and the end of the first stage of the communist revolution has had many features and consequences that are analogous to such a situation. Among other things, it has led to lowered sights and low dreams: Even among many people who once would have known better and would have striven higher, it has led, in the short run, to acceptance of the idea that—in reality and at least for the foreseeable future—there can be no alternative to the world as it is, under the domination of imperialism and other exploiters. That the most one can hope for and work for are some secondary adjustments within the framework of accommodation to this system. That anything else—and especially the attempt to bring about a revolutionary rupture out of the confines of this system, aiming toward a radically different, communist world—is unrealistic and is bound to bring disaster.

At the same time, in the "vacuum" created by the reversal of socialism and accompanying setbacks for communism, and with the continuing, and even heightening, depredations carried out by imperialism—with all the upheaval, chaos, and oppression this means for literally billions of people throughout the world—there has been a significant growth of religious fundamentalism and its organized expression in many parts of the world, including among the desperately oppressed. Imperialist marauders and mass murderers, and fanatical religious fundamentalists—the former more powerful and doing greater harm, and in so doing giving further impetus to the latter, but both representing a dark veil, and very real chains, of enslavement and enforced ignorance, reinforcing each other even when they oppose each other.

But all this has not done away with reality: the reality of how the world is, under the domination of this capitalist-imperialist system and the daily horror this involves for the great majority of humanity—or the reality of what communism actually represents for humanity and the possibility of making new breakthroughs and advances on the road of communist revolution.

When we examine, with a scientific outlook and method, the rich experience of the first socialist countries and the first stage of the communist revolution overall, we can see that the problem is not, as has been constantly drummed at us, that the communist revolution, in attempting to do away with capitalism, was seeking in vain to overcome some unchangeable trait that causes people to pursue selfish ends as their "bottom line" motivation, a motivation which must be the guiding and driving principle of human society, lest it violate "human nature" and thereby plunge society into catastrophe and subject the people to tyranny. The problem has been that—while it has brought about profound changes, in circumstances and in people, as a result of the increasingly

conscious initiative of people taking up the communist viewpoint—this revolution has taken place not in a vacuum, and with people as a “blank slate,” but as conditions and people have emerged out of the old society and with the “birthmarks” of that society (and of thousands of years of tradition embodying and rationalizing oppressive relations among people). And the new socialist societies that have been brought into being through these revolutions have existed in a world still dominated by imperialism, with its still very formidable power—economically, politically, and militarily.

As Marx and Lenin understood in basic terms—and as Mao discovered and explained much more fully—socialism is not an end in itself: it is not yet communism but is the *transition* to communism which can be achieved not in this or that country by itself, but only on a world scale, with the overthrow of all reactionary ruling classes and the abolition of all exploitative and oppressive relations everywhere. And during this entire period of socialist transition, because of the fact that reactionary states will continue to exist and for some time will encircle and threaten socialist states which are brought into being; and because of the vestiges of the old society—in the production relations, the social relations, and in the superstructure of politics, ideology, and culture—which still exist within socialist society itself, even as the advance on the socialist road leads to restricting these vestiges and transforming important aspects of them in the direction of the final goal of communism...because of all this, there remains the possibility that the hand of the past, not yet dead and still powerful, can seize hold of society and drag it back. In short, for these reasons, the danger of capitalist restoration continues to exist throughout the socialist transition period, and this can be combated and defeated only by continuing the revolution, within the socialist country itself, and doing so as part of and while actively supporting and promoting the communist revolution throughout the world.

The reversal of socialism and what is in fact the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and China was not a matter of “the revolution eating its own children”...of “conspiratorial communist revolutionists turning into totalitarian tyrants” once they have power...of “bureaucratic leaders, entrenched in power for life, stifling and suffocating (bourgeois) democracy”...it was not “the inevitable result of perpetuating hierarchal organization of society”...or any of the other fundamentally erroneous and unscientific notions which are so ceaselessly propagated these days in attacking communism. Those who directly brought about the defeat of the revolution in the Soviet Union and in China were in fact people with high positions in the revolutionary party and state, but they were not some group of faceless, and classless, bureaucrats, mad for power for its own sake. They were, as Mao characterized them, people in authority *taking the capitalist road*. They were representatives not of communism but of capitalism, and in particular the vestiges of capitalism that had not yet been thoroughly uprooted and surpassed—and could not be in the short term and within the confines of one or another particular socialist country.

The fact that these revisionists were high-ranking officials in the party and state apparatus does not reveal some fundamental flaw in communism or in the communist revolution and socialist society as it has taken shape up to this point. It does not point to the need to find a whole other means and model for bringing about a radically different world. The causes of these reversals of socialism lie deeper, and they are consistent with a scientific communist understanding of society, and in particular of socialism as a transition from capitalism to communism: They reside in the contradictions that are, in significant aspects, carried forward from the old society which has been overthrown but whose features and influences have not yet been entirely transformed. These contradictions—including that between mental and manual labor, which is bound up with the division of society into classes and has itself constituted an integral and profound division in all societies ruled by exploiting classes—*both* give rise to the need for an organized communist vanguard to lead the revolution, not only in overthrowing the capitalist system but then in continuing the revolution in socialist society, *and* at the same time give rise to the danger of the revolution being betrayed and reversed by people who hold leadership positions within that vanguard. Given the actual historical development of human society and the possible pathways of change this has now opened up (recall the analogy to evolution in the natural world and the relation there between constraint and change), the question—the actual alternatives, in the real world, if we are in fact setting out to radically change this world, so as to uproot and abolish exploitation and oppression—is not leadership vs. no leadership, democracy vs. no democracy, dictatorship or no dictatorship; it is *the socialist road or the capitalist road*, leadership which takes things in one direction or the other, democracy—and dictatorship—which is in the service of and furthers one kind of system or the other, toward the reinforcement and perpetuation of exploitation and oppression or toward their eventual elimination, and with that, finally, the elimination of the need for a vanguard party or a state, once the material and ideological conditions that make that possible have been brought into being with the triumph of the communist revolution throughout the world.⁸

In sum on this point: The first stage of the communist revolution went a long way, and achieved incredibly inspiring things, in fighting to overcome the very real obstacles it faced and to advance toward a world where all relations of exploitation and oppression would be finally eliminated and people would enjoy a whole new dimension of freedom and would undertake the organization and continuing transformation of society, throughout the world, with a conscious and voluntary initiative unprecedented in human history. But, not surprisingly, there were also significant shortcomings and real errors, sometimes very serious ones, both in the practical steps that were taken by those leading these revolutions and the new societies they brought forth, and in their conceptions and methods. These shortcomings and errors were not the *cause* of the defeats of the initial attempts at communist revolution, but they did contribute, even if secondarily, to that defeat; and, beyond that, this whole experience of the first stage—with both its truly inspiring achievements and its very real, at times very serious, even if

overall secondary, errors and shortcomings—must be learned from deeply and all-sidedly, in order to carry forward the communist revolution in the new situation that has to be confronted, and to do even better this time.

IV.

The New Challenges, and the New Synthesis

When the revisionists seized power in China in 1976 and moved to restore capitalism, for a certain period of time they not only continued to pose as communists in a general sense but more specifically claimed to be the continuators of Mao's revolutionary line and legacy. In this situation, what communists around the world really needed to do was to maintain a critical spirit and approach, make an objective, scientific analysis of what had actually happened, and why, and clearly distinguish communism from capitalism, Marxism from revisionism, as this found concentrated expression in those concrete and complex circumstances. This was not easy to do at the time, and the majority of the communists in the world who had looked to Mao's China as a revolutionary model and beacon failed to do this, and so either themselves blindly tailed the new revisionist rulers of China and took the path into the swamp, or in some other form abandoned the outlook and objectives of the communist revolution. Responding to the great need, refusing to go along with what had happened in China simply because it was done in the name of communism and by hijacking the great prestige that revolutionary China and Mao rightly enjoyed among revolutionaries and communists throughout the world—and at the cost of a major split within our own Party—Bob Avakian undertook the task of making a scientific analysis of what had happened in China, and why, and then fought for the understanding that indeed a revisionist coup and restoration of capitalism had taken place. And along with that, he brought forward a systematic presentation of the ways in which Mao had further developed the science and strategy of communist revolution.⁹In a time of great disorientation, demoralization, and disarray in the ranks of the "Maoists" around the world, this work of Avakian's played a crucial role in establishing the ideological and political basis for the regrouping of the remaining communists after the loss of China and the devastating effects of this on the revolutionary and communist movement throughout the world.

But even greater needs now presented themselves. While providing overall leadership to our Party, Bob Avakian has, over the past 30 years, continued to deepen a scientific analysis of the experience of the international communist movement and the strategic approach to communist revolution. The result of this work has been the emergence of a new synthesis, a further development of the theoretical framework for carrying forward this revolution.

As our Party's *Constitution* points out, the situation in the world today—including the defeat of the initial wave of communist revolution—actually "poses, anew, the great need for communism." And:

While there are no socialist states in the world, there is the experience of socialist revolutions and there is the rich body of revolutionary, scientific theory that developed through the first wave of socialist revolutions to build on. But the theory and practice of communist revolution requires advances to meet the challenges of this situation—to scientifically address, and draw the necessary lessons from, the overall experience of this first wave of socialist revolution and the strategic implications of the vast changes taking place in the world.

Bob Avakian has taken on this responsibility, and has developed a communist body of work and method and approach that responds to these great needs and challenges.

In this body of work and method and approach, in the new synthesis brought forward by Bob Avakian, there is an analogy to what was done by Marx at the beginning of the communist movement—establishing in the new conditions that exist, after the end of the first stage of the communist revolution, a theoretical framework for the renewed advance of that revolution. But today, and with this new synthesis, it is most emphatically *not* a matter of “back to the drawing board,” as if what is called for is throwing out both the historical experience of the communist movement and the socialist societies it brought into being and “the rich body of revolutionary scientific theory” that developed through this first wave. That would represent an unscientific, and in fact a reactionary, approach. Rather, what is required—and what Avakian has undertaken—is building on all that has gone before, theoretically and practically, drawing the positive and the negative lessons from this, and raising this to a new, higher level of synthesis.

Other presentations and publications by our Party have provided a more extensive and systematic discussion of this new synthesis.¹⁰ Here we will briefly characterize some of its main elements.

» In terms of philosophy and method, this new synthesis is, in a meaningful sense, regrounding Marxism more fully in its scientific roots. It also involves learning from the rich historical experience since the time of Marx, upholding the fundamental objectives and principles of communism, which have been shown to be fundamentally correct, criticizing and discarding aspects that have been shown to be incorrect, or no longer applicable, and establishing communism even more fully and firmly on a scientific foundation.

In the original conception of human society’s historical development toward communism, even as formulated by Marx, there was a tendency—although this tendency was definitely very secondary—toward a somewhat narrow and linear view. This was manifested, for example, in the concept of the “negation of the negation” (the view that things proceed in such a way that a particular thing is negated by another thing, which in turn leads to a further negation and a synthesis which embodies elements of the previous things, but now on a higher level). This concept was taken over from the philosophical system of Hegel, whose philosophy exerted a significant influence on Marx (and Engels), even while, in a fundamental sense, they recast and placed on a materialist foundation Hegel’s view of dialectics, which was itself marked by philosophical idealism

(the view that history consists in essence of the unfolding of the Idea). As Bob Avakian has argued, the “negation of the negation” can tend in the direction of “inevitable-ism”—as if something is bound to be negated by another thing in a particular way, leading to what is almost a predetermined synthesis. And when applied to the historical sweep of human society, in such a way that it verges on being simplistically formulaic—as in the construct: primitive classless (communal) society was negated by class society, which in turn will be negated by the emergence once again of classless society, but now on a higher foundation, with the achievement of communism throughout the world—the tendency toward reductionism with regard to the extremely complex and variegated historical development of human society, the tendency toward a “closed system” and toward “inevitable-ism,” become more pronounced and more problematical.

Again, this was a secondary shortcoming in Marxism, at its foundation (as Bob Avakian has also argued: “Marxism, scientific communism, does not embody, but in fact rejects, any teleological...notion that there is some kind of will or purpose with which nature, or history, is endowed”¹¹). But tendencies of this kind asserted themselves more fully with the development of the communist movement and were particularly noticeable, and exerted a negative effect, in the thinking of Stalin, who in turn influenced Mao’s philosophical views, even while Mao rejected and ruptured in significant ways with Stalin’s tendencies toward “woodenness” and mechanical, somewhat metaphysical, materialism. The new synthesis of Bob Avakian’s embodies a continuation of Mao’s ruptures with Stalin but also in some aspects a rupture beyond the ways in which Mao himself was influenced, even though secondarily, by what had become the dominant mode of thinking in the communist movement under the leadership of Stalin.

» Internationalism. In the early 1980s, in the work *Conquer the World?*,¹² Bob Avakian made an extensive critique of erroneous tendencies in the history of the communist movement, and in particular the tendency toward nationalism—toward separating off the revolutionary struggle in a particular country from, and even raising it above, the overall world revolutionary struggle for communism. He examined ways in which this tendency had manifested itself in both the Soviet Union and China, when they were socialist countries, and the influence this exerted on the communist movement more broadly, including in the sometimes pronounced moves to subordinate the revolutionary struggle in other countries to the needs of the existing socialist state (first the Soviet Union, and then later China). Along with this, Avakian made a further analysis of the material basis for internationalism—why, in an ultimate and overall sense, the world arena is most decisive, even in terms of revolution in any particular country, especially in this era of capitalist imperialism as a world system of exploitation, and how this understanding must be incorporated into the approach to revolution, in particular countries as well as on a world scale.

While internationalism has always been a fundamental principle of communism since its very founding, Avakian both summed up ways in which this principle had been incorrectly compromised in the history of the communist movement, and he

strengthened the theoretical foundation for waging the struggle to overcome such departures from internationalism and to carry forward the communist revolution in a more thoroughly internationalist way.

» On the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist society as a transition to communism. While deeply immersing himself in, learning from, firmly upholding, and propagating Mao's great insights into the nature of socialist society as a transition to communism—and the contradictions and struggles which mark this transition and whose resolution, in one or another direction, are decisive in terms of whether the advance is carried forward to communism, or things are dragged backward to capitalism—Bob Avakian has recognized and emphasized the need for a greater role for dissent, a greater fostering of intellectual ferment, and more scope for initiative and creativity in the arts in socialist society. He has criticized the tendency toward a "reification" of the proletariat and other exploited (or formerly exploited) groups in society—a tendency which regards particular people in these groups, *as individuals*, as representative of the larger interests of the proletariat as a class and the revolutionary struggle that corresponds to the fundamental interests of the proletariat, in the largest sense. This has often been accompanied by narrow, pragmatic, and positivist outlooks and approaches—which restrict what is relevant, or what can be determined (or is declared) to be true, to what relates to immediate experiences and struggles in which the masses of people are involved, and to the immediate objectives of the socialist state and its leading party, at any given time. This, in turn, has gone along with tendencies—which were a marked element in the Soviet Union but also in China when it was socialist—toward the notion of "class truth," which in fact is opposed to the scientific understanding that truth is objective, does not vary in accordance with differing class interests, and is not dependent on which class outlook one brings to the pursuit of the truth. The scientific outlook and method of communism—if it is correctly taken up and applied, as a living science and not as a dogma—provides, in an overall sense, the most consistent, systematic, and comprehensive means for arriving at the truth, but that is *not* the same thing as saying that truth itself has a class character, or that communists are bound to arrive at the truth with regard to particular phenomena, while people who do not apply, or who even oppose, the communist outlook and method are not capable of arriving at important truths. Such views of "class truth," which have existed to varying degrees and in various forms in the communist movement, are reductionist and vulgar materialist and run counter to the actual scientific viewpoint and method of *dialectical materialism*.

As a related part of the new synthesis, Bob Avakian has criticized a one-sided view in the communist movement toward intellectuals—toward seeing them only as a *problem*, and failing to give full recognition to the ways in which they can contribute to the rich process through which the people in society overall will come to a deeper understanding of reality and a heightened ability to carry out an increasingly conscious struggle to transform reality in the direction of communism.

Again, as the *Constitution* of our Party explains:

This new synthesis also involves a greater appreciation of the important role of intellectuals and artists in this whole process, both pursuing their own visions and contributing their ideas to this broader ferment—all, again, necessary to get a much richer process going....

In short, in this new synthesis as developed by Bob Avakian, there must be a solid core, with a lot of elasticity. This is, first of all, a method and approach that applies in a very broad way.... A clear grasp of both aspects of this [both solid core and elasticity], and their inter-relation, is necessary in understanding and transforming reality, in all its spheres, and is crucial to making revolutionary transformations in human society....

Applied to socialist society, this approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity includes the need for a leading, and expanding, core that is clear on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the aim of continuing socialist revolution as part of the world struggle for communism, and is determined to continue carrying forward this struggle, through all the twists and turns. At the same time, there will necessarily be many different people and trends in socialist society pulling in many different directions—and all of this can ultimately contribute to the process of getting at the truth and getting to communism. This will be intense at times, and the difficulty of embracing all this—*while still leading the whole process broadly in the direction of communism*—will be something like going, as Avakian has put it, to the brink of being drawn and quartered—and repeatedly. All this is difficult, but necessary and a process to welcome.

As a unifying theme in all this, Avakian has stressed the orientation of “emancipators of humanity”: the revolution that must be carried out, and in which the masses must be the conscious driving force, is not about revenge nor about changes of position within a narrow framework (“the last shall be first, and the first become last”) but is about transforming the entire world so that there will no longer be people who are “first” and others who are “last”; the overthrow of the present system, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the continuation of the revolution in those conditions is all for the purpose and toward the aim of abolishing all oppressive divisions and exploitative relations among human beings and advancing to a whole new era in human history.

» Strategic approach to revolution. Avakian’s new synthesis has regrounded communist work in, and has enriched, Lenin’s basic understanding of the need for the masses of people to develop communist consciousness not only, or mainly, through their own immediate experience and struggles but through the all-around exposure of the nature and features of the capitalist-imperialist system and the clear setting forth of the convictions, aims, outlook and method of communism, which is brought to the masses, in a systematic and all-around way, by an organized vanguard party, linking the struggle at any given time with, and diverting and directing it toward, the strategic revolutionary goal, while also “setting before the masses” the essential questions and problems of the revolution and involving them in forging the means to resolve these contradictions and advance the revolutionary struggle. With the leadership of Bob Avakian, the basic

strategic orientation necessary for carrying out revolutionary work in an imperialist country, to hasten while awaiting the development of a revolutionary situation and the emergence of a revolutionary people, in the millions and millions, and then to seize on such a situation when it does finally come into being—and to be able to fight and win in those circumstances—has been developed and is continuing to be further developed. (In this connection, see *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, 2008.)

All this is a living refutation of those who argue that revolution is not possible in imperialist countries, or that the practical and theoretical work of communists there should center on fighting for reforms and “solutions” to the immediate problems of the masses, in a way that severs this from revolutionary objectives and the communist outlook—and which, in reality, will lead away from that and, insofar as it influences masses of people, will lead them into a demoralizing dead-end and ultimate accommodation with the present system of oppression.

At the same time as this new synthesis has further developed the basic strategic orientation for revolution in imperialist countries such as the U.S., Avakian has also called attention to new challenges for the revolutionary struggle, and the need for further development of revolutionary strategy, in countries dominated by foreign imperialism, given the great changes in the world, and within most of these countries, in recent decades.

This new synthesis, in its many crucial dimensions (which we have only been able to briefly touch on here) has put revolution and communism on a more solid scientific foundation. As Avakian himself has emphasized:

[I]t is very important not to underestimate the significance and potential positive force of this new synthesis: criticizing and rupturing with significant errors and shortcomings while bringing forward and *recasting* what has been positive from the historical experience of the international communist movements and the socialist countries that have so far existed; in a real sense *reviving*—on a new, more advanced basis—the *viability* and, yes, the *desirability* of a whole new and radically different world, and placing this on an ever firmer foundation of materialism and dialectics....

So, we should not underestimate the potential of this as a source of hope and of daring on a solid scientific foundation.¹³

V. Communism at a Crossroads: Vanguard of the Future, or Residue of the Past?

In the face of the continuing challenges and difficulties of the current period, the initial regrouping of communists which took place after the defeat in China and the end of the first stage of communist revolution has, to a significant extent, given way recently to

sharp divergences: on the one hand, our Party, whose basic line is concentrated in our new *Constitution*, along with some others that are gravitating toward the new synthesis; and, on the other hand, two opposing tendencies—either to cling religiously to all of the previous experience and the theory and method associated with it or (in essence, if not in words) to throw that out altogether.

In a certain sense, this was prefigured in the responses to *Conquer the World?* when it was originally published, nearly three decades ago now. On the one hand, there were those in the international communist movement who were extremely upset by what was said in *Conquer the World?*—claiming that it reduced the experience of the communist movement to “a tattered flag” (this was a response which itself was reflective of a dogmatic and brittle approach to what communism is, rather than regarding it and wielding it as what it really is: a living and developing critical revolutionary science, one of the hallmarks of which is its continual self-interrogation) —and, on the other hand, besides those who welcomed *Conquer the World?* for correct reasons, there were those who actually welcomed it *but* did so with the view, and the hope, that it would constitute a wedge opening the door to casting off and renouncing the whole historical experience which *Conquer the World?* was critically examining from a fundamentally different viewpoint, one of recognizing that objectively this experience was principally positive and involved historically unprecedented advances for humanity which must be firmly upheld, but also recognizing that there were real problems, shortcomings, and errors, some of them quite grievous, which needed to be further excavated, critically examined, and learned from as well. At that time, these opposing responses to *Conquer the World?* were in a more embryonic state and within an overall framework of broadly-defined unity. It was only with the further unfolding of things over the next few decades, and with the experience of further difficulties—including setbacks in struggles that seemed for a time to be breaking new ground and embodying a revitalization of the communist movement in the world—that these opposing views further developed and sharpened.

Today, on the part of those who refuse to critically examine the historical experience of the communist movement, it is common to find the phenomena of insistence upon “class truth” and related reification of the proletariat, and generally an approach to communist theory and principles as some kind of dogma, akin to religious catechism—in essence: “We know all we need to know, we have all the fundamentals that are required, it’s just a matter of carrying out the handed-down wisdom.”

At the opposite pole are those whose understanding of the historical experience of the communist movement—and in particular the causes of its difficulties, setbacks, and defeats—is also superficial and ill-founded, who ignore or dismiss scientific communist analysis of the profound contradictions that have given rise to the danger of capitalist restoration in socialist society, and who attempt to substitute in place of that analysis an approach based on bourgeois-democratic principles and criteria, and bourgeois-democratic notions of legitimacy—bound up with the formal process of elections, with competing political parties, so common in capitalist society and so compatible with and conducive to the exercise of political power by the capitalist class. Those who hold to

these positions, even while continuing to claim the mantle of communism, are anxious to discard and distance themselves from the concept and the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat—and in many cases the very term itself. In effect, such people are seeking to “unburden themselves” from the most liberating experience in human history so far! They claim to want to move rapidly ahead, to meet new conditions of the time...but they have their vehicles in the wrong gear, and they are moving rapidly in *reverse*—retreating at an accelerating pace into bourgeois democracy and the narrow confines of bourgeois right,¹⁴ traversing the centuries from the 21st back to the 18th.

While the erroneous tendencies we have identified here involve real differences, there is also a significant aspect in which they are “mirror opposites,” and they actually share important characteristics in common. In fact, it is noteworthy that, in recent years, there has been a phenomenon of certain groups “flipping” from one pole to the other—and in particular from dogmatism and related tendencies to an embrace of bourgeois democracy (if still in the guise of communism). The following are some of the significant features these tendencies share in common.

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

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

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

the understanding that practice is the ultimate point of origin and point of verification of theory; but, in opposition to these narrow, empiricist distortions, this must be understood to mean practice in the broad sense, encompassing broad social and historical experience, and not simply the direct experience of a particular individual, group, party, or nation. The very founding, and the further development of, communist theory itself is a powerful demonstration of this: From the time of Marx, this theory has been forged and enriched by drawing from a broad array of experience, in a wide range of fields and over a broad expanse of historical development, in society and nature. Practice as the source of theory and the maxim that “practice is the criterion of truth” can be, and will be, turned into a profound *untruth* if this is interpreted and applied in a narrow, empiricist, and subjective manner.

» Very significantly, these “mirror opposite” erroneous tendencies have in common being mired in, or retreating into, models of the past, of one kind or another (even if the particular models may differ): either clinging dogmatically to the past experience of the first stage of the communist revolution—or, rather, to an incomplete, one-sided, and ultimately erroneous understanding of that—or retreating into the whole past era of *bourgeois* revolution and its principles: going back to what are in essence 18th century theories of (bourgeois) democracy, in the guise, or in the name, of “21st-century communism,” in effect equating this “21st-century communism” with a democracy that is supposedly “pure” or “classless”—a democracy which, in reality, as long as classes exist, can only mean *bourgeois* democracy, and *bourgeois dictatorship*.¹⁵ All this while ignoring, treating as outdated, or dismissing as dogma (or consigning to the meaningless category of the “ABCs of communism” which are acknowledged as an abstraction and then put to the side as irrelevant to the practical struggle) the fundamental, scientific communist understanding, paid for literally and repeatedly in the blood of millions of the oppressed from the time of the Paris Commune, that the old, reactionary state must be smashed and dismantled and a radically new state must be brought into being, representing the revolutionary interests of the formerly exploited in transforming all of society and emancipating all of humanity, or else any gains of the revolutionary struggle will be squandered and destroyed, and the revolutionary forces decimated.¹⁶

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

VI.

A Cultural Revolution Within the RCP

The influence of incorrect and even outright revisionist lines is hardly something to which

our Party itself has been immune. In fact, the lines and tendencies we have criticized here have not only existed within our Party, but over a number of years, and until very recently, exerted a powerful pull and posed the real danger of our Party's ceasing to be a revolutionary communist vanguard and instead degenerating into yet another motley collection of reformists, even if retaining, for a time at least, the label of communist.

Over the period of the 1980s and 1990s, a situation had developed within our Party in which, in effect, there were *two* parties, representing two fundamentally opposed roads. On the one hand, there was the "official" line of the Party, and the ongoing development of that line, as embodied particularly in the new synthesis Bob Avakian was bringing forward and, in the main, expressed in the Party's newspaper (the *Revolutionary Worker*, now *Revolution*) and other documents and publications of the Party. But at the same time, in increasing opposition to the new synthesis and the revolutionary-communist line overall, were revisionist views and orientations which, while not generally expressed and argued for in a systematic way, were becoming predominant on all levels of the Party—views and orientations which varied in certain particulars but had in common that, objectively, they amounted to abandoning the outlook and aims of the communist revolution, accommodating to the system of imperialism and settling for, at most, reforms within this horrific system.

What were some of the main features of these revisionist lines, and main factors leading to their growth and increasing influence within our Party?

» The defeat in China and the end of the first stage of communist revolution—combined with decades of relative "stability" in the world's most powerful imperialist country, after this defeat and the related ebbing of the great upsurge of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, in the U.S. as well as on a worldwide scale—not only had a disorienting and demoralizing effect on large numbers of people who had actively sought, and fought for, radical change in the world, as well as people more broadly, but this was also true among communists and within our Party. Communist parties are made up of people who come together on the basis of an advanced, scientific understanding of the necessity and possibility for revolution, aiming for a fundamentally different and far better future for humanity; but they exist and carry out their work within the present system—they are not, cannot be, and should not be separated, much less sealed off, from the rest of the world and the conditions it imposes and the pulls it exerts.

At the same time, and seizing on the defeats and setbacks for the communist revolution, there has been the relentless ideological assault on communism carried out by the defenders and apologists of the old order over the past several decades, and the effect of this has been to make the pull toward accommodation with imperialism, especially in a country like the U.S., all the more powerful.

Speaking to an important Party meeting several years ago—at which he directly confronted and sharply criticized the revisionist lines within the Party—Bob Avakian made the following observations:

Let's look again honestly at this. I talked about how we are still suffering from the effects of the loss of China. We should not underestimate this defeat in China, and everything it has brought forth, everything the imperialists have done on that basis, and have built on that. China, and everything it represented for the international proletariat and the world proletarian revolution—to lose that after the Cultural Revolution [in China], after millions and millions of people went through that upheaval, and yes, a significant process of remolding their world outlook—this is something we're still coming to terms with, both in objective reality and in our own thinking.

If you add to this the whole “death of communism” phenomenon, and the constant barrage of anti-communism and abuse and slander heaped from all directions and in all forms on the GPCR [the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China], on the Chinese revolution and socialism there, and in fact on all of the experience of socialist society and the dictatorship of the proletariat; if you think about the effect of all that, and you are a materialist and you apply dialectics, it is very difficult to think that we are immune from the effects of all that and that it only influences people outside the Party. Even in our thinking and our souls, if you want to use that term, in our heart of hearts, don't we have questions about whether we were wrong about all this: Why did we lose? If we were so right, and if what we're for is so correct, why did it end up this way? I don't think there are very many comrades who can say they haven't had those questions agonizing within them, probably more than once.

We have an answer to those things, but you have to dig for that answer and you have to keep on digging—and you have to be scientific. You have to go to materialism and dialectics.

The problem was that, while Bob Avakian and a few others in the Party had been “digging” in this way, applying the scientific outlook and method of dialectical materialism, most of the Party, on all levels, was not doing so—and instead was, to a large degree, “buying into” the slanders of communism and becoming swept up in what Lenin so incisively identified as the spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, ideologically and politically: retreating into the confines of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois right, tailing after the outlooks characterizing the reformist movements—including “identity politics” and the related relativism philosophically (the idea that there is no objective truth, or that objective truth cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, and that there are merely different groups or individuals with different “narratives,” all equally true, or untrue)—and replacing revolution with reform as the basic objective.

» The revisionism within our Party was characterized by long-standing features of revisionism in the communist movement that Lenin had also exposed—which were embodied in the notion that “the movement is everything, the final aim is nothing,” and the determinist orientation that what is necessary is what is possible, and what is possible is what is already being done. This involved “digging in” among the masses in the wrong sense—on a narrow basis and with a narrow conception of struggle, with

revolution and communism left to the side or at most “tacked on,” in a meaningless and lifeless way, to reformist work, and gutted of any real meaning and connection to the ongoing activity of the Party—in effect burying revolution and communism. Party members were often very busy—but occupied, or preoccupied, with everything but revolution and communism.

In essence, this was a form of “economism.” Historically in the communist movement, economism has meant focusing the attention of the working class on its own immediate conditions and struggles as the “most widely applicable means” of winning them, some day, to socialism and communism—an approach which Lenin thoroughly exposed and refuted in his famous work *What Is To Be Done?*, where he showed that this approach will never lead to building a revolutionary movement aiming for communism but will only contribute to confining the movement, and the masses involved in it, within the framework of capitalism. In opposition to this, Lenin emphasized that, while it is important for communists to take part in and relate to significant struggles of the masses, and even to strive to lead many of these struggles, they must do so *as communists*, whose emphasis is on doing exposure of the features and nature of the capitalist system, through timely and compelling agitation and propaganda, setting before all our communist convictions and aims, and *in this way* linking the struggles and movements of the day with the goal of revolution and communism, diverting these struggles, and the masses of people, from the spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and leading all this toward the revolutionary goal. Since the time of Lenin, economism has come to take on the broader meaning of applying the notion of “most widely applicable means” not only to economic struggles of workers but more generally to struggles among many different strata—making the essential focus of communist work organizing such struggles and in reality, if not always in words, treating the prospect of revolution and communism as something abstract and belonging to a far off realm in the indefinite future, with no living link to the present and the movements and struggles at any given time.

In essence, in place of the orientation of *revolutionary work in a non-revolutionary situation*, hastening while awaiting the development of a revolutionary situation, the economist recipe is: *reformist work pending revolution*—a revolution which will never come and is never actually built for with this approach. What all manifestations of economism have as a fundamental characteristic is *tailing* the masses, instead of acting as a vanguard to *lead* the masses—learning from them, yes, but leading while learning—raising their sights to the possibility and necessity of revolution and working and struggling with them to win them to take up the revolutionary and communist standpoint and fight for its emancipating goals.

» The economism and overall revisionism that was increasingly characterizing the actual work, life, and culture of our Party was also marked by the pragmatism and empiricism that has been so common in the communist movement (and which we have discussed above), as well as agnosticism about well-established principles of communism and even about the desirability as well as the possibility of revolution and communism. The

ongoing theoretical work and real breakthroughs in communist theory that the Chairman of the Party, Bob Avakian, was carrying forward were not so much frontally opposed as largely ignored by most of the Party—or in some cases greeted with an equally uninterested “wow, heavy” and then put on the shelf to gather dust—because such theoretical work and the breakthroughs it produced, while crucial in relation to the goals of revolution and communism, were not of value and not “useful” to those mired in an economist and revisionist orientation.

» Related to the above, another key element of the “revisionist package” that had gained such currency within our Party was the approach not of treating communism as a real, revolutionary orientation—which must be consistently applied to change the world, and which masses of people can and must be won to take up consciously and actively fight for—but instead reducing communism to an “alternative lifestyle.” With this viewpoint, the Party was becoming just one more self-validating oppositional niche, more or less trendy. Sometimes this “alternative lifestyle” meant busily preoccupying yourself, and everyone else, dashing from one immediate struggle to the next; sometimes it took the form of smug, dogmatic satisfaction at (supposedly) being a communist, with your special knowledge of history and set of ethics (that you could never connect with anyone, if you even still ever tried); sometimes it just meant marking time, putting critical thinking in the freezer. The work of the Party was increasingly marked by the approach of feeding the masses pabulum while maintaining, as the special province of the “initiated,” what has been described as “a temple of secret knowledge”—turning communism into a lifeless, essentially religious, dogma.

In opposition to the works of Bob Avakian and the Party’s newspaper and other publications and official documents, much of the public face of the Party—the bookstores associated with it, for instance—gave off the musty odor of relics of the past, or else the busy-ness of (non-revolutionary) “movement centers.” The variations in all this may have been many, but the source and result were the same: revisionism.

» Along with all this was a definite aversion to, and a studied avoidance of, carrying out ideological struggle with masses of people, particularly in opposition to religious conceptions and notions as well as other backward viewpoints which are, in fact, shackles, mental chains, on the masses of people. This went so far as to include even a reluctance, or refusal, to take on the anti-communist prejudices and preconceptions that are now so widespread but at the same time so superficial.

» Overall and most fundamentally, what this “revisionist package” represented was giving up on revolution: adopting—even if without saying so explicitly and in an open and aboveboard way—the attitude that “we’ve seen all the revolution we’re going to see.” At most, revolution was something for the distant future—or it was for others, somewhere else—perhaps it could succeed in the Third World but, with the revisionist viewpoint, that was seen as having very little in the way of a real, and living, relation to what our Party was doing or should do (other than, perhaps, to reduce itself to being vacuous “cheerleaders” of revolutionary struggles elsewhere). As for the Party and its culture,

under the influence of this revisionism, liberalism ran rampant and a general attitude took hold that said in essence: "C'mon, let's be realistic—what do you expect?—you can't have a party in this country that is really a vanguard of revolution, that is actually worthy of the name *Revolutionary Communist Party*."

The fundamentally antagonistic and increasingly acute contradiction between these two lines—the developing body of work and method and approach of Bob Avakian and the "official" line, documents, and publications of the Party, on the one hand, and the "revisionist package," with the various features and the essential content we have outlined here—came fully to a head in the last few years: These opposing lines could no longer coexist within the Party, or such "coexistence" would lead to the triumph of revisionism and the end of the Party as any kind of a real revolutionary-communist vanguard.

The precipitating factor, leading to open and profound struggle over these fundamental differences, occurred in the context where the Party was preparing to carry out a campaign of building a culture of appreciation, promotion, and popularization of Bob Avakian's role as a communist leader, as concentrated in his body of work and method and approach. Building this culture of appreciation, promotion, and popularization has now come to be recognized as one of the two mainstays of our Party's all-around revolutionary work (the other mainstay is wielding our Party's press—all this is discussed in our Party's new *Constitution*). But at the time, only a few years ago, discussions about this within the Party revealed, more clearly than had been apparent before, that within the Party itself there was, as a recent internal Party document puts it, "an abysmal lack of appreciation for what had actually been the principal content of the Chair's work—his re-envisioning of revolution and communism, the new synthesis." As this internal document goes on to point out:

The work of this new synthesis had been going on for 25 years at that point; but the revisionist line was turning away from that work, first in non-comprehension and then, as things developed, objective opposition.

Something new was—and is—struggling to be born into the world; it's fighting uphill against both conventional wisdom *and* the dogmatism, along with reformism, of the communists. But this was either opposed by comrades...or else this was ignored, or at most treated as "interesting." And almost universally its content was not grasped (or eclectically opposed). In practice it was treated as irrelevant. The vulgar empiricism that "theory cannot run ahead of practice"...went essentially unchallenged in the ranks.

Bob Avakian had been confronting and going deeply into the real problems that had led to all too many people being unable to distinguish Marxism from revisionism after ten years of the GPCR in China. This was ignored by many comrades, and some became downright uncomfortable with this. The fact that he had gone deeply into this and begun to develop answers to these extremely vexing questions: again, opposed—either outright, or through "ignore-ance." This [revisionist opposition] amounted, objectively, to

“buying into” the “death of communism”—in that it replaced living, developing communist leadership, actually grappling with (and forging answers to) the agonizing questions of “why we lost China” with frozen, dogmatic religious faith.

At this point, the opposition between the revisionist and communist lines in our Party had not only become more fully expressed but had become clearly and sharply focused on the question of whether to grasp, and boldly take out to the masses of people, what is represented by the leadership of Bob Avakian and is concentrated in the new synthesis he is bringing forward—or whether to reject this and refuse to act on it. In these circumstances, the former represented advancing on the road of revolution and communism—because the role of Bob Avakian and his body of work and method and approach consists, above all, in the development of communism, as a living science and strategic revolutionary orientation—while the opposition to this within our Party represented, in a concentrated way, retreating into reformism and capitulation to imperialism, even if this was done while maintaining “communism” as some kind of religious catechism and/or an “alternative lifestyle.”

Fully recognizing the seriousness of the situation and the stakes, as well as the risks, involved—and able to rely at that point only on a very small core within the Party leadership—Bob Avakian boldly issued a call for a Cultural Revolution within the RCP. At the same time, he insisted that this must be a Cultural Revolution in the midst of a Long March—emphasizing through this metaphor that the radical transformation and revolutionary revitalization of the Party, which was the purpose and aim of this Cultural Revolution, must be carried out in the context of, and fundamentally to serve, the transformation of the larger objective world—the carrying out of work by the Party which would actually be guided by communist principles and objectives and would build a revolutionary, and not a reformist, movement. For the reasons that have been discussed here, the focal point and cardinal question of this Cultural Revolution was whether to base ourselves on and actively carry out the new synthesis and the overall body of work and method and approach of Bob Avakian, and the advance in communist theory and strategy that this concentrates, or whether to turn away from that and adopt instead one or another variation—or some eclectic stew—of revisionism.

In a talk earlier this year to a group of Party members, Bob Avakian spoke about his orientation at the start of this Cultural Revolution:

As I saw and confronted things at the time, more or less 5 years ago, there were three basic choices when it became clear that, despite the continuing revolutionary-communist character of the Party’s “official” line, the Party was in fact “saturated with” and even characterized by revisionism. The three choices were:

accept this Party as it was, and in essence give up on what the Party is *supposed* to be all about;

quit, and set out to start a new Party;

or, launch the Cultural Revolution.

I believed then, and still believe now, for reasons I've spoken to elsewhere and earlier today, that the *latter* course was the only correct course and the necessary course. This is for reasons having to do with how precious a party is, and how difficult it would be to create a new party if in fact prematurely and incorrectly this Party were given up on. But, yes, it is true, there is nothing holy about a party, and if it's not going to be a revolutionary vanguard, then fuck it!—let's do something else and get something else. But I believed then, and believe now, that we must not give up on this Party unless objectively and scientifically it is clearly indicated that there is no hope for actually transforming this Party into what it needs to be.

This Cultural Revolution was not a purge but a struggle—an ideological struggle whose purpose and method was not to target individuals but to compare and contrast the revolutionary line with the revisionist line and in this way to deepen the foundation of the Party, and its members, in the revolutionary line while exposing, criticizing, and rupturing with the revisionist line—to revive and give even greater impetus to the orientation of Party members, on all levels, as revolutionaries and communists, to ground this more firmly in a scientific communist method and approach, and to rescue and revitalize the Party as a whole as a real revolutionary-communist vanguard capable of and determined to take on its responsibilities as that, and nothing less. The course and nature of this Cultural Revolution, over the five or so years since its initiation, has been complex and at times intense. It has involved a number of twists and turns and has required repeated, and deepening, ideological struggles to bring about a basic rupture, on the part of members of the Party and the Party as a whole, with revisionism and a leap to becoming—once again, and on a more profound basis—communists and the communist vanguard we are required to be and are now determined to be. It has been marked by different stages, with a decisive advance taking place in its early stages, when the leadership of the Party collectively rallied, in fundamental terms, to the revolutionary line and the leadership of Bob Avakian in developing and fighting for that line, and on that basis deepened its determination and ability to carry this Cultural Revolution through to defeat revisionism and rescue and revitalize the Party as a revolutionary-communist vanguard.

As should be expected in a struggle of this magnitude and with these stakes, the process of the Cultural Revolution in our Party has been one which has involved a dividing out with those who were willing to make their peace with imperialism and its monstrous crimes, even if sometimes they would still call themselves communists, or would express the wish that a better world could be brought into being, so long as they did not have to take responsibility for the struggle, and face the sacrifices that would be required to actually make this a reality. Some people refused, or found themselves unable, to rupture with revisionism and so resigned (or were prevailed upon to resign) from the Party. For the most part, and with a few exceptions,¹⁷ those who have left the Party have done so on the basis of insisting that they do not believe that revolution is possible—at least not in this country, not in any meaningful time frame—while some have even

acknowledged that they no longer regard revolution and communism as desirable. In reality, what this means is not that revolution is not possible, and communism not desirable, but that these people's revolutionary will and communist orientation have degenerated and—unlike those who have come forward through the course of the Cultural Revolution in our Party, and once again and more deeply have committed themselves to the cause of communism—those who have turned their back on the Party and on revolution recognize that this revolution and its goal of communism will require, but they are not willing to undertake, “the hard work, the risky work, the often unpopular and ‘going against the tide’ work, to make this a reality.”¹⁸ They no longer meet the basic criteria spelled out in our Party's *Constitution* (Part II. Principles of Organization):

The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA is made up of people who have come together to help fulfill the greatest need before humanity: making revolution, as the first step toward communism. They have fully dedicated their lives to this—with great seriousness and great love; with great determination and great passion.¹⁹

In its principal aspect and most essentially, the outcome of the Cultural Revolution within our Party has been a real revitalization of the revolutionary and communist outlook, objectives, spirit, and culture of the Party—a Party facing squarely, and confronting scientifically, the complexities, the difficulties and the dangers, as well as the inspiration, of doing all it can to work for revolution in this country, and to contribute the most it can to this same cause throughout the world, all aiming for the final goal of communism. And the struggle continues, on a new basis, within the Party to further strengthen, and deepen, its revolutionary character and foundations, in the context of vigorously and creatively carrying out revolutionary work, based on what is in fact the revolutionary-communist line of this Party.

Over a whole period of time, our Party has suffered—while masses of people who have looked to the Party, and the masses of people more broadly whose objective interests lie with communist revolution, have also suffered—as a result of the revisionism which had gained increasing influence within our Party, being fed by, and in turn strengthening, the tendency to adopt an incorrect summation and approach to the situation where the first stage of communist revolution had ended with the restoration of capitalism in China, and imperialists, old and new, were on a rampage to seize on this situation to even more ruthlessly plunder the world and to wage an unrelenting ideological and political war in the attempt to demolish any remaining respect for the great things that had actually been accomplished in that first stage of socialism and to discredit the revolutionary science of communism which brought to light the possibility and gave guidance to the real-world struggle that made possible those great achievements. Through the course of the Cultural Revolution in our Party, we have emerged much stronger, and unified on a much higher level, ideologically and politically as well as organizationally, more firmly grounded in the science of communism, as it has been further developed through the new synthesis brought forward by Bob Avakian, and with the understanding of this as a living science which we must continue to apply and to further develop, in an ongoing way and through continuing struggle.

We have paid a price for sticking to communist principles and objectives and refusing to abandon the road of revolution for the well-worn ruts of reformism—which, it is claimed, is more “realistic” and will somehow “work”—when bitter experience has shown, over and over again, that this can only “work” to keep people contained within the killing confines of bourgeois rule and capitalist oppression. But having paid this price, we are now more prepared to take on the great responsibilities we must shoulder, more determined to rise to great needs before us—to actively work for revolution here, on the basis of the new synthesis brought forward by Bob Avakian, to make everything we do actively and meaningfully contribute to that revolutionary goal, and to fight for this same understanding and orientation in the communist movement in the world as a whole.

Fully aware of very real problems and risks that may be involved in doing so, we are making our experience—and what we have come to grasp, more deeply and firmly, through this experience—known to others, in the communist movement and more broadly, because of its profound lessons and its great importance for our whole cause. Our experience, particularly through the Cultural Revolution in our Party, has greatly raised our understanding of what it means for the masses of oppressed, here and around the world, and for the future of humanity, that such a Party has not been defeated and destroyed—that it has not only persevered but has achieved a real revitalization and strengthening, ideologically, politically and in terms of strategic revolutionary approach and communist orientation and a scientifically grounded determination to work tirelessly to make this understanding a powerful, living reality of masses of people consciously fighting for revolution, yes in this mightiest of all imperialist powers, in unity with people doing the same throughout the world. As our Chairman, Bob Avakian, has recently written:

It is in this way, it is on this scientific foundation and through the application of this scientific method and approach, that we can, and should, have a conquering spirit—and an orientation of (to borrow a phrase from a poem by Yeats) passionate intensity—for revolution and communism.²⁰

VII. Conclusion: A Challenge and a Call

We mean what we have said here, and we mean what we say in the Conclusion of our *Party's Constitution*:

The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA has taken the responsibility to lead revolution in the U.S., the belly of the imperialist beast, as its principal share of the world revolution and the ultimate aim of communism. This is a great and historic undertaking—and all those who yearn to see this happen should rally to and support this vanguard, working together with the party, building support for it and, on the basis of taking up the cause and outlook of communism, joining it.

The emancipation of all humanity: this, and nothing less than this, is our goal. There is no greater cause, no greater purpose to which to dedicate our lives.²¹

All that we have spoken to here, and what we have laid bare, in direct and unvarnished terms, should give even greater meaning and emphasis to the call for people who share, or respect, our determination to bring a new world into being, without exploitation and oppression, to rally to the aid and support of this Party.

To the revolutionaries and communists everywhere, to all those who thirst for another, radically different and far better world: Let us not retreat into and retrench in the past, in whatever form—let us instead go forward boldly toward the goal of communism and the emancipation of humanity from thousands of years of tradition's chains.

ENDNOTES

1 Marx to Kugelmann, 1868, cited in Raymond Lotta, with Frank Shannon, *America in Decline, An Analysis of the Developments Toward War and Revolution, in the U.S. and Worldwide, in the 1980s*, Vol.1, Banner Press, Chicago, 1984, p. 10. [[back](#)]

2 For a fuller analysis of the relation between the oppression of Black people and the historical development of U.S. capitalism and imperialism, see Bob Avakian, *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 2008; also available online at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

3 *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 2008, Preamble: Basic Principles of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, p. 2, emphasis in original. This *Constitution* is also available online at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

4 "Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity," Parts 1 and 2, is available at revcom.us and in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, May 1, 2008. The book by Ardea Skybreak referred to here is *The Science of Evolution and the Myth of Creationism—Knowing What's Real and Why It Matters*, Insight Press, Chicago, 2006. [[back](#)]

5 Elsewhere, through the work of our Party's Chairman, Bob Avakian, and through the efforts of others drawing inspiration and guidance from his works and his method and approach, considerable summation has been made—and further summation continues to be made—of both the very real, and truly unprecedented, achievements and of the secondary but nonetheless significant, and in some ways quite serious, shortcomings and errors, in the Soviet Union as well as China, when they were socialist countries. See, for example, Bob Avakian, *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, published as issue No. 50 of *Revolution* magazine, December 1981, and available online at revcom.us, and "The End of a Stage, the Beginning of a New Stage," in *Revolution* magazine, issue No. 60, Fall 1990; see also thisiscommunism.org, the website of the Set the Record Straight project. [[back](#)]

6 Besides other sources that we have referred to in relation to the experience of the communist revolution and socialist society, for an important summation of the contributions of Marx, Lenin, and Mao to the development of the science of communism and the strategy of communist revolution, see the Appendix: Communism as a Science in the *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*. [[back](#)]

7 The literal end of the Soviet Union, in the early 1990s, came more than three decades after socialism had actually been overthrown and capitalism restored in that country in the mid-1950s. Since that time the Soviet Union had become, as Mao Tsetung identified it, *social-imperialist*, that is, socialist in name but capitalist-imperialist in fact and in deed, although this was a form of capitalist imperialism in which the state was the decisive locus and central element of the economy. Yet while now capitalist, the Soviet Union, as a social-imperialist power, remained a formidable rival to the U.S. and its imperialist bloc; and, ironically, when the Soviet Union and its empire literally unraveled in the 1990s, this was seized on by apologists and “triumphalists” of “classical Western” capitalism-imperialism and proclaimed as yet another defeat for communism and “proof” that socialism is an unwieldy and unworkable monstrosity. For analysis of the actual experience of socialist society, in the Soviet Union and China—the historically unprecedented and liberating transformations carried out in those countries when they were socialist, and the very real problems, shortcomings, and errors, see thisiscommunism.org, the website of the Set the Record Straight project. [[back](#)]

8 Those who claim that the experience of the communist movement, and the socialist societies it has brought into being, shows the limitation and ultimately the bankruptcy of what they call the “party-state paradigm,” have drawn essentially erroneous and misleading conclusions, which echo the “conventional wisdom” propagated by the capitalists and their intellectual camp followers and feed into the cacophony of their anti-communist dithyrambs (their sound and fury which ultimately signify nothing...or nothing positive). In the coming months and years—including through an online theoretical journal, as well as our Party’s newspaper, *Revolution*, and other vehicles—we will more thoroughly excavate, dissect, and refute theories such as this, and the outlook and method they embody. Here, let us state very clearly that without this so-called “party-state paradigm”—in other words, without state power for the formerly exploited, aiming to abolish all exploitation and uproot all oppressive relations throughout the world, and without a vanguard to lead in that process—you will not even come close to addressing, let alone to solving, the profound and complex contradictions that have to be dealt with in order to actually bring a radically different world into being. To abandon and attack that “paradigm” is, at least objectively and regardless of anyone’s professed intent, to abandon and undermine the goal, and the struggle to realize the goal, of breaking out of and ultimately breaking free of the system that perpetuates all too real horrors that now daily wound and haunt humanity and indeed pose a very real threat to its continued existence. *That* is what the experience of the communist movement—and indeed the historical experience of human society overall—actually shows, when it is examined and summed up with a scientific outlook and method. [[back](#)]

9 See, for example, Bob Avakian, *The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung*, text of a speech by Bob Avakian delivered at Mao Tsetung Memorial Meetings, RCP Publications, Chicago, 1978, and *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, RCP Publications, Chicago, 1979. [[back](#)]

10 See "[Re-envisioning Revolution and Communism: What IS Bob Avakian's New Synthesis?](#)", available online at [revcom.us](#). [[back](#)]

11 "[Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity](#)" (Part 1), available online at [revcom.us](#); also included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet—the quote here is found on p. 27 of that pamphlet. [[back](#)]

12 Bob Avakian, *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, published as issue No. 50 of *Revolution* magazine, December 1981, RCP Publications, Chicago. For a presentation of essential aspects of Bob Avakian's development of the content and scientific basis for communist internationalism, see (in addition to *Conquer The World?*) "[Advancing the World Revolution: Questions of Strategic Orientation](#)," originally published in *Revolution* magazine, Spring 1984, available online at [revcom.us](#). [[back](#)]

13 "[Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity](#)" (Part 1), available at [revcom.us](#), and included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet—the quote here is from pp. 36-37 of that pamphlet. [[back](#)]

14 The *Constitution* of our Party, in the Appendix: Communism as a Science, explains that bourgeois right refers to:

the way the still existent commodity relations and inequalities left over from capitalism, right within socialist society, mutually reinforce each other, and are reflected in the superstructure—the political institutions and ways of thinking, culture, and so on—and how all this poses obstacles to the continuing revolutionary advance under socialism and must be restricted and finally overcome as a crucial part of the struggle to prevent capitalist restoration and achieve the final goal of communism. [[back](#)]

15A concise exposure of the illusions of "pure" and "classless" democracy, and explanation of the actual relation between democracy and dictatorship—of fundamentally different kinds—is presented in the following statement by Bob Avakian:

In a world marked by profound class divisions and social inequality, to talk about “democracy”—without talking about the *class nature* of that democracy and which class it serves—is meaningless, and worse. So long as society is divided into classes, there can be no “democracy for all”: one class or another will rule, and it will uphold and promote that kind of democracy which serves its interests and goals. The question is: *which class* will rule and whether its rule, and its system of democracy, will serve the *continuation*, or the eventual *abolition*, of class divisions and the corresponding relations of exploitation, oppression and inequality. (Cited in the Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, emphasis in original; this can also be found at revcom.us.) [[back](#)]

16 During this present period, some communists, former communists, and “fellow travelers” of communism have conjured up an eclectic brew of scholasticism, agnosticism, and relativism, which is in opposition, in some cases consciously and explicitly, to the new synthesis brought forward by Bob Avakian, and in any case to the fundamental outlook, methodology, and objectives of communism. Those who proffer this brew claim that there is no adequate theoretical framework to explain, clarify, and draw the appropriate lessons from the past experience of the communist movement and to guide practice which would avoid the mistakes of the past, as these people (mis)understand them. Therefore, the argument goes, efforts must be spent on what can only amount to endless and aimless endeavors to discover, in a realm totally divorced from revolutionary practice guided by communist principles, the necessary theoretical framework. Often this is accompanied by an advocacy, if not an actual carrying out, of practical work and struggle on the most narrow basis and of the most reformist kind—another ingredient in this eclectic brew. All this serves, at least objectively, as a rationalization for withdrawing, retreating, or simply remaining aloof from actual *revolutionary struggle*—struggle guided by communist theory and principles which in fact can be, have been, and are being developed, in dialectical relation with practice, in the broad and not narrow sense—struggle with a revolutionary not reformist content.

It is hardly surprising, especially in a highly parasitic imperialist country—an imperialism which literally preys on the world and billions of its people—that such a scholasticist, relativist, and agnostic orientation and approach would arise, even with a more or less communist coloration, and would find some receptivity particularly among the more privileged strata, and specifically among the intelligentsia. For, so long as one can continue to maintain that an adequate theoretical framework is lacking, one can continue to convince oneself that there is nothing wrong with refusing to make the commitment to the actual struggle for communism, a commitment and struggle which could compel one to move outside of what is, after all, the not so uncomfortable existence of an academe in the world’s wealthiest and most powerful imperialist citadel. What is being objected to here is definitely not the role of the academic intellectual *per se*, nor grappling in the realm of theoretical abstraction itself—which can be an important area of endeavor and can in fact make valuable contributions, in various ways, to the cause of communism, even when this does not directly involve the realm of politics and political philosophy. Rather, what is being identified, and sharply criticized, is the

phenomenon of making a principle of approaching theory in abstraction from revolutionary practice and in opposition to the scientific communist, dialectical and materialist, understanding of and approach to the relation between theory and practice, as this has been discussed here. And we do feel the need to express our impatience with a certain kind of frankly unintelligible and self-consciously obfuscating fluff that passes itself off as, and all too often passes for, radical thinking in academic circles and which at times even masquerades as Marxism. [\[back\]](#)

17An exception to the general pattern with those who have left the Party on the basis of more or less openly giving up on revolution, is a motley group which has not been content simply to capitulate to imperialism but has set itself up as a small cabal of “parasitic critics” outside the Party, seeking to fabricate “grand rationalizations” for this capitulation by launching highly unprincipled attacks on our Party and its leadership—and in particular our Chairman Bob Avakian—by purveying gossip and innuendo, slander and crude distortion of our Party’s line and work, and even making crude appeals to anti-communism, all while still pretending, for now, to uphold revolution and communism (although this pretense, too, will very likely be abandoned before long). While objectively this represents a minor phenomenon, there are some things that characterize these “critics” which can serve as useful teachers by negative example.

First, the positions and viewpoints that they are now arguing for have the virtue (if it can be called that) of presenting, in a fairly thorough way, precisely the kinds of revisionist lines that were identified, dug out, discredited, and defeated through the course of the Cultural Revolution in our Party—lines whose features we have outlined here in discussing the “revisionist package” that emerged in opposition to the revolutionary line within our Party.

Second, the former Party members who resigned and started up this little cabal have provided a textbook example of the nature of political and ideological opportunism, including in the fact that they refused to carry out principled struggle over their differences while *in* the Party. Such conduct is in contradiction to and in violation of the fact that it is a basic principle of communist organization, and has all along been an explicit principle of our Party, that Party members have not only the right but the responsibility to raise differences with the line and policies of the Party, in an open and aboveboard way, through the appropriate Party channels. Moreover, during the course of the Cultural Revolution in our Party, all Party members were called on at one point to seriously reflect on their commitment to the Party, its communist principles and aims, and the content and objectives of the Cultural Revolution in the Party, and if—but only if—they were firm in this commitment, to rededicate to this. And it is noteworthy that a certain Mike Ely, who is now attempting to puff himself up as some kind of “big fish” in this little stagnant pond of “parasitic critics,” did in fact make such a rededication at that time—once again without raising any objections or differences concerning the line of the Party and the aims and the course of the Cultural Revolution within the Party.

Given that it has now become very clear that he has had disagreements with the basic line of the Party—not only in the last few years, during the period when a Cultural Revolution has been carried out within the Party, but going back well before that—the question naturally poses itself: Why did such a person remain in the Party all that time, while refusing to raise substantive disagreement with or wage open and aboveboard struggle around important aspects of the Party's line that he has clearly held basic differences with over a whole period of time? The obvious answer is that he remained in the Party, while at the same time *concealing* major differences, in the attempt to use the Party as a vehicle for his own, opportunist line. Evidently, as a result of the grip of revisionism in our ranks, he found it possible for many years to carry out his “alternative lifestyle” inside our Party, pretending unity and more or less doing whatever he wanted, given the rampant liberalism that was a part of the revisionist line and the culture it promoted within our Party. It was only as the Cultural Revolution continued to be carried forward, and as the ground for revisionism was increasingly cut away, that he found it more and more difficult to continue carrying out an opposing line while feigning agreement with the Party. So then, what did he do? He abruptly quit the Party, sought other avenues for the expression of his opportunism, and launched his unprincipled attacks on the Party and its leadership. Before quitting the Party, did he exhaust—or even seek to utilize—the means that exist within the Party for raising and struggling over differences in a principled way? Did he, before quitting, write up a paper expressing his differences and have it forwarded, through Party channels, to Party leadership? Did he request a meeting with Party leadership to voice and discuss these differences? No. Instead, he acted in complete violation of the principles of communism, and in fact in the opposite manner of anyone with any basic sense of integrity.

This kind of conduct is not surprising on the part of such a person, not only because of his opportunist political and ideological line in general but also because, especially once the Cultural Revolution was launched and was gaining momentum within our Party, and the sights of Party members were being raised to crucial questions of ideological and political line, and to struggling out these lines with science and substance, had he attempted, while still in the Party, to employ the kind of “tabloid” methods he has used since quitting the Party—innuendo, gossip, “revelations of inside information,” and so on—this would not only have been immediately recognized, within the Party, as crude and ludicrous distortion, and blatant violation of communist principle, but it would have been identified as part of a more overall opportunism, and he would have been required to abandon those kinds of unprincipled methods and instead engage, in a serious way, with the crucial questions of line that have been at stake in this Cultural Revolution, and to defend, by principled and substantive means, the lines he has obviously held in opposition to the revolutionary line of the Party. And he would have failed miserably in attempting to do that, because once again these lines would have been clearly recognized as representative of the very “package” that the Party, and its members, were increasingly identifying as revisionist and waging ideological struggle against as such.

As we have said, in the course of a major class struggle—and that is what this Cultural Revolution in our Party has been: a crucial class struggle, in the ideological realm—things and people are bound to divide out. Our Party, having carried out this struggle on a principled basis, focusing on questions of ideological and political line and seeking to win as many as can be won to the revolutionary line, without compromising with revisionism, has greatly strengthened itself in its communist outlook and orientation and its ability to carry out its revolutionary responsibility; and on this basis we are well rid of opportunists like those in this small cabal of “parasitic critics.” And while the line of such opportunists is utterly bankrupt, our Party, and the revolutionary movement we are dedicated to building, and leading, will be strengthened as people compare and contrast the objectively counter-revolutionary line of these opportunists and the role they are playing, with the revolutionary-communist line and work of our Party.

(In this connection, see “Stuck in the ‘Awful Capitalist Present’ or Forging a Path to the Communist Future?, A Response to Mike Ely’s Nine Letters,” by a writing group in the RCP, available online at revcom.us.) [\[back\]](#)

18 Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, II. Principles of Organization, Article 1 —Membership, p. 18; also available online at revcom.us. [\[back\]](#)

19 Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, II. Principles of Organization, p. 15; also available online at revcom.us. [\[back\]](#)

20 Bob Avakian, Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy, RCP Publications, Chicago, 2008; this work is also available online at revcom.us. [\[back\]](#)

21 Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, Conclusion, p. 24; also available online at revcom.us. [\[back\]](#)