

THE BASIS, THE GOALS, AND THE METHODS OF THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

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Bob Avakian

The Vision, the Works, the Leadership for a New Stage of Communist Revolution

By Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party

[Editors' Note: The following is drawn from a talk given by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, to a group of Party members and supporters in 2005. It has been edited for publication here, and subheads and footnotes have been added. Previous excerpts drawn from the same talk have been printed in *Revolution*, most recently a series of excerpts with the overall title "Views on Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM"—see *Revolution* #37, 39, 40, 41, 42, and 43 (March 5, 19, 26 and April 2, 9, and 16, 2006). "Views on Socialism and Communism" is available in its entirety at revcom.us.]

The New Synthesis: Not Utopianism, But Dealing With Real-World Contradictions

I want to move on now—everything that's been spoken to so far forms, in one aspect, a kind of a background for this—to speak more directly and fully to the question: What is the *new synthesis*?

The first point that needs to be made is that this is something that is dealing with real world contradictions—it's not some idealist imaginings of what it would be nice to have a society be like. When we talk about a world we want to live in, it is not a utopian notion of inventing a society out of whole cloth and then trying to reimpose that on the world once again. But it is dealing with *real-world contradictions*, summing up the end of a stage (the first stage of socialist revolutions)¹ and what can be learned out of that stage, attempting to draw the lessons from that and dealing with real-world contradictions in aspects, important aspects, that are new. It is a synthesis that involves taking what was positive from previous experience, working through and discarding what was negative, recasting some of what was positive and bringing it forward in a new framework. So, again, it's dealing with real-world contradictions—but in a new way.

In this connection, there is a point of basic orientation that is worth quoting from a paper written by a leading comrade of our Party:

"If we try to embrace, encompass and explore non-communist people, ideas and perspectives ever more widely and flexibly (which we should do) *but do so on the basis of something other than a truly solid core and strategic grounding in OUR project and objectives*, we will at one and the same time fail to harvest as much as we could from these wider explorations and initiatives AND, most unconscionably, we will LOSE THE WHOLE THING!"

Now, this has particular application with regard to the orientation and approach of our Party; but, in the broader framework of the larger world we need to be transforming, this also has more general application. And what's being said here is an important aspect of the principle of **solid core with a lot of elasticity**,² which is itself a kind of encapsulation, or concentrated expression, of what is involved in the new synthesis I am referring to. Not only now but throughout the struggle, to first seize power and establish socialism and then to continue advancing to communism—in other words, both before and after the seizure of power—the general principle of solid core with a lot of elasticity and the specific point that's being driven home in what I cited above from that paper by a leading comrade will have important, indeed fundamental, application: the contradiction between on the one hand, yes, embracing, encompassing and exploring non-communist people, ideas and perspectives ever more widely and flexibly and getting the most we can out of that—not in a narrow, utilitarian sense, but in the broadest sense—but at the same time not losing the whole thing, not letting go of the solid core, without which none of this will mean anything in relation to what must be our most fundamental objectives.

Living With and Transforming the Intermediate Strata in the Transition to Communism

And this relates to the very real and often acute contradiction between applying the united front under the leadership of the proletariat—the leadership of the **proletariat**, and not of the petty bourgeoisie, or some other class—all the way through the transition to communism on the one hand, and on the other hand, *actually forging ahead through that transition and advancing to communism*. So "solid core with a lot of elasticity" relates to this very real and often acute contradiction, which in turn relates to the point that Lenin made when he said that the first and, in a certain historical sense the easier, step is to overthrow and to appropriate the bourgeoisie (to expropriate the holdings of the bourgeoisie). And if this is, in a certain historical sense, an easier step, the more difficult process is one of, as Lenin put it, **living with and transforming** the middle strata in the transition to communism. This is a very profound point, and both aspects of this are important; this is once again a unity of opposites—*living with* and *transforming* the middle strata. If you set out only to live with them, you will end up surrendering power back, not to the petty bourgeoisie but in fact to the bourgeoisie; things will increasingly be on their terms. On the other hand, if you seek only to transform the petty bourgeoisie (speaking broadly, to refer to the intermediate strata of various kinds), you will end up treating

them like the bourgeoisie and driving them into the camp of the bourgeoisie, seriously undermining the dictatorship of the proletariat, and you will end up losing power that way, also.

So there is, as Lenin emphasized, the need to live with and transform these middle strata, these intermediate strata, both in their material conditions as well as in their world outlook—and in the dialectical relation between the two. This goes back to my comment earlier, speaking to three basic class forces, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and the proletariat: the transition to communism aims to and must eliminate the basis for and the existence of *all three* of these groups, or classes, but the proletariat is the only one that doesn't mind. The petty bourgeoisie definitely minds; it will continually strive to re-create its existence as a petty bourgeoisie and, indeed, will strive toward becoming the bourgeoisie, spontaneously. But you have to draw a clear distinction between the petty bourgeoisie (the intermediate strata) and the bourgeoisie, and not seek to exercise dictatorship over the petty bourgeoisie, which would drive them into the arms of the enemy—and, in that and in other ways, would work against our most fundamental objectives. (I will speak to that more fully in discussing the “parachute” point a little later.) On the other hand, you can't simply allow these intermediate strata to follow the spontaneity of their own outlook and their own interests at any given time, or you will lose the whole thing that way.

As you move to uproot the soil that gives rise to capitalism and move beyond the sphere of commodity production and exchange—the law of value, the great difference between mental and manual labor, and all the production and social relations and the rest of the “4 Alls”³ characteristic of capitalism—you are going to run into conflict with the interests of intermediate strata. And how to handle that, through the whole long transition from socialism to communism (which, again, can only happen on a world scale), is going to be a very, very tricky question and one that's going to require a consistent application of materialist dialectics, in order to be able to win over, or at least politically neutralize, at any given time, the great majority of these intermediate strata—and prevent the counter-revolutionaries from mobilizing them, playing on grievances they may have, or playing on and preying on the ways in which things that you objectively and legitimately need to do may alienate sections of the petty bourgeoisie at a given time. And here again there is a real contradiction—which can become quite acute at times—between the necessity that you are, in fact and correctly, imposing on the petty bourgeoisie, while not exercising dictatorship over it, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the countervailing spontaneity and influence of the larger social and production relations which exist and which you have not thoroughly transformed—and, along with that, there is the larger world, which at any given time may be mainly characterized by reactionary production and social relations and the corresponding superstructure. You are not going to be able to deal with all this in such a way as to not only maintain the rule of the proletariat but to continue the advance toward communism, unless you can correctly handle the principle and strategic approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity.

In this regard we can say that there is a kind of application, under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of an important formulation in *Strategic Questions*⁴—which I won't try to fully elaborate here, but it has to do with drawing dividing lines so that, at any given point, you unite the greatest number of people around positions which are, to the greatest degree possible, in the objective interests of the proletarian revolution, while at the same time winning as many as possible *subjectively* to that—or, in other words, winning as many as you can to be partisan toward the goal of proletarian revolution—*without undermining* the necessary unity at any given time. You can see that's another “moving target”—it's a living dynamic and a contradictory thing, sometimes in acute ways. And, in socialist society itself, particularly with regard to the middle strata, but more broadly and even among the proletarians, there is an application of that principle spoken to in *Strategic Questions*. But if you let go of the solid core, none of this would be possible. In terms of the four objectives I referred to earlier, in relation to the solid core in socialist society—including the importance of having the maximum elasticity possible at every given point—if you let go of the first point, holding onto power, none of the rest of it has any meaning.⁵ So we can see how there is tremendous tension—or, another way to say it, there is very acute contradiction—involved in all this.

And, as I have spoken to, this involves a whole epistemological dimension as well as the political dimension. It involves the question of how not only the communists but the masses of people broadly actually come to a deeper and richer synthesis of the understanding of reality in any phase of things, through any process, and in turn have a stronger basis for transforming the world—without giving up what you've got at any given time, without letting go of the core of everything. This is what causes me to continually invoke the metaphor of being drawn and quartered.⁶ If you think about this—if you actually try to think about this image of standing there at the core of all this, unleashing all this intellectual and political ferment in society, while at the same time you are seeking to bring into being certain material and ideological transformations that move toward communism and which run up against spontaneous inclinations, even of proletarians, and run up against certain vested interests of intermediate strata, and, of course, run fundamentally up against the bourgeoisie and the imperialists and other reactionary forces—you're trying to do all that and (continuing the image) you're holding on to the reins with each hand while people are running in all kinds of directions. If you really think about all that, you can see why I continue to invoke the metaphor of being drawn and quartered, if we don't handle this correctly. But I am equally convinced that, if we don't proceed in this way, we are not going to get, within the socialist country itself, the kind of process we need in order to get to communism (leaving aside for a minute the whole international dimension, which I will come back to).

Now, this principle of solid core with a lot of elasticity—and elasticity *on the basis of the solid core*, let me emphasize that once again—has to do with, is closely bound up with, another principle which is discussed in the talk on the dictatorship of the proletariat:⁷ namely, the great importance of distinguishing between those times and circumstances when it is necessary to pay finely calibrated attention to things and to insist that they be done “just this way,” and, on the other hand, those times and circumstances when it is

not only *not necessary* to do that, but it would be *harmful* to do that. In the experience of our Party, for example, there have been various times and circumstances when it was necessary to pay very finely calibrated attention and insist on things being done exactly *this way* and *not that way*—and, along with that, to insist on things being very tightly in formation, so to speak. But then there have been many other circumstances where that has not been the case, and where to insist on this would be wrong and harmful. For example, relatively recently we have had debate about the Party Programme, inside as well as outside the Party, and we have had other processes in the Party where there have been debate and struggle over questions of line. This is not, and should not be, just a one-time or infrequent aspect of things—it is something that should find expression repeatedly, in the appropriate times and circumstances, in the ongoing political and ideological life of the Party.

As I pointed out in that talk on the dictatorship of the proletariat, this relationship between “opening up” and “closing ranks” and between elasticity and solid core, is also a dialectical process, a unity of opposites. What is solid core in one aspect also has elasticity within it as well. There is no such thing as a solid core that doesn’t have some elasticity within it. At any given time (as well as in an overall sense), there are always those things to which you are paying finely calibrated attention, but other aspects of the same thing to which you are not paying the same systematic attention.

In that talk on the dictatorship of the proletariat, one of the examples I used was writing an article. It’s not that you don’t care about certain things you say, but some of them you have to get exactly right, because they bear on the whole character of what you’re saying, while with other things, you say them as best you can but you do not—and actually should not—pay the same amount of attention, or you’d never finish writing, for one thing. And in anything you do—in a meeting, for example, and more generally in everything you do—this principle applies: solid core with elasticity and paying finely calibrated attention to some things that are at the core and give definition to everything you’re doing, while not trying to pay the same kind of attention, and allowing a lot more elasticity, with regard to other things.

And with regard to the aspect of solid core itself, you can’t say, “well, we have to have an absolute, perfect solid core before we can allow for any elasticity and initiative.” On the other hand, there is a real problem if the elasticity is not, in a fundamental sense, on the basis of the solid core—if, in effect, the elasticity and the initiative that is taken amounts to, or results in, substituting *some other* solid core for the one that is actually, objectively needed. But, again, you can’t get metaphysical and “absolutist” about this: You can’t say, “only when we have some ‘absolute’ solid core, and everybody has exactly the same level of understanding and agreement with regard to that solid core, can we then have any elasticity.” First of all, you’ll never achieve that kind of absolute certainty and absolute unity, you’re never going to overcome all unevenness; and second of all, your solid core will dry up and turn into its opposite, into dogma. It will become lifeless and turn into its opposite, and it won’t even be a solid core any more, in fact. There has to be space and life, even within a solid core; there are certain solid core things *within* any solid core,

around which other things, within that solid core, are less solid and have more elasticity, if you will. (This is another expression of the very important point made by Mao, which I have emphasized a number of times: what is universal in one context is particular in another, and vice versa.) But if you don't have sufficient adhering power, so to speak, at the core, so that (to use this metaphor) the electrons are flying off in every direction, then you have a serious problem.

Once again, we can see that crucially involved in all this is that fundamental dividing line between materialism and idealism, and between dialectics and metaphysics. You can't have a metaphysical view of what a solid core is, and somehow it has to be absolutely solid; at the same time, you can't have an idealist view of the whole process which corresponds to people going off in all directions because there's no material grounding in terms of what the solid core is and has to be in any given set of circumstances, and in terms of what are the things where you have to insist on their being done in a certain way, with everyone "marching in tight formation," so to speak, and on the other hand what are those things where you not only should *not* do that but where it would do real harm to try to insist on that.

And, speaking frankly, among the ranks of the communists—this applies to our Party but also more generally to the communist movement—there is a need for a further leap and rupture beyond utopianism and idealism and, frankly, beyond social-democracy or even outright bourgeois democracy and, ironic as it may sound, even plain old, straight-up anti-communism within the communist movement itself, which takes expression particularly in what amounts to a bourgeois-democratic view of such crucial things as the nature and role of the state and a bourgeois-democratic critique of the historical experience of the proletarian state. We need to leap and rupture beyond and out of those confines, even while we also need to rupture more thoroughly with the "mirror opposite" of this: the tendency to dogmatism and essentially a religious view of the principles and of the experience of communism and the communist movement, which amounts basically to "all solid core" with *no* real elasticity—and, correspondingly, to a "solid core" that in the final analysis is not all that solid, is in fact brittle, because it is grounded in apriorism and instrumentalism (seeking to impose dogmatic conceptions *on* reality and to "bend" and torture reality to make it serve certain preconceived notions and certain aims—not to engage reality and transform the actual necessity that has to be confronted, in accordance with its fundamental and driving contradictions, but to apply one variation or another of what Lenin criticized as the approach of "truth as an organizing principle," which amounts to a subjective and idealist notion of truth rather than a recognition of truth as something that is objective and that is characterized by its being a correct reflection of objective reality). Still, while we must reject an orientation and approach that amounts to "all solid core," at the same time we cannot have a utopian and idealist view of what elasticity means—treating it as something unmoored from the actual underlying material relations of society, and the world, in which all this is embedded, a material reality which we are seeking to transform, but can't simply transcend in our minds.

The correct application of this principle—solid core with a lot of elasticity—is elasticity **on the basis of the necessary solid core** at every given point. And I say *the necessary solid core* because, again, dialectics enters in: it is not a matter of some absolute solid core, because that would be metaphysics—conceiving of and aiming to achieve some perfect state of solid core, which in fact you never will achieve—but it is a matter of the *necessary* solid core: enough of a solid core so that it acts as a powerful cohering center and basis on which you can then proceed to move forward and unleash the elasticity and the initiative, *without losing the whole thing*. And there's no “magic formula”—or, in a basic sense, no formula of any kind—for that. There's no formula. You can't get out a “sliding calculus” and say: at this stage of socialism, we need 28% solid core, and you can have 72% elasticity; but at this stage, once there is an imperialist intervention and invasion, we can only have 4% elasticity and 96% solid core. That's not how it works. *[laughter]* These are living, moving things that we have to be scientifically engaging and dealing with and determining concretely on the basis of actually grasping the motion and development of the defining and driving contradictions.

The “Parachute” Point

What has been said so far, concerning “solid core with a lot of elasticity,” relates very closely to the next point I want to get into, which is ***the “parachute” point: the concentration of things at the time of the seizure of power, and then the “opening out” again after the consolidation of power.***

This is a general principle as to how revolution goes, and it also has more specific application to a country like this, and this country in particular. Whatever the path to power in a particular country—whether, in broad terms, the revolutionary road is one of protracted people's war, where that is applicable, which involves surrounding the cities from the countryside and then eventually seizing power in the cities and thereby in the country as a whole; or whether the revolutionary road involves, as it does in imperialist countries like the U.S., a whole period of political (and ideological) work and preparation and then, with the emergence of a revolutionary situation, a massive insurrection, involving millions and millions of people, centered and anchored in the urban cores—either way, at the time when countrywide political power can be seized, things become “compressed” politically. A lot of the diverse political trends and currents that are in opposition to the established power either become politically paralyzed and/or they become compressed in and around the one core that actually embodies the means for breaking through what needs to be broken through to meet the immediately, urgently felt needs of broad masses of people who are demanding radical change. This happens specifically and in a concentrated way when that need to break through to actually seize power is not just some sort of long-term strategic objective and consideration, but becomes immediately posed; when, along with that and as part of that, other programs which are seeking social change become paralyzed in the attempts to implement them—

run up against their limitations which, on a mass scale, causes people to reject them and to rally from them to the one program that actually does represent the way to break through.

Things tend to become compressed at that point, as when a parachute closes up. And one of the things that has not been sufficiently understood—and has led to mistakes, in its not being correctly understood and dealt with—is the fact that, while this is a very real and important and necessary ingredient, in an overall sense, of actually being able to have the alignment that makes it possible to go for revolution, this is something that comes into being at the concentration point of a revolutionary situation but *not* something that will continue in the same way after that point has been passed, regardless of how that situation is resolved—not only if the revolutionary attempt fails or is defeated, *but even if it is successful and results in the establishment of a new, radically different state power*. Even then, after that situation has passed, and as things go forward in the new society, the “parachute” will “open back up” and “spread out.”

This relates to Lenin’s third condition for an insurrection—that a situation develops in which political paralysis qualitatively weakens half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution. Other forces, representing the interests of social strata other than the proletariat, and programs corresponding to that, are paralyzed or incapable of speaking to the needs and demands of masses of people and what’s posed, very acutely, by the objective situation. When that occurred, for example, in the Russian Revolution in October 1917, people in huge numbers rallied to the Bolsheviks. And in that situation, as the revolutionary crisis assumed its most acute expression, there was that dramatic moment when one of the Mensheviks (reformist socialists) said at a mass meeting, “there is no party here that would lead a struggle for power”—and Lenin rose and declared emphatically: “There *is* such a party!” And Lenin and the Bolsheviks were able to win people to that. But this does not mean that all the people that they won, at that decisive moment, were won in any full sense, or anything close to it. That is, they were not necessarily won, in their great majority, to the full communist program. While some were won to that, for a far greater number it was more that, at that acute moment, the program of the Bolsheviks, and of no other force, represented the only way out of a desperate and increasingly intolerable situation.

So here is where, after power is consolidated, “the parachute opens back out.” In other words, all the diversity of political programs, outlooks, inclinations, and so on—which reflect, once again, the actual remaining production and social relations that are characteristic of the old society, as well as what’s newly emerging in the society that has been brought into being as a result of the revolutionary seizure and consolidation of power—all these things assert, or reassert, themselves. And if you go on the assumption that, because people all rallied to you at that particular moment when only your program could break through—if you identify that with the notion that they’re all going to be marching in lockstep with you and in agreement with you at every point all the way to communism—you are going to make very serious errors. This is a very important point in general in terms of revolution and, obviously, would have particular and important

application in a country like the U.S. And, obviously, this relates to **solid core with a lot of elasticity**, because everything is going to get pulled more toward that revolutionary core at the time when everything is compressed like that—and then many things are going to move back out, away from that core, in a certain sense.

This is an important dimension in which the whole question of living with and transforming the middle strata asserts itself, and poses the kind of contradictions that I've been talking about. On the one hand, there are the basic proletarian masses and, within the broad ranks of those masses, there are those who are most advanced and class conscious in their understanding, who are most firmly supporters of and fighters for the revolution, and who most deeply understand the overall objectives of the revolution and the final aim of communism; and then, along with those advanced proletarians, there are intermediate and backward, even among the proletariat, and there are broader strata of people (within which there are also advanced, intermediate, and backward). And once again, to continue advancing toward the goal of communism, which involves a whole long period of transition, you have to know how to handle all these different dimensions and levels of the "social configuration," if you will, all the different expressions of the underlying contradictions that are giving rise to this. Ideologically, politically, and in terms of the economy and economic construction, as well as in terms of defending the socialist country while at same time supporting the world revolutionary struggle, you have to know how—here's another application of solid core with elasticity—you have to know how at one and the same time to (a) hold on firmly to power and keep going in the direction of communism, while (b) giving expression to, and making the most of, all positive factors of all the different forces and diverse strata among the broad category of the people in society, while handling correctly the negative aspects that go along with that, from the standpoint of continuing the socialist transition toward the goal of communism (which, once more, can only be achieved on a world scale).

Here again this involves great complexity: The core, at any given time, whatever that core is, is holding all this in its hands, so to speak, and has to see the broad panoply of all this and, at least in their basic outlines, all the gradations that lie within this, and know how to handle it all in a "textured way," if you want to use that metaphor. You have to handle correctly all the complexities of this while keeping it all going where it needs to go—continuing the revolution toward the goal of communism. You see, it's not "head down, march straight forward"; it's like this [*waving his hands in circles to give expression to all the complexity*], with all these different things going on, often in different and contradictory directions, within this whole process. That's what we're talking about dealing with, and if you try to compress that back down to what it was like at the time of the seizure of power, you're going to lose power, lose the whole thing, one way or another, because you will not be able to do that. On the other hand, if you let it all go where it wants to go [*laughter*—if you let it all go where it wants to go, then you're going to lose everything in that way—because it's going to go back into that spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie,⁸ in one form or another. And this is not existing in a vacuum, but in the actual conditions of what socialist society is like, with its material and

ideological “left-overs” from capitalism—with the continuing existence of different classes and strata, and their underlying material basis in the production relations, with the corresponding social relations, as well as the expression of this in the political and ideological superstructure—and the international context that all this exists within, with the existence of remaining imperialist and reactionary states and the very real dangers and threats this poses to socialist states that are brought into being through revolution.

We can see the negative, extremely negative, expression of not correctly grasping and handling this in the experience—which I won’t attempt to go into in any kind of full way here, but briefly—the experience of Pol Pot in Cambodia, where instead of this kind of approach they had this whole approach that involved real irony, as well as real disaster. They had peasant masses who had not undergone any real radical transformation in their thinking, despite certain changes in their material conditions: the peasant masses, especially in the base areas they established during the war against the Lon Nol regime and the U.S. (which installed and backed that regime), were led by intellectuals who had that problem, the very real problem that I’ve spoken of in other talks and writings—the phenomenon of education on a narrow foundation (I’ll come back to that point shortly, because it is actually a very important point). And the Khmer Rouge, under Pol Pot’s direction, took the rest of Cambodian society and attempted to pound and flatten it down to the level of the peasantry—as the peasantry was then—in the name of, and somehow as a supposed means for getting to, communism. To wildly understate it, they did not grasp solid core with elasticity or the “parachute point” at all. And this led to real disasters and, yes, real horrors.

The Danger of Education on a Narrow Foundation

Now, to turn more directly and fully to this point about education on a narrow foundation: I was reminded of this point again in seeing the presentation by Raymond Lotta on Setting the Record Straight—and specifically the discussion of the Soviet model of bringing up “a working class intelligentsia.” Besides the very real, and very significant, problem of mechanically identifying class *origin* with class *outlook*—which was a very marked tendency with Stalin but also found some expression in China under Mao’s leadership, although Mao was far more dialectical than Stalin about this, and in general—besides that problem, what was the essential aspect and the focus of that “working class intelligentsia” in the Soviet Union? Engineers. Now, I know that it’s probably not fair, and I don’t want to single out engineers as the only ones representative of the problem, but they are, I’m afraid to say, sort of a good metaphor for the problem. I have actually known engineers who became communists—but there’s still something about engineers, I’m sorry. *[laughter]* And there is definitely something about education on a narrow foundation, even if the education is in “Marxism.” If it’s education that amounts to training in dogma, which does not recognize and deal with the complexities of things—and all the different realms of society and history and nature, and yes, of epistemology, that have to be dealt with in order to actually lead this kind of complex process of revolution—if people trained in that kind of “education on a narrow foundation” emerge as the leadership, and if that leadership then takes basic masses as the main force it is

mobilizing and relying on, *but* takes them more or less *as they are*, and uses them as a battering ram in relation to all the other strata in society, it becomes a very, very bad and dangerous brew, a poisonous brew.

I've used this metaphor before—I've thought about this in terms of athletes, who go from very poor conditions up to very luxurious conditions, but never broaden their viewpoint as they go "upwards." Then they become "role models" for many others in society. And often combined with this, these days especially, is what this guy (Mark Bowden) who wrote the book *Black Hawk Down*, very well described as "jock Christianity." This is like getting in a very narrow elevator shaft and going from the basement to the penthouse without ever stopping and looking out any windows. And the same basic problem arises whenever anyone undergoes this kind of experience. This formulation about the danger of education on a narrow foundation was something I read in a book by Robert Kaplan, who's not a good guy, he's an imperialist apologist, but nevertheless it's an important insight, I believe, in his book *The Ends of the Earth*. He was actually talking about Islamic fundamentalism. And he quoted someone saying, "There is nothing so dangerous as education on a narrow foundation." With this in mind and returning to the metaphor of an elevator shaft, you get in the elevator and it doesn't stop on any floors, and it's not one of those elevators in a fancy hotel where there are glass walls so you can look out through those walls to see a broader sweep of things. It's very straight and narrow, and goes past floor after floor after floor, never stopping—it's got the express button on. And riding on that elevator, you never get a broader vista.

Well, if that's the kind of approach, even to Marxism, that you take, you can turn Marxism (or what claims to be Marxism) into its opposite, into something that becomes a weapon for very bad purposes and that does not recognize, and is not capable of recognizing, let alone dealing correctly with, the complexities that I've been talking about and emphasizing. Without going into great detail here, but just sort of characterizing things for the moment, this is essentially, epistemologically and politically, what was, to a significant degree, embodied in and what was happening in Cambodia under Pol Pot. You can see how things like that could be brought into being, and how even very positive things could be turned into their opposites, if they are led by people who are proceeding on the basis of "education" on a narrow foundation and, along with that, are mobilizing masses of oppressed people around a motivation of seeking revenge, not only against the old ruling class but also against anyone who may occupy a somewhat more "advantaged" position in relation to those on the bottom of society.

This is something we should learn from, very deeply. This is why I keep stressing these epistemological principles. If we are going to lead this whole process, we and our comrades throughout the international movement—and we are, because we must—then we have to develop this kind of a broad sweeping view and not an instrumentalist view of how we have to understand things and lead people to understand and transform things: what are the underlying and driving and defining contradictions and where they are tending, and how they have to be taken where they can be taken in the interests of the masses of people, broadly, and ultimately in the interests of humanity as a whole.

Anything less than that is going to fall short, “at best.” There will be many people we can unite with who represent something less than that, but nothing less than that can *lead* this process. And if it does, it will not go where it needs to go, even if it makes a start. Of this I am deeply convinced.

Relative Abundance, Relative Egalitarianism, and the Advance to Communism

There is an interconnection in all this between the underlying material conditions and the superstructural expressions, at every point. At the end of *Phony/Real*,⁹ I talked about this question of abundance and egalitarianism and stressed that what we are in favor of is **relative** abundance and **relative** egalitarianism during the transition to communism. Actually, with the achievement of communism we move beyond considerations of egalitarianism; but in the transition phase, during the socialist period, what we are talking about is relative abundance and its relation with relative egalitarianism. In other words, we are not for leveling, smashing everything down to the “lowest common denominator”—we’re not for “communizing poverty,” reducing everybody down to whatever the lowest status of people is at a given time, and then “we’ll all march forward together from there,” which is another expression of what went on in Cambodia under Pol Pot, more or less. But if we are correctly handling the back and forth between the underlying material factors and the superstructural expressions, the situation will continue to develop where, as it says at the end of *Phony/Real*, we increasingly develop greater relative abundance—in other words, there’s never **absolute** abundance, there are never **unlimited** resources, and there is never an absence of necessity, but there is a growing relative abundance, so that increasingly what is required (essentially, the amount of total labor time that is required) to simply reproduce the material requirements of life is declining, is taking up less and less of the time of the people, in relation to what overall is produced and is available in society and ultimately in the world as a whole. And, in interrelation with this, at every stage there should be further transformations in the economic base (in the production relations, including the division of labor in society, particularly the division between intellectual and physical labor) and in the superstructure, so as to move increasingly toward overcoming the remaining divisions and social inequalities. Put another way, what should be aimed for in society as a whole is: increasing relative egalitarianism, not essentially by bringing the higher levels down, so much as continuing to raise everything up, while moving (what was) the bottom up the most in an overall sense. In advancing toward and in finally realizing communism, the objective and the approach is not, and must not be, to “flatten everything out”—it is to continue to advance toward overcoming social inequality and, beyond that, to move beyond calculations of equality and inequality by realizing and implementing the principle of “from each according to their ability to each according to their need.”

This is another important aspect of the continual dialectical interplay between underlying material factors and the superstructural factors. It is another crucial dimension in which we have to understand and handle things correctly—not trying to overstep what’s possible at any given time but, as it says in *Phony/Real*, to repeatedly move, in the course

of the socialist transition, from one level to another, higher level of relative abundance and relative egalitarianism—which, in turn, will give further expression to the emancipation of the productive forces, including the masses of people above all, and will at the same time give increasing scope to the flourishing of the individuals who make up society, within the overall collective framework.

So we can see from all this that, if we're proceeding correctly, there's going to be a very real and often very acute contradiction between applying the United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat "all the way through" the transition to communism and, on the other hand, *actually forging ahead through that transition and finally arriving at the goal of communism*, together with the whole worldwide struggle. This, once again, has to do with the dialectical relation between living with and transforming the intermediate strata, and has everything to do with the application at every point of solid core with a lot of elasticity and the related principles that I've discussed.

ON MATERIALISM AND THE MATERIAL BASIS FOR REVOLUTION, FOR SOCIALISM AND THE ADVANCE TO COMMUNISM.

A Sober Sense of Our Responsibilities

Here is a point of truly world-historical importance: The fundamental contradiction of capitalism will continue to call forth the need for proletarian revolution and the advance to communism to resolve this fundamental contradiction; *but*, as was spoken to earlier, to realize this requires the conscious struggle to recognize this—to dig down to the essence of this—and to act on it.

This is also a very real contradiction: It is like proceeding through a thicket to actually get to a grasp of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism *and* how it is actually moving and developing, and the different forms of motion of all this, and how they're interpenetrating. This is not readily apparent, even to communists who are seeking to systematically apply the scientific outlook and method of communism to the world and to history and to society and nature.

So, on the one hand, even if all the communists in the world were to be wiped out tomorrow, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism would continue to objectively throw up the need for the proletarian revolution to resolve this contradiction in the interests of the masses of people. But, on the other hand, as we rupture more and more fully with determinism, we can understand that there is no guarantee that in any given period of time, or for a long time, there would necessarily emerge communists who would grasp this necessity, this objective need that was being acutely expressed. And we should recognize—we should fully confront the fact—that objectively, stepping back and

looking at things since the loss of China in 1976 (the revisionist coup d'état leading to the restoration of capitalism in China), while there have been and are important struggles going on in the world with real material force and important ideological expressions of what we're all about, in a very real sense communism is hanging by a thread in the world right now.

And if the communist viewpoint and method, and the striving for communist objectives, that is represented by our Party and its leadership and some others in the world at this time (and, together, let us be honest and scientific, we represent a small number, particularly in relation to the challenges we face in the world—and this must change) but if, in the more short run, this were wiped out or crushed and defeated, there is a real chance that communism as a conscious expression could suffer a very severe setback and perhaps even disappear for a while. I don't say this with any sense of defeatism—nor certainly to spread defeatism—nor do I say it to promote any false sense of self-aggrandizement on the part of those of us who are seeking to lead things toward the goals of revolution, socialism, and ultimately communism. I say this simply in a scientific sense. This is the reality—and this is the responsibility we have. This acutely posed itself at the time of the coup and capitalist restoration in China—was the communist movement going to basically be lost for a while, perhaps for a good while?—and it's posing itself again acutely now. If you look at what's going on in the world, if you look at the two extremes and everything in between that are talked about in “The New Situation and the Great Challenges,”¹⁰ you can understand from a materialist standpoint what I'm talking about. And, once again, I say this to emphasize nothing other than our profound responsibilities. We have a responsibility to fight for the correct understanding and application of the communist viewpoint and method, to see to it not only that this isn't lost but that it becomes, on a qualitatively higher level, a real material force, taken up by growing ranks of the masses of people, of proletarians and other strata.

And, on the other side of things—speaking of not just the one, the negative extreme that could result from the development of the current dynamics in the world, but also the other, positive extreme, as well as everything in between—there is the possibility of qualitative breakthroughs in the world struggle as a whole, both in the realm of theory but also in the realm of practice and in their dialectical relation. And not only in the world as a whole but also in this country itself.

Now as Raymond Lotta has pointed out (in his presentation on “Setting the Record Straight”¹¹ about the historical experience of socialist society and the dictatorship of the proletariat), the book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*¹² does bring out—I'd actually forgotten this myself [*laughs, laughter*] until I heard this presentation, but it does bring out what is a very important point, it focuses on a very important contradiction: The motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism (and all the contradictions it gives rise to) is indeed *tending toward* the advance to communism, but on the other hand—acutely in contradiction to that, and an expression of the fact that this is not inevitable, or the only possible resolution of this fundamental contradiction—this advance to

communism will require conscious and determined struggle on an unprecedented historical level in order to bring this into reality. And this, too, should give us a sober sense of our responsibilities.

To put it another way, what are we communists? We are not, to refer to Eldridge Cleaver's phrase, "the baddest motherfuckers on the planet earth"—at least not quite in the sense that he meant it. We are a reflection, we are the conscious expression, of this fundamental contradiction of capitalism—of how it is tending, *and* of the need for the world-historic struggle to resolve this contradiction in the interests of the masses of people through proletarian revolution and the advance to communism, worldwide. That is what we communists are. We are the conscious expression of that.

George Bush is a reflection and in a certain sense, more or less—and probably less in his case—a conscious expression of this contradiction, in terms of the interests of the bourgeoisie. But in a whole different way, on a whole different level, we are the conscious expression of this contradiction and its motion and development, the way in which this is tending *and* the way in which it needs to be resolved through conscious revolutionary struggle. And this enables us to understand our own role. This doesn't mean we are a *mechanical extension* of that—it means we are a *conscious expression* of it, with all the complexity and all the dynamism and initiative that this can imply—here again enters in the importance of a dialectical, as opposed to a mechanical-materialist, understanding of the relation between the economic base and the superstructure and more specifically between material reality and the reaction of people upon that material reality, to transform that reality, or, to put it another way, the dialectical relation between matter and consciousness and, as Mao emphasized, the continual transformation of the one into the other: matter being reflected in consciousness and, in turn, consciousness reacting back upon matter and changing it. (Of course it is important to keep in mind that consciousness itself is a form of matter in motion—and not something else—but consciousness, and in particular the consciousness characteristic of human beings, is a *particular kind* of matter in motion which has the ability to grasp the contradictions and driving forces in matter and its motion and development and to act, consciously, to affect that.)

The Proletariat and the Material Basis for Advancing to Communism

Now part, and indeed a crucial part, of the material basis for communism, if it is to not be an idealist good wish or a nice idea only, is the existence and role of the proletariat as the "grave-digger" of capitalism. This is a crucial, indeed indispensable, part of the material basis for advancing to communism. You cannot, despite Leibel Bergman, have a proletarian revolution in which dentists are the driving force.¹³ [laughter] You have to have a material basis—after all, what is embodied in this fundamental contradiction of capitalism? What does represent socialized production? It is the proletariat. And Engels did say there were two forms of motion of this contradiction, two expressions, one of them being the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Well, there

can't be a class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie if there is no proletariat. Fortunately, there is. And we have to add this, without getting mechanical materialist and determinist about this either: there cannot be a proletarian revolution if there are no class-conscious proletarians striving for that revolution.

So, we have to continue to examine and grapple with this question, continue to come back to the question of the proletariat, its actual existence and its revolutionary potential, now and in socialist society. We have to look at the contradictions involved in this from a materialist and dialectical standpoint and have a dialectical and materialist approach to this—as opposed to vulgar and mechanical materialism, determinism, and economism—in order to be able to actually lead a revolution in which the interests and outlook of the proletariat are in the leading and decisive position, understanding that not in some narrow, mechanical way, but rather in a sweeping, world-emancipating sense.

Looking at the U.S. itself, there are a lot of contradictory trends with regard to the proletariat. Here I am not going to try to examine all of this, but I do want to speak to some important aspects of it.

There is *proletarianization*, on the one hand, going on in different forms. People from the intermediate strata are being pushed down into the proletariat. And a big expression of this proletarianization involves immigrants coming into the U.S. who are from different strata in different countries, especially although not only from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Many of them were not proletarians in the countries they came from, and they carry the influences of that as well, but they become proletarians here, in their millions. So there is—in one dimension, one aspect of things—increasing proletarianization going on in the U.S. in this period. But there is also, in contradiction to that, significant *de-proletarianization* that is going on and has gone on for a number of years, and even decades. There are people whose situation changes from being proletarians to becoming semi-proletarians, who work part of the time, and make a living and accumulate things through other means as well, one way or another—peddling or petty activities in the informal economy and often in the illegal and underground economy—and there are people who go back and forth from the one to the other continually, depending on the particular ups and downs of the economy and other factors.

There has been a significant de-proletarianization over three decades now, and more, in the inner cities. You could actually trace it back to the 1950s, but it's accelerated since the mid-'70s. People who were working in even well-paying jobs, in auto or steel, for example—you go to the places where these steel plants were and, from what I understand, there's a bunch of cement there, in Gary, Indiana and Chicago and places like that; and auto plants, the same thing in parts of the midwest and in L.A. and the Bay Area and other places. Large numbers of people who formerly worked in these plants have gone into other positions, sometimes into lower sections of the proletariat, or they've gone into other ways of making their way through the world.

So there's *de*-proletarianization, and then there's some *re*-proletarianization. With regard to a number of services, such as travel, sometimes when people make travel or vacation arrangements they are speaking to somebody in prison—the job has been “farmed out” to the prison and people in prison doing that work are pushed back into conditions more approximating that of the proletariat—of an extremely exploited and oppressed proletariat, in fact—and there are other ways in which people are working in essentially semi-slave labor or very harsh sweatshop conditions within prison. That's one manifestation of what could be considered “re-proletarianization.” There are other dimensions to this—there are people who had better-paying positions who have been pushed down into the proletariat, even the lower sections of the proletariat, by the changes brought on by globalization and related phenomena.

These contradictory trends, including significant de-proletarianization, find expression in the superstructure, including in ideological and cultural phenomena and trends. One of the **main** expressions of this is the growth of religion and religious fundamentalism among formerly proletarian sections of people or semi-proletarian sections of people today. You see this, for example, among Black people and immigrants in the U.S. And you see it as a worldwide phenomenon (which I will get into shortly).

Underlying and driving all this, on the global scale, there is the further “imperialization,” if you will—further imperialist penetration and domination of agriculture and in general the economies of Third World countries—and accompanying that the stark, grotesque contradictions in those countries between “technologically advanced enclaves” and massive technological backwardness (think of India, for example—and think of the cover of *Notes on Political Economy*,¹⁴ with a computer screen and little children carrying back-breaking loads). There is this stark and grotesque contradiction between technologically advanced enclaves and massive technological backwardness, along with deepening impoverishment and immiseration and, together with this, the massive uprooting of the peasantry and migration to the urban areas, as well as emigration to far-flung parts of the globe—all this together with, and fundamentally as a part of, this further “imperialization.” On this scale, this is a phenomenon of the last several decades. For the first time in the history of the world, *half* the world's population now lives in urban centers—but often in desperate conditions, without being integrated in any “articulated” way into the economy of these countries: truly massive numbers of people are increasingly crowded into shantytowns which continue to grow in rings around the cities, and they are engaged, many of them (in many countries the majority of them), in the informal economy, both legal and illegal.

Changing Material Conditions and the Growth of Religious Fundamentalism

This is a new phenomenon in world history. It is an expression of both further and particular development of imperialism and of the setbacks of the socialist revolution in the world. Look at China, if you want to see this phenomenon once again—it is becoming more and more like India in many respects and particularly with regard to this

striking phenomenon, this acute contradiction, where there are enclaves marked by advanced technology and glittering facades of wealth, surrounded by a sea of mass poverty and desperation.

And, along with this, all over the world, we see the growth of religious fundamentalism. Mike Davis, who has his limitations but also has some important insights, wrote an article where he spoke about how in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when people were driven off the land in the countries where capitalism was rising, they were more or less—not evenly and smoothly but more or less—integrated into the proletariat. And the proletarianization of these people led to a *decrease* in religion. But the phenomenon in the world today is in significant measure the opposite: people being driven from the countryside to the cities, or flushed out of the proletariat, if you will, and being herded into these massive shantytowns, existing in this “disarticulated” kind of situation—this has given rise to the reverse phenomenon of the growth, the significant dramatic growth, of gravitation toward religion, and in particular religious fundamentalism. In countries that are traditionally Islamic, it’s Islamic fundamentalism. In India, it’s mainly Hindu fundamentalism. In large parts of Latin America and Africa and other places, it’s Protestant Evangelical and, in particular, Pentecostal fundamentalism (Pentecostalism). This is something we have to understand more deeply. Pentecostalism, for example, combines the most extreme form of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, talking in tongues and all the rest of that stuff, with a very overt populism. It actually started among poor Black people in the U.S. about a century ago. (It’s not the John Ashcroft version of Pentecostalism I’m talking about.) This is a phenomenon throughout the impoverished parts of the world, in this country as well as in places like Africa and Latin America. This is something we have to learn about and come to understand more deeply, in order to be able to contend with it more effectively, in line with everything that I’ve been talking about here.

Here again, there is the interplay between underlying material factors and superstructural factors, and it’s important not to be a mechanical materialist and not to be an idealist in relation to these things. Simply because there is a growth of fundamentalist religion doesn’t mean that this is an inevitable trend that is bound to win out over more positive trends and programs, including and in particular revolutionary communism.

And this phenomenon of the growth of religious fundamentalism is not owing only to material factors. The fact is (and this is something that others have pointed out as well) that this has been accompanied in the political sphere by the concerted efforts of the imperialists, and those allied with them, over decades to wipe out secular opposition to them—especially communists, but also other secular opposition, all over the world. There is the dramatic example of Indonesia—the mass slaughter of communists, in the hundreds of thousands, in the 1960s—which I have spoken to in a number of places, including the talk *Revolution*.¹⁵ But you can also look at places like Egypt and the experience with Nasser (a bourgeois-nationalist leader in Egypt who had a popular following not only in Egypt but more broadly in the Arab countries, during the 1950s and

1960s). When “Nasserism” ran into its limitations in various ways, Islamic fundamentalism grew in relation to that. The same thing in Palestine: the U.S. and Israel have had a systematic policy of seeking to drive out Palestinians who are (at least nominally) Christians, because they have tended to be more secular than the Islamic Palestinians. Israel and the U.S. actually like the dynamic of “Jihad versus McWorld” (the way in which imperialism and creations and outposts of imperialism, like the state of Israel, on the one hand, and reactionary Islamic fundamentalism, on the other hand, actually mutually reinforce each other, even while opposing each other); they understand that it’s more favorable to them than having secular, and especially communist, opposition. And then add to this the defeat of socialism and the restoration of capitalism in China—and the negative effects and influences resulting from that, including the fact that, even if they sometimes make references to “socialism...with Chinese characteristics,” the rulers of China clearly have nothing to do with revolution and striving for a radically different world, and China is now clearly dominated by bourgeois forces which promote a bourgeois outlook and bourgeois aspirations. Recently, there was someone on the news, someone who writes for *Newsweek* (I believe he was the Middle East correspondent for *Newsweek*) and he was talking about the people who are the suicide bombers, in Europe and in England in particular (this was shortly after the bombing of the subways in London), and he said: A couple of decades ago these people would have all been communists, but now they’re Islamic fundamentalists. There is an insight there (even though suicide bombing has nothing to do with communist strategy). That’s why I say we have to let reactionaries publish some books in socialist society—so we can learn some things. [laughter] And not just us, but the masses of people will learn more as a result.

So these are things we have to grapple with more deeply. We have to understand the complexity of all this and the interpenetration and interplay of these different factors, in the base and the superstructure—and in the different parts of the superstructure, the ideological and the political dimensions interacting with each other in the superstructure. All of these factors, and their interpenetration with each other—all of this has an influence with regard to the spread of this religious fundamentalism, which takes place, on the one hand, somewhat spontaneously and, on the other hand, through the very conscious encouragement of it by the imperialists (and forces allied with them), together with their systematic efforts to discredit and destroy the ideology and the political forces representing a real, and really liberating, alternative: communist ideology and the communist political program and objectives.

Rupturing with Reformism, Grasping Firmly the Social Base for Proletarian Revolution

Now, this leads me to another point which I brought up in a talk nearly 20 years ago. This is an important point, and I want to return to it and to emphasize the importance of a correct understanding of it. What I am referring to is the formulation and orientation—which is intended to be and is somewhat provocative—of viewing positively **the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement**, and the whole

way in which this is part of a rupture with economism and reformism. This represents a rupture with a whole historical trend which emerged and increasingly exerted itself under Stalin, after Lenin's death—the identification of the communist movement with the labor movement. (At the same time, it is important to stress that this trend was not simply associated with Stalin but has been characteristic of various forces who have claimed to be for “socialism,” of one kind or another, and at the same time have opposed and vilified Stalin, including the Trotskyites, the revisionists of various kinds, many social-democrats and other reformist-socialists, and so on.)

This is an important principle, the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement—but, at the same time, this is not the same thing as the separation of the communist movement *from the proletariat and from materialism*. That we don't need. If there is going to be a proletarian revolution, especially in a country like this, it has to have a foundation in the proletariat. And there are a lot of complex contradictions involved in that.

Let's look at some of the contradictory character of this. Even if you could somehow think of making revolution in a country like this without the proletariat, or without the proletariat playing a very significant role—even if you could somehow imagine that, as problematical as that is—do you think you're going to build socialism without a proletariat that's with you? To just get right down on the ground, if you can imagine such a revolution, where you do not have on your side masses of people who actually are capable of producing the material requirements of life—and the material requirements of building a new society—and you go to those people and say, “let's produce so we can carry forth the socialist revolution,” they will answer, directly or indirectly: “fuck you!” Well, you're in trouble. *[laughter]* Now, this is not a static thing either, because a lot of people who are not proletarians now, semi-proletarians and others, can become proletarians in socialist society—they can be employed, they can be enabled and unleashed to contribute, materially as well as politically and ideologically, to building the new society—when you have state power and you've got the reins of the economy in your hands. New proletarians can be created by the millions, out of the ranks of the formerly unemployed and others. But even that's contradictory because being a proletarian in socialist society has conservatizing influences as well, relative to capitalist society. In capitalist society, the proletariat is the exploited class, while in socialist society that is no longer true—this, of course, is a very good thing, and this radical change is an integral part of the whole advance to communism—but it also brings with it some conservatizing influences. On the other hand, the proletariat is the class which, even under socialism, will continue to be “losing out,” if you will, in the division of labor of society—unless and until the revolution is carried forward to communism and that division of labor is fully and finally overcome. This is why the proletariat can emancipate itself only by emancipating all of humanity: The only way it can completely overcome and abolish the conditions in which there is the basis for the proletariat to once again be exploited is by transforming all of society, and indeed the whole world, to bring into being a situation where all the production and social relations, all the political institutions, structures, and processes, and all the ideas that are an expression of, and

reinforce, the division of society into classes and the existence of social inequalities bound up with those class divisions and antagonisms (such as those between intellectual and physical labor, as well as between women and men)—where all of that has been uprooted and finally eliminated.

So, in the world today, we see these acutely contradictory trends with regard to the situation of the masses of people. There are also contradictory trends with regard to the more bourgeoisified sections of the working class in the U.S., many of whom are being pushed down as a result of changes which were further unleashed after the end of the “Cold War,” and as a result of how that “Cold War” was resolved, but which were in motion even before that. This has contradictory effects, too. These changes are not automatically leading people to be more radical in the positive sense. So all this is part of a complex picture that we have to deal with. We cannot make proletarian revolution, even in terms of the first leap represented by the seizure of power, without a significant base among different strata of the proletariat, and we can’t build socialism and advance to communism without that.

We did a considerable amount of investigation into the status of the proletariat and different sections of the working class, broadly speaking, as part of the process of producing our Draft Programme, but we have to understand more fully the physiognomy, if you will, the different configurations within the proletariat, as well as more broadly in society. We have to keep firmly in mind the principle and strategic orientation that Lenin stressed, of going down *lower and deeper to the basic sections of the proletariat*, whose interests more conform to and give rise to an inclination or gravitation toward proletarian revolution; but we also have to understand and handle correctly the complexity of all this. And we have to understand the historical evolution of the working class in the U.S. and its contradictory trends, what expressions these have taken over the last number of decades and what expressions they are taking today.

Suburbanization, Segregation and the Promotion of White Supremacy

In this connection, a book that drew my attention is *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*, by David R. Roediger. In some significant ways, this book by Roediger is in line with important themes and points of analysis in Thomas Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, which focuses on Detroit, but *Working Toward Whiteness* takes a broader look at what happened through the New Deal and in the aftermath of World War 2.¹⁶ Roediger discusses suburbanization, along with what amounts to the bourgeoisification of significant sections of (white) workers, particularly unionized workers. He focuses on those workers and sections of the working class that he calls the new immigrants—immigrants, in particular those from eastern and southern Europe, who came into the U.S. after World War 1, and faced discrimination and were sort of held in an in-between position, not considered to be fully American or even fully white, but very distinguished from oppressed nationalities, especially Black people. And he traces what happened with these different sections of immigrants. He points out, for

example, that a lot of eugenics—the racist theories of population manipulation and so on, and theories of racial inferiority—a lot of this was actually directed against these immigrant groups during that period. Obviously, it was directed against Black people and other “people of color” in U.S. society, but it was also directed against these immigrant groups: they were considered to be somewhere on the sub-human ladder by many of the eugenicists, and a lot of the qualities that you hear now attributed to immigrants from other countries were attributed to these immigrants at that time from the Mediterranean and southern and eastern Europe, including the notion of their reproducing like rabbits all over the place.

There was, especially through and in the aftermath of World War 2, a very important *international* context and framework for what went on here. We talked about this in our Draft Programme (even, if I remember correctly, our Party’s previous Programme), about the bourgeoisification of significant sections of the working class as a result of the outcome of World War 2, the position of U.S. imperialism in rising to ascendancy within the imperialist world, and what this enabled it to do in terms of bribing broader sections of the working class in the U.S.

And you see here as well the interconnection of different things. For example, it’s been pointed out that the whole “defense strategy” that was developed for the homeland after World War 2, and under Eisenhower in particular, involved developing a vast interstate highway system that didn’t exist before. That was done largely in relation to perceived “defense” needs in the context of the “Cold War,” and the confrontation with the Soviet Union, which went through different phases, but was pretty acute in the 1950s. But what that did, at first somewhat coincidentally and then more consciously on the part of the ruling class, was provide more of a material basis for suburbanization, because you could have more of this commuting back and forth to work when you had these more developed highway systems that people could travel on at higher speeds. So this again shows the interconnection between the international and the domestic (if you will) conditions and contradictions.

There are some important insights and analyses in Roediger’s book, some of which I want to cite. He says that, in the years immediately after World War 2, “With Uncle Sam increasingly promoting the idea that U.S. levels of consumption, born of free enterprise, proved superiority over the Soviet system, the suburban house became an important (white) American symbol and the subsidized” (note: *subsidized*) “suburban home owner the quintessential social citizen. ‘When you rear children in a good neighborhood,’ one subdivision promoter told *Time* [magazine] in 1947, ‘they will go out and fight Communism.’” [laughter] Roediger goes on to comment about liberal anti-communism and how it tried to pose opposition to racism in terms of the national interests, and even fell into promoting this opposition to racism and discrimination in terms of how to better fight the “Cold War.” Roediger again: “Even as liberal anticommunism created new openings to attack Jim Crow as undermining national unity and embarrassing the nation in the Cold War, it simultaneously promoted the white suburb as the apotheosis of free market development, consumer society, and the American Dream.” (Apotheosis here

referring to raising something to the level of a god, or to the level of the epitome, or perfect example, of something.) This is an important point: the white suburb became the apotheosis of free market development, consumer society, and the American Dream.

And Roediger goes on to comment: "Various styled as 'the right to racially homogeneous neighborhoods,' 'white entitlement,' and," (note well) "'freedom of choice,' this stance connected northern urban segregationism with claims on the state characteristic of the ascendancy of new immigrants during the New Deal" (again, referring particularly to immigrants from eastern and southern Europe). And here Roediger makes a very important point relating to many things I've been stressing here: "Of course in no society, least of all a market-based one, does a 'right to choose neighbors' exist." Note how this is also an expression, once again, of the principle, articulated by Marx, that "right can never be higher than the economic structure of society, and the culture conditioned thereby." Roediger continues: "In truth, high-sounding pro-segregation rhetoric typically asserted no such broad right" (that is, the right to choose neighbors), "but instead reflected the debasement of language by white supremacy when it assumed that 'freedom' inhered in the ability to avoid living near 'Negroes...Chinese, Mexicans, American Indians, and other minorities.'" And he goes on: "New Deal housing policies empowered and advantaged new immigrants, but as whites, not as new immigrants. Such policies form perhaps the clearest example of the New Deal's 'whitening' reforms. They expanded and clarified the ways state policy could favor whites, raising the stakes for the claiming of white identity."

In other words, Roediger is saying that this was not all spontaneous racism. There was plenty of that, but it wasn't all that. These New Deal policies expanded and clarified the ways that state policy could favor whites, raising the stakes for the claiming of white identity, as he puts it.

And he continues: "They [policies applied by the state] also advertised the coercion that accompanied federal blandishment" (that is, coaxing and enticement). In other words, there was a carrot and a stick here. If you did assert your whiteness, you got certain benefits; and, if you didn't, you suffered for it.

Roediger then goes on to talk about some of the ways this worked out: "FHA [Federal Housing Authority] guidelines took up the attack on 'mixed race' neighborhoods with a vengeance, cautioning against the presence of, or even possible infiltration by, 'socially antagonistic' populations or 'incompatible racial elements.'" Remember, this is a federal agency he's talking about, the FHA. He continues: "Thus while helping the descendants of new immigrants get more favorable credit and cheaper homes, the FHA and VA [Veterans Administration] also directed them *away from the mixed urban areas* containing immigrant neighborhoods and ethnic institutions." In other words, these government institutions could have directed these immigrants *into* neighborhoods that were mixed, but had the basis for the immigrants to be able to effect a transition in their situation and be more comfortable in dealing with the transition, but institutions like the FHA and VA deliberately *pushed them away* from those neighborhoods, away from integration, and

into segregated and suburban neighborhoods. "The FHA," Roediger points out, "represented an open incarnation of the New Deal alliance between white supremacist southern Democrats and northern segregationist forces, in this case, realtors, bankers, and white urban and suburban home owners."

And he goes on: "Beyond the racial outcomes dictated by the 'raceless' logic of the market" (in other words, beyond just the spontaneity of economic factors) "in an unequal society, the FHA constructed powerful preferential options for whites....With the top tier of federal housing initiatives reserved for whites, public housing, as the historian Craig Steven Wilder reminds us, became 'the only new construction available to black and Puerto Rican people,' and it 'was normally constructed in segregated areas and therefore only served to reinforce ghettoization.'" Here, again, this is a matter of conscious federal policy.

Roediger once more: "From its earliest days the New Deal implemented a two-tier housing policy. On the one hand, the initiatives in the realm of public housing provided for mostly low-income workers. These initiatives bowed to segregation but served the poor across the color line." In other words, they reinforced segregation but they were extended to people in different neighborhoods, of different races or nationalities. Continuing with Roediger's observations: "Like direct relief benefits"—now this is very important—"public housing was quickly typed in many places as 'welfare' for African-Americans, as a 'handout for the feckless' [the lazy and irresponsible]. On the other hand, government support [that is, government subsidy] for *private* housing massively and deliberately benefited white home owners and white prospective buyers. It was *not* seen as welfare at all." [The preceding quotes are from David E. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 230, 226, 228, 231, 232, 227-28, 225, emphasis added.]

So here you see a very profound point—how things were typed and cast: deliberate segregation and creating a stigma. Both types of situations Roediger describes result from federal funds and federal subsidies, but one of them is public housing and cast as second class, as handouts to the lazy and irresponsible, and the other is glorified as the emblem or apotheosis of the good society, with government underwriting of private home ownership, and things divided along lines of segregation by "race," as defined by the ruling class.

And, as Roediger also points out, this further entrenchment and institutionalization of segregation, discrimination, and white supremacy in housing, which resulted through the New Deal, was accompanied by the same thing in employment, including in the industrial working class, and it was gone along with by the heads of the industrial unions, organized in the CIO (Congress of Industrial Unions), which also gained strength through the New Deal—"union leaders" (we might put this in quotes) who were thoroughly reformist-minded and thoroughly wedded to, and linked their own interests with, the "fortunes" of U.S. imperialism. That's me saying that. [*laughter*] But Roediger goes on to

say: “Within the CIO itself, the unequal positions of new immigrant workers and workers of color ensured that nonracial syndicalist policies could empower new immigrants around the defense of white interests” (*Working Toward Whiteness*, p. 220). In other words, by not taking up the fight against white supremacy, they reinforced white supremacy and the superstructural expressions of racism that went along with it.

And, once again, taking into account the international dimension of this—and specifically the role and strivings of U.S. imperialism in the world in this period—we can see how the defense of “whiteness” was linked to the defense of “Americanism.” We can also see that what is particularly treacherous is the way in which the Communist Party, despite its declared opposition to white supremacy, and even despite its work in opposition to it, nonetheless, in subordinating itself within the terms and confines of the New Deal, became in essence an appendage of U.S. imperialism, with the white supremacy which has been built into and institutionalized in this system and which became (as Roediger shows) even more firmly institutionalized and deeply entrenched through the New Deal and in the aftermath of World War 2, with the triumph of U.S. imperialism in that war and its emergence as the top imperialist power in the world.

In this connection, it’s worth quoting Eric Alterman, who wrote this book called *What Liberal Media?* He’s a social democrat and a liberal himself—he definitely has his limitations—but he did bring forward a very interesting and important insight. Speaking about people like Bill O’Reilly and Chris Matthews, he said the following: “for both O’Reilly and Matthews, the term ‘working class’” (because, to step back, O’Reilly always insists that he’s working class, [*laughter*] but his father was a realtor or something like this—“I’m a working class guy,” he frequently insists, but Alterman observed): “for both O’Reilly and Matthews, the term ‘working class’ is defined not by income, but by cultural values such as hard work, devotion to family, and respect for authority and tradition.” (In passing here, it should be noted that income, as such, is not a scientific means for determining class position—for example, a small shopkeeper could actually have a lower net income than someone who works in a low-paying sweatshop, but that sweatshop worker would be part of the proletariat, while the shopkeeper would be part of the petty bourgeoisie—but this does not change the fact that Alterman is making an important point here.) And, in fact, these values, which Alterman summarizes, are really *petty bourgeois* values of a certain kind—they are a superstructural expression that is representative of a certain section of the working petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy. So this is an interesting and important insight of Alterman’s. All this underlines, again, the importance of—a correct understanding of—Lenin’s emphasis on the split in the working class under the conditions of imperialism and on basing revolution on the “lower” and “deeper” sections of the proletariat; and it underlines—the correct understanding of—**the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement.**

A Basic Foundation and “Mobilizing All Positive Factors”

At the same time, as I referred to earlier, on the other side of things, with the end of the “Cold War” and heightened globalization, there have been significant changes and there is considerable “flux” in the broader working class in the U.S. There is an aspect in which this provides more objective basis for winning formerly bourgeoisified sections of the working class to the proletarian revolution, *although* the effects of all this are sharply contradictory and definitely do not lead to heightened class consciousness in a mechanical and linear sense, nor certainly spontaneously. The fact that sections of the working class are being, if you will, *de-bourgeoisified* in certain measure does not spontaneously lead to their radicalization in a good sense, by any means, and certainly not in a mechanical and linear way or spontaneously.

Our strategic orientation and approach to all this must be: winning over the broader working class as part of the UFuLP (United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat), with this “anchored” fundamentally in the “lower, deeper” sections of the proletariat *and* based on the world outlook and fundamental interests of the proletariat, not as individuals, but as a class, not as representative of *groupings within* the proletariat, but fundamentally representing the outlook and interests of the proletariat as a class in the sweeping sense. And here again we see the importance of the approach (which I have spoken to, in previous talks and writings) of what we have characterized as “combining all positive factors” (as opposed to all *negative* factors!) within the proletariat (and among the basic masses broadly) as well as in regard to the overall development of the struggle and the united front, **under the leadership of the proletariat.**

Now, you can think about, for example, Léon Bing’s book, *Do or Die*, about the gangs in LA. She describes this phenomenon, on the one hand, of a 14-year-old Black kid, who’s in the gangs in the ghetto and who, every day, kind of goes out and looks at what seems to him the strange phenomenon of these Mexicans going to work—for him, this is not a familiar phenomenon, given the circumstances in which he’s grown up and the people he’s known. But he sort of looks at it like an oddity—what’s that about? On the other hand, I was just reading something in our paper about this outpouring of 40,000 immigrant workers in Chicago¹⁷ and the way in which some work was done, to take out to the people in this demonstration not only the Call for World Can’t Wait but also *Revolution* newspaper and a DVD “sampler” of my talk, *Revolution*; and, in following up on this, there was a comment by this one Mexican immigrant proletarian, who said that one of the things he learned from the this DVD was about the history of Black people in the U.S.—the whole horrific history of oppression—he didn’t know about this, and this was very important for him to learn.

So there is the question: how do we combine all positive factors? There are the negative factors, obviously, of de-proletarianization and the way this affects people’s outlook, some of which I’ve spoken to. On the other hand, there are certain positive qualities to not being thoroughly plugged in to the economy, particularly in an imperialist country like this, and not being, if you will, bourgeoisified in that kind of way. It gives people more of a readiness to jump to a radical solution, especially if and as that takes on more of an

actual feeling of reality to them—and it is our responsibility to do the work to make that happen, together with the development of the objective situation, and in order to transform that situation to the greatest degree possible at every point.

On the other hand, there are obviously positive qualities of people who are more regularly employed—and whose life conditions are more regularly those of the proletariat. There's a discipline that comes with that. There is the socialization of labor, working together and in coordination with hundreds, even thousands of people, directly (and ultimately thousands, even millions more, throughout the world), which still counts for a great deal. There is the broadness of mind that does tend to develop with that, although that is contradicted by other countervailing tendencies. And then there are those other countervailing tendencies: there's the conservatism that comes from being in that position. An immigrant comes to the U.S, say from Mexico, and he (or she) has twelve people dependent on them down in their village in Mexico—that has a certain pull on people. And they have four kids; they left their village, they brought their kids with them and they have to support these kids. And the kids are undergoing the changes that happen when you go to a different society. The parents are proletarians—or, as often happens, the mother comes with the kids, and she is (or becomes in her new situation) a proletarian, but the kids, or some of them, get off into the drug trade. There are all these different contradictory tendencies, and we have to forge a *synthesis of all the positive factors* out of this, and overcome the negative factors.

We are not going to have, and there never will be, a proletarian revolution that is made with “pure proletarians,” especially as conceived of with an economist outlook and approach (reducing the workers and the scope of their struggle to merely the economic sphere, reducing the struggle of the working class to immediate concerns involving wages and related questions, or in any case limiting it to the economic sphere, with the highest expression of that being something like a general strike). Revolution is not going to be a general strike, as the Trotskyites and others with essentially the same viewpoint and approach think—if they even think about revolution. But, beyond that, it's not going to be a neat unfolding of something where, in direct proportion and mechanical relation to how many proletarians there are, that much more powerful will be the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. It's going to be much more contradictory and complex than that, in some ways acutely so.

One of the things we continually wrestle with—I spoke to this in an article about George Jackson, it is another form of the Scylla and Charybdis contradiction, having to navigate, metaphorically, between a hard rock and a whirlpool¹⁸—is that we know very well that there are thousands and ultimately millions of these youth, for example, who are semi-proletarians, many of whom have told us, over and over again, “when the time comes, I'll be with you.” Now, some of them are, at this point, bullshitting about that—as materialists we should certainly understand that—some of them are bullshitting, okay? [laughter] But many of them are not—and one of the difficult challenges of a situation like ours is finding a way to give expression to the sentiments of these youth in favor of revolution, while doing so in a way that corresponds to and serves, and does not rupture

with, the correct strategy and revolutionary road for a country like this (as spoken to earlier) and does not overstep what the situation is and where the broader masses of people are at any given point, in terms of their consciousness and, correspondingly, how and for what they are, and are not yet, prepared to fight.

There are many difficulties when you *can* be on the road of armed struggle, of people's war, from the beginning, including the pull toward falling into what amounts to armed reformism, or armed revisionism, in particular the ways in which you can get pulled in that direction after getting a certain ways through waging people's war but then running up against new obstacles and in particular the challenge of getting over the big hump of being able to take on the concentrated strength of the reactionary army and go all-out to defeat it. Still, there are certain advantages in that kind of a situation, which we do not have as a result of the fact that the road to revolution in a country like this cannot be protracted people's war, that the all-out struggle for power can only come after a major, qualitative change in the objective situation, and that, in preparation for such a qualitative change, the essential approach must be one of political and ideological work and struggle to **hasten while awaiting** the development of a revolutionary situation. But once, in the development of any revolutionary movement, the conditions are such that armed struggle is the necessary and appropriate form of struggle, then the possibility of mobilizing people into that struggle—including many who have previously not been involved in the revolutionary movement—is heightened. And, speaking specifically of the millions of youth in the inner cities, if conditions were such that the armed struggle were on the agenda—once a revolutionary situation existed, including the presence of a revolutionary people, of millions and millions—a lot of these youth would be front-line fighting forces. Of course, it would be necessary then to carry out a tremendous amount of ideological struggle with them about what they would be, and should be, fighting for. Because there will be very powerful spontaneous pulls to be fighting for something other than what they should be fighting for, and toward ways of fighting that correspond to that something else, rather than what they need to be fighting for. There would be tremendous need for the presence and influence of a communist solid core and for ideological struggle, but a lot of these youth would be in the front ranks, well before a lot of more “classical” proletarians. But, on the other hand, if you think that it would be possible to make revolution without those proletarians becoming actively involved—including in the all-out struggle for power, when the time comes for that—no, that's not going to happen.

So this is the complexity of what we have to deal with. Once again, we have to be able to correctly handle all these things that get unleashed and come into the picture of what goes into actually making a revolution, as opposed to having a simplistic, linear, and mechanical notion of how this is going to come about. And once again, there is the by now familiar refrain—or what should be a familiar refrain by now—which is the need for a materialist and dialectical understanding and approach to all this—to the proletariat and proletarian revolution, to the basis and means for making this revolution and for advancing toward communism, as opposed to any bourgeois or petty bourgeois

expressions of idealism. This is a fundamental line of demarcation, not in terms of who can be involved in this revolution but in terms of what class outlook and program has to *lead* it, and what the communists have to embody and express in order to lead it.

Once Again: The Democratic Intellectual and the Shopkeeper

And the need to be firmly grounded in and systematically applying a proletarian world outlook—in the broadest sense—as opposed to various expressions of bourgeois and petty bourgeois idealism, takes us back once again to the shopkeeper and the democratic intellectual, who have now become familiar figures, if not old friends.

[*laughter*] The democratic intellectual, and what is represented by that worldview, is not capable of leading a thoroughgoing struggle for revolution—and such a worldview reflected among the communists is revisionism (reformism, accommodation to and ultimately support for the existing capitalist-imperialist system, all in the name, or guise, of communism).

Lenin talked about this same basic phenomenon in relation to people like Mark Twain in the context of the U.S. war against the Philippines, at the end of the 19th century, and the atrocities committed by the U.S. in that war. Mark Twain was an outspoken opponent of that war—he denounced it in very uncompromising terms. But Lenin pointed out that his opposition came from the standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie, which wants to get rid of the excesses and atrocities which they can recognize but doesn't see the need to transform the material foundation of all this, the material basis in which all these atrocities and excesses are rooted and from which they emanate—the imperialist system itself and its grounding in the capitalist mode of production.

And Lenin also made, in another context, a very important observation which relates to our old friends, the democratic intellectual and the shopkeeper. [*laughter*] Lenin pointed out that *capitalism puts into the hands of individuals, as commodities and capital, things which have been produced by all of society*. And today this is, more than ever, a worldwide phenomenon. It is worth repeating this: Capitalism puts into the hands of individuals, as commodities and capital, things which have been produced by all of society—and, indeed, on a worldwide level increasingly. So you see people who think of themselves as having earned everything they have, who believe they have a right, an inalienable right, to whatever they have been able to accumulate—even if we're just talking about articles of consumption, and leaving aside the accumulation of capital—and who are blind to, or willfully ignore, the whole process of accumulation through which all this wealth, a portion of which they have, is created on a *social basis*. Lenin pointed out that, as long as that is the case, as long as you have commodity production—and this is all the more so with capitalism, which generalizes commodity production—you are going to have this phenomenon that Marx talks about, of commodity fetishism. Now, he wasn't talking about deviant sexual behavior. He was talking about the inverted sense of reality whereby people view what are fundamentally relationships among people, *social*

relationships, as if they are relations between *things*, and they don't see the underlying process and division of labor—which, indeed, in today's world is on a world scale—through which all these things are actually produced and distributed.

You see this reflected even in your own thinking: "I'm going to the hairdresser." Because this person is an embodiment of the commodity that you are going to be paying for. "I'm going to the hairdresser, I'm going to the grocer, the butcher" (when they had butchers who were separate commodity traders, rather than being part of big supermarket chains, as they mostly are now in a country like the U.S.). Under the conditions of commodity production and exchange, people are thrown into relations with each other that appear to be relations *between things*—and when you want some things, you have to have another *thing* with which to get it—generally money, which is nothing other than the congealed and universal form of the exchange of all commodities. As I recall, Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*, pictures one fictional society where they actually tried to have people carrying around words, as a physical thing, instead of having a language with abstractions. Well, similarly, if you tried to carry around all the commodities that get traded on a world scale, it would be very unwieldy! So that's the role of money.

But Engels made a point about money. If I've got the Latin phrase right, he said about money, "*non olet*"—"it doesn't smell." What he meant by that is: it doesn't tell you where it came from and where it's going—how it was produced, by what means, under what conditions, and what it's going to be used for. Is it merely going to be used for the exchange of commodities, or is it in fact going to be used to buy that one unique commodity, *labor power* (the ability to work), that can *create more wealth* in its use? So Engels was saying: as long as there is money, there's the potential for capitalism to emerge in the world, because money doesn't "smell," it doesn't tell you how it got accumulated or what use it's going to be put to.

So, in a society like this—a society of generalized commodity production and exchange, a society in which there is generalized commodity fetishism—people think that somehow **they** did whatever it was that caused these things they have to land in their lap. They are blind to the larger and more fundamental process that goes on, through which this wealth is created and in accordance with which it is distributed. I talked about this in the *Revolution* speech—in the imperialist countries many people are, in effect, floating on a pool of accumulated wealth. Why did Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs get to go into their garage and tinker around with computer things, and eventually end up founding Apple Computers, while someone their age in places like Pakistan, Honduras, Thailand, and Egypt had been, for 10 years already, working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, producing some of the commodities that these two guys, and millions more like them, use for everyday life? I have told people: If you don't believe this is an imperialist system, if you don't see how the seal of parasitism is set on this whole society by imperialism, go home to your closet and throw out every piece of clothing except those made in the United States—which, in reality, means every piece of clothing that is made under conditions of not "normal" but *extreme* exploitation, including exploitation of little children, all throughout the world. Throw all those out and keep only the ones that aren't made that

way—and see if you can go out your front door. See if you will have anything to wear. All you have to do is look at the labels on your clothes to see what kind of system this is—to see a reflection of the fact that it is an international system of exploitation, with the most extreme forms of exploitation, including of children, throughout the Third World. This goes back to the relation between imperialism and bourgeois democracy (and social democracy), which I spoke to in an earlier part of this talk.¹⁹

Lenin also pointed out that capitalism and commodity production and exchange force people to, as he put it, calculate with the stinginess of a miser: What do *I* have, compared to what *you* have, what do I *get* for what I give up? This is the way people are forced to calculate, not because of unchanging and unchangeable human nature, but because of the conditions in which people's lives are embedded and the forces that shape those things—and the ideas that this in turn gives rise to and reinforces—within the confines of the capitalist system and its worldview.

A petty bourgeois outlook cannot see beyond commodity fetishism, beyond viewing the relations between people as essentially a relation between *things*, between *commodities*. It cannot get beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right; it cannot get any farther in its theoretical conceptions of society and how it ought to be, than our old friend, the shopkeeper, can get in everyday life. And this is why you need a *proletarian* revolution, understanding that with all the complexity that I have been speaking to, and not in some linear or mechanical and economist sense.

But there is a basic point here: *You are not going to make revolution—communist revolution—by trying to base it on scattered petty entrepreneurs* (and other people in the middle strata). Yes, we need to win as many of them to this revolution as we can, but we're not going to make this revolution by trying to base it on them, and by upholding their material interests and their outlook in opposition to big capital (the corporations and so on), which is what a lot of "the left" is obsessed with and absorbed in these days. And *you are not going to realize communism through some loose interaction of atomized individuals*. Communism and the communist revolution will not be a grand flea market or a grand worldwide bazaar. I'm resisting the "Shakespearean temptation" to say: that would be a bizarre notion.²⁰ [*laughter*] I guess I didn't succeed in resisting it [*laughter*]. But, once more, that notion has more to do with Adam Smith than it does with Marx. So this emphasizes, yet again, the importance of a materialist, a dialectical materialist, as opposed to a utopian-idealist view of revolution and of communism.

Let's return again to Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*: Here he makes a very important observation: "No society," he says, "can retain for any length of time the mastery of its own production and the consequences of its process of production unless it abolishes exchange [here speaking of commodity exchange] between individuals." This once more relates to the anarchy of commodity production and exchange. Let's repeat that: "No society can retain for any length of time the mastery of its own production and the consequences of its process of production unless it abolishes exchange [here speaking of commodity exchange] between individuals." This

statement by Engels is another one of those things that concentrates profound understanding, from a materialist standpoint, about human society and its historical development, and its potential. Here I won't further elaborate on this statement by Engels, but will emphasize the value and importance of continuing to reflect on and grapple with this statement and its profound meaning.

Individuals and Collectivity and the Greater Good of Society

Now, proceeding from what has been said above, I want to speak further to the contradiction involving individuals in relation to collectivity and cooperation, and individuals in relation to the greater good of society. This is a matter of grasping firmly the principal aspect and yet not obliterating or ignoring but giving due weight and expression to the secondary aspect. These contradictions between individuals, on the one hand, and collectivity and cooperation on the other, and between individuals and the greater good of society—these contradictions are spoken to in a number of talks as well as writings of mine, including *GO&GS (Great Objectives and Grand Strategy)*²¹ and the epistemology discussion.²²

In that epistemology discussion, I said there is more work to be done on these questions, and I referred to engaging with John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in this connection. In that work, Rawls is setting out to construct the idea of a just society. He is not claiming that this society has ever existed or that it has evolved historically, but he's setting out to define what such a just society would be like and what should be striven for as the goal. And in this context—he's speaking particularly about and polemicizing against the utilitarians, including people like John Stuart Mill, or perhaps people like Jeremy Bentham more than Mill—and he says: "Justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others....in a just society," he continues, "the basic liberties are taken for granted and the rights secured by justice are *not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests*." Note again: "The rights secured by justice are *not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests*." And then later, in discussing, as he calls them, "Two Principles of Justice," Rawls writes, once again particularly in opposition, it seems, to utilitarianism of various kinds: "First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others." Sound familiar? Immanuel Kant, anyone? "Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all," rather than the exclusive province of some. "These principles," he goes on, "are to be arranged in a serial order with the first principle prior to the second. This ordering means that infringements of the basic equal liberties protected by the first principle *cannot be justified, or compensated for, by greater social and economic advantages*." [Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, revised from the 1971 edition), pp. 25, 53-54, emphasis added here]

In other words, what he is saying here, boiling it down, is this: the greater social good cannot justify restricting the rights of some, or affording greater “basic liberties” to one part of society as opposed to another. Goodbye, dictatorship of the proletariat!

And here we can see the fundamentally idealist and ahistorical nature of these principles, and of the viewpoint they express. If you think back to the whole discussion at the beginning of this talk, about the motion and development of society through the continuing expression and dynamism of the contradictions between the forces and relations of production and the base and the superstructure, and Marx’s point about how each generation inherits the productive forces from the previous generation, and the whole discussion of necessity and freedom, with the latter consisting in the transformation of the former—if you think about all that, you can see how this is totally idealist and ahistorical, how this notion of Rawls’s doesn’t at all correspond to how societies actually develop and how classes first emerged, and the state with them, and what the further development of class society *has in fact* led to.²³ You can see how this is fundamentally ahistorical, and fundamentally idealist. If one applies historical materialism and thereby understands how society actually has evolved, it can be clearly seen how it is *not possible* to apply these principles of justice, formulated by Rawls, equally to individuals in the way he’s talking about.

And in basic opposition to this kind of approach is the communist approach of situating all this in the context of definite production and social—and, in class society, class—relations and the recognition that, in a society divided into classes, there are not only differing but even *fundamentally opposed* views of “the societal good”—what it is and how to achieve it—and of the relation of individuals to that societal good. Again, I go back to my earlier point that every class, and in particular every ruling class, identifies the general societal interests with its particular class interests. In opposition to that, there is the communist approach of *correctly* recognizing the criterion of realizing the greater social good, as the *principal* thing, while *not negating* the *secondary but still very important* aspect of not trampling on individuals and individuality, but *giving the fullest expression to individuality within the overall societal and collective and cooperative framework*. Here, again, we are back to Marx’s point that “right can never be higher than the economic structure of society, and the culture conditioned thereby.” *And*, with the exercise of state power by the proletariat, led by its vanguard, there is the importance—here is something else which I expect will be controversial within the international communist movement, or in any case it is a rupture with at least some of the previous practice of socialist states—there is the importance of not subjecting individuals, *even* individuals of the former ruling class (and other counterrevolutionaries being dictated over), to *arbitrary* suppression and curtailment of their individual rights, expressions, etc.

This goes back to my whole discussion about the “rule of law” and a Constitution, because if even the representatives of the overthrown ruling class and other counter-revolutionaries, or people who are said to be counter-revolutionary, are subjected to *arbitrary* suppression and curtailment of their rights, then you’re opening the door to doing that on a very wide scale, including among the ranks of the people, at the whim

and caprice of whoever happens to be having their hands on the levers of power at a given time. So here again is the role of a Constitution and the question of “the rule of law” in socialist society.²⁴

Once again, this all relates back to **the communist, as opposed to the bourgeois, the materialist—the dialectical materialist—as opposed to the idealist and metaphysical, view of freedom**. And it’s important for us to grasp and apply this *without* falling into a utilitarianism and instrumentalism which says that whatever is for the greater societal good should be done, and it doesn’t matter what happens to individuals—when you make an omelette you have to break some eggs, and so on.

Having spoken to these points, I want to emphasize again that, even now, before there is the establishment of a new proletarian state in the world—and, in fact, in order to strengthen the basis for establishing that state, wherever that breakthrough can be made first, through the revolutionary struggle for the seizure of power—and to make the socialist state serve, as fully as possible, the fundamental and final aim of advancing to communism, there is still more work to be done on this question of the relation of individuals to the greater societal good, including with regard to the summation of the previous historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the same time, the principles I have spoken to, and the contradictions I have identified as essential, in relation to this, do, I believe, provide important parts of the foundation for that further work.

The understanding that freedom is the recognition—and the *transformation*—of necessity; that “right can never be higher than the economic structure of society, and the culture conditioned thereby”; and of what was just said in relation to, or by way of refutation of, Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*, as well as what was said concerning Kant’s “categorical moral imperative”²⁵: this, taken together, provides a foundation for understanding more fully the communist view of freedom, in contrast with the bourgeois view. I won’t say more about that here, but leave that as something for people to reflect on and for further wrangling.

But what I do call attention to here is how all of this, in terms of the relationship—the contradiction—between the individual and the collective, and individuals and the greater societal good, relates back to the “parachute” point that was discussed earlier. As was emphasized, it is very important to recognize that there is going to be a great deal of diversity as the parachute “opens back up again,” after power is seized and consolidated through proletarian revolution. There will be different social classes and groupings, and there will be many different individuals with different particular characteristics and inclinations; and handling correctly these different contradictions, in the different ways and on the different levels they express themselves, and in their inter-relations, is all part of the complexity of what’s involved in leading the struggle in any particular country as part of the worldwide advance to communism.

Footnotes

1. What is referred to here, with the concept of “end of a stage,” is the experience that began (after the short-lived Paris Commune) with the Soviet revolution in Russia, in 1917, and then the Chinese Revolution, which achieved nationwide political power in 1949, and ended with the restoration of capitalism in China, after Mao’s death in 1976—which, in turn, followed the restoration of capitalism in the formerly socialist Soviet Union in the mid-1950s. See “The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage” by Bob Avakian (*Revolution* magazine, Fall 1990).

2. Bob Avakian speaks to this concept of “solid core with a lot of elasticity” in the talk *Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition to Communism*, and it is referred to in the book by Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005); in particular footnote 2, on pp. 68-69 of *Observations*, explains this concept as follows: “Avakian discusses this concept in the talk *Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition to Communism* as follows: ‘[Y]ou have to have a solid core that firmly grasps and is committed to the strategic objectives and aims and process of the struggle for communism. If you let go of that you are just giving everything back to the capitalists in one form or another, with all the horrors that means. At the same time, if you don’t allow for a lot of diversity and people running in all kinds of directions with things, then not only are people going to be building up tremendous resentment against you, but you are also not going to have the rich kind of process out of which the greatest truth and ability to transform reality will emerge.’ (‘A World We Would Want to Live In,’ *Revolutionary Worker* #1257 [October 31, 2004].)”

3. This refers to a statement by Marx, in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, that the dictatorship of the proletariat represents the necessary transit to the abolition of all class distinctions (or class distinctions generally); of all the production relations on which these class distinctions rest; of all the social relations that correspond to these production relations; and to the revolutionizing of all ideas that correspond to those social relations.

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

5. As spoken to by Bob Avakian in another part of this talk, these four objectives are: (1) holding on to power; (2) making sure that the solid core is not a static thing but is expanding to the greatest degree possible at any given point; (3) working consistently toward the point where that solid core will no longer be necessary, where there will no longer be a distinction between that solid core and the rest of society; and (4) giving expression to the greatest amount of elasticity at any given time on the basis of that solid core. The section of the talk that addresses this was published as “Views on Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR

GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM," particularly the part titled "A Materialist Understanding of the State and Its Relation to the Underlying Economic Base," which appeared in *Revolution* #42 (April 9, 2006) and is available online at revcom.us.

6. This metaphor of being drawn and quartered is spoken to by Bob Avakian in "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World" (*Revolutionary Worker* #1262 [December 19, 2004]). It was also published as part of the book *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005).

7. *Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition to Communism* appeared in the *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper (now *Revolution*) between August 2004 and January 2005 and is available online at revcom.us.

8. Bob Avakian discusses this phenomenon of the "spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie" in the series of excerpts from this talk published as "Views on Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM," particularly the part titled "A Materialist Understanding of the State and Its Relation to the Underlying Economic Base," which appeared in *Revolution* #42 (April 9, 2006) and is available online at revcom.us.

9. Avakian, *Phony Communism Is Dead...Long Live Real Communism!*, 2nd edition (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2004).

10. See "The New Situation and the Great Challenges," in *Revolution* #36 (February 26, 2006), available online at revcom.us. This is a talk given in the aftermath of September 11, and was originally published in the *Revolutionary Worker* #1143 (March 17, 2002).

11. *Revolution* published this "Setting the Record Straight" presentation, "Socialism is Much Better Than Capitalism and Communism Will Be A Far Better World," in serialized form. See *Revolution* issues #25-33 (Dec. 4, 2005 through Feb. 5, 2006), #35 (Feb. 19, 2006), #38-39 (March 12-19, 2006) #42 (April 9, 2006) and #44 (April 23, 2006), #46 (May 14, 2006); #48 (May 28, 2006); and #49 (June 4, 2006); entire series available at revcom.us.

12. Avakian, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1986).

13. In his memoir, *From Ike To Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*, Bob Avakian recounts how Leibel Bergman played a major role in his initial development as a communist. Bergman had been a member of the old Communist Party but broke with it in the 1950s, when it adopted a thoroughly and irrevocably revisionist stand. Avakian also discusses how Bergman himself, in his later years, more and more gravitated toward a revisionist position, and at the time of the revisionist coup d'etat in China, Bergman supported this coup and the restoration of capitalism it led to. At one point, while still a member of the RCP, Leibel Bergman said: If we concluded that dentists were the decisive force for making revolution, we would have to win these dentists to Marxism-Leninism.

14. Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, Notes on Political Economy (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2000).

15. *Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About* (Chicago: Three Q Productions, 2004). This film of a talk by Bob Avakian can be ordered in DVD or video format online at threeQvideo.com.

16. *Footnote by the author*: Examination of how the New Deal in particular fostered discrimination, and related questions, is found in *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, by Ira Katznelson.

17. The talk by Bob Avakian in 2005 from which this excerpt was taken was given when there were the beginnings of mass mobilizations against the attacks on immigrants but before the much more massive outpourings of opposition that have taken place in recent months.

18. See "Re-reading George Jackson" in *Revolutionary Worker* #968 (Aug. 9, 1998). This article is part of the talk *Getting Over the Two Great Humps: Further Thoughts on Conquering the World*.

19. This was spoken to in the part of this talk that was published as "Views on Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM," which is available, in its entirety, on the Web; and the part referred to here was published in *Revolution* #43 (April 16, 2006).

20. "Shakespearean temptation" is a reference to an earlier part of this talk where Bob Avakian mentions the comment by Samuel Johnson, an 18th-century English writer and literary critic, who said that Shakespeare would torture his text to work in a pun—that the pun was the apple for which Shakespeare would gladly give up all of paradise. This was spoken to in the part of this talk that was published as "Views on Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM," which is available, in its entirety, on the Web; and the part in which this reference to Samuel Johnson's comment on Shakespeare appeared was published in *Revolution* #43 (April 16, 2006).

21. *Great Objectives and Grand Strategy* is a talk given by Bob Avakian at the end of the 1990s; excerpts from it have been published in the *Revolutionary Worker* #1127-1142 (November 18, 2001 through March 10, 2002) and are available online at revcom.us.

22. "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World," is included in the book *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* by Bob Avakian (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005) and originally appeared in the *Revolutionary Worker* #1262 (December 19, 2004). It is available online at revcom.us.

23. The discussion of the points referred to here by Bob Avakian is included in "Views on Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM," which is available on the Web in its entirety at

revcom.us; and the particular discussion referred to here appeared in *Revolution* #40 (March 26, 2006).

24. A discussion of the “rule of law” and Constitutions in socialist society is found in the part of this talk published as “Views On Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM,” which is available, in its entirety, online at revcom.us. The part containing this discussion appeared in *Revolution* #42 (April 9, 2006).

25. This discussion of Kant’s “categorical moral imperative” (that people should never be treated as a means to an end, but only as an end in themselves) is found in the part of this talk published as “Views On Socialism and Communism: A RADICALLY NEW KIND OF STATE, A RADICALLY DIFFERENT AND FAR GREATER VISION OF FREEDOM,” which is available in its entirety online at revcom.us. The particular section referred to here was published in *Revolution* #43 (April 16, 2006).