

THE NEED FOR COMMUNISTS TO BE...COMMUNISTS

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Editors Note: Over the past number of months, including in our last issue, *Revolution* has been publishing excerpts drawn from a talk given by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, to a group of Party members and supporters in 2005. In this issue of *Revolution*, we are publishing the following, which is drawn from an excerpt from another talk by Bob Avakian, in 2004. It has been edited for publication here, and some explanatory notes have been added by the author, within the body of the text itself, within brackets. Beginning with the next issue of *Revolution*, we will resume publishing excerpts drawn from the 2005 talk by Bob Avakian to a group of Party members and supporters.

To put the problem provocatively, to tie together some threads that I have been speaking about--to perhaps indulge in hyperbole, in order to make a very real and crucial point--*the problem is that, most of the time, most communists are not communists!*

This is a problem with regard to our Party, but it is also a world historical problem of the communist movement and the whole experience in socialist society. Think about the phenomenon they talked about in China: bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist-roaders. [This refers to the fact that a significant number of people in China who supported the revolution there, and even joined the Communist Party that was leading this revolution, never advanced ideologically beyond the position of simply wanting to remove the barriers and shackles that were placed on China and Chinese society by imperialist domination and the related persistence of feudal (or semi-feudal) relations, in both the economic and social relations and in the superstructure of politics and ideology. Once the Chinese revolution had won initial victory over imperialism and feudalism, and the revolution had entered the socialist stage--and especially as this revolution continued to advance in the socialist stage, with the goal of uprooting and abolishing all exploitation, oppression, and social inequality--many of these people no

longer supported the revolution and increasingly came into opposition to it. This took a concentrated expression within the Chinese Communist Party, and in particular among leaders of the Party who adopted lines, programs, and policies that would in fact lead society back to capitalism (and hence these Party officials were characterized by Mao as "capitalist-roaders"). Because the socialist system had become relatively well established in China, and had broad support among the people in China--particularly the workers and the great bulk of the peasantry, though also many revolutionary intellectuals and others--these "capitalist-roaders" presented their capitalist program as "socialism." Indeed, the destruction of socialism and the restoration of capitalism is precisely what has happened since these capitalist-roaders, headed most decisively by Deng Xiaoping, seized power in China through a coup d'etat and suppressed the revolutionary forces, in the Chinese Communist Party and in society more broadly, after Mao's death in 1976. But, beyond the particularities of this situation and struggle in China, the reality is that the phenomenon of bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist-roaders will occur, in one form or another, in every revolution that advances to socialism and aims for the ultimate goal of a communist world. This is why Mao emphasized the crucial importance of continuing the revolution once socialism has been established. And the problem of how to prevent the restoration of capitalism in a socialist country, how to continue advancing toward communism--and how to do so through means and methods that are consistent with the goal of communism--is a decisive question with which communists must continue to wrangle deeply, in order to make further advances, first of all in the realm of theory, and then in the practical experience of new socialist states that are brought into being.]

Most people in the Chinese Communist Party did not become willful capitalist-roaders. That is, they did not set out to adopt and fight for and implement a whole set of policies and lines that would lead back to capitalism. But a great number of them followed that line, they thought it was bean curd cheese; they didn't know the difference between black cat and white cat. ["Bean curd cheese" is a reference to a statement by Zhang Chunqiao, one of the main leaders within the Chinese Communist Party who upheld and fought for the revolutionary line of socialism and communism and who, after Mao's death, was arrested and imprisoned as part of the so-called "gang of four." In an article, "On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie," written not long before Mao's death and the reactionary coup d'etat led by Deng Xiaoping, Zhang spoke to the danger of just such a coup and capitalist restoration; and, referring to the attitude of many Communist Party members toward the "allure" of revisionist, capitalism-promoting lines and policies, Zhang said that many of these Party members think that these lines and policies are like bean curd cheese--they smell bad but taste good! "Black cat/white cat" refers to a notorious statement by Deng Xiaoping a number of years before he finally led the successful reactionary coup d'etat to restore capitalism, in which Deng argued: Who cares if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice. This meant: what difference does it make if the policies we adopt for developing the economy embody socialist or capitalist principles, as long as they lead to the emergence of China as a powerful modern state. This too had an allure among many, including within the Chinese Communist Party, and this is related to the phenomenon of bourgeois

democrats turning into capitalist-roaders.] The majority of the cadres of the Chinese Communist Party followed that revisionist line when it won out, and when the people fighting against it were purged and decimated and, in many cases, executed.

How did that happen? In the Chinese revolution, and in every revolution that leads to socialism, you can be one part communist and one part bourgeois democrat in one form or another. You can have one part of you that's straining to get beyond what Marx characterized as "the narrow horizon of bourgeois right" and one part that's willing to accept some version of bourgeois right. These contradictory tendencies will continue to express themselves, and the one tending to bourgeois right can win out. ["Bourgeois right" refers to social inequalities characteristic of capitalism which, during the socialist period, are left over from the old society and which can be finally and completely eliminated only through the advance to communism--including the profound division between mental and manual labor, as well as other great differences among people which constitute, or contain the seeds of, oppression and exploitation--and "bourgeois right" also refers to the reflection of these economic and social relations in the political structures, institutions and functioning of society, including the law, and in the thinking of the people. The phenomenon of communists who do not in reality rupture beyond the bounds of bourgeois right is fundamentally owing to the fact that, as Marx and Engels put it in "The Communist Manifesto," the communist revolution involves and requires a radical rupture with traditional property relations and with traditional ideas. Those traditional property relations (economic and social relations of exploitation and oppression) and their reflection in the thinking of people (traditional ideas corresponding ultimately to economic and social relations of exploitation and oppression) will continue to persist, and to re-emerge and re-assert themselves, until the basis for them has been finally eliminated through the advance to communism, throughout the world. And, until that final goal is reached, the influence of these traditional property relations and traditional ideas will find expression not only in society as a whole but also among the communists, where the phenomenon of failing to rupture beyond, or being pulled back within, the narrow confines of bourgeois right can assert itself in such a way that "communism" itself comes to be "re-defined" in terms that in reality amount to bourgeois democracy and the capitalist economic and social relations that are in fact served and reinforced by bourgeois democracy. Bourgeois democracy is, after all, an embodiment of the rule over society by the capitalist class: it is a form of bourgeois *dictatorship*¹

In pointing to the fact that communists themselves can have one part that is communist and one part that is bourgeois-democratic, I am not raising this to promote some kind of "self-cultivation"--"Oh, what am I about, what is my essence?" It's not a matter of communists making revolution within themselves--in and of itself, and for itself. There is a need for ideological struggle and making revolution within yourself in *that* sense, but not in a self-cultivationist, turning-inward sense. It's a matter of what line and what world outlook you follow, and where that will lead, what effect that will have in society and the

world--that is the essence of the matter. Do you take up deeply and grasp firmly the communist world outlook and method and program, or do you take up, or get spontaneously pulled to, another one?

There are a lot of injustices in society. To take one stark example, there is horrendous national oppression and the racism that goes along with it. At this point, this is noted, in a certain way and up to a certain point, even by some representatives of the ruling class. For example, not long ago Howard Dean, in seeking to explain his comment that the Democratic Party needs to appeal to southern white guys with Confederate flags on their pick-up trucks, said, "well, I regret the imagery, but the point I'm making is that we have to appeal to the Southern whites." [This was during the period when Howard Dean was still running as a candidate in the Democratic Party primaries.] But then, probably because he knew this had gotten him into a lot of hot water, he said at the same time: "We have to have a big conversation about race in America." And he went on to talk about a new study (yet another one!) which illustrates how persistent discrimination is in American society. This study specifically showed that, if you're a youth--they had groups of college students do this--and you go out and apply for a job and they ask "have you ever been convicted of a crime" and you indicate that you've been convicted of crimes like possession of drugs with intent to sell, if you are *white* you're more likely to get called back for a job than a *Black* person who has an *absolutely clean record*.

This is just another manifestation of the continuing oppression of Black people, and you can apply this to other oppressed nationalities as well. It's a manifestation of great injustice. And then there are the continual murders by police, particularly police murdering people in the inner cities, one after the other. There is the oppression of women. There are all kinds of injustices in this society--most of them are spoken to in our Draft Programme, and for good reason. You can get deeply involved in struggle against those things, and you can come to recognize that without a revolution to overthrow the existing system you can't get rid of these profound outrages and injustices--you can take up that position without really rupturing beyond the bounds of bourgeois right. To make that rupture is a sharp and continual struggle that repeatedly poses itself as an acute question. This is the challenge that is continually posed for all communists.

Now, it is important to stress that, in the course of building struggle against the many outrages and injustices that are continually produced by the workings of this system--and in developing and, as Lenin put it, diverting that struggle toward the goal of revolution, socialism, and ultimately communism--it is correct, and necessary, to unite with many different people and forces, with a diversity of ideological views and political positions. Another way to say this is that it will be necessary to unite with very broad numbers of people who have not yet ruptured beyond the bounds of bourgeois right and bourgeois democracy. In fact, there will be many people who continue to adhere to views and positions that are still ultimately within these bounds, for a long time to come, even well into the stage of the socialist transition; and we will never succeed in advancing toward the goals of the communist revolution--and never win such people to

in fact make the leap beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right--if we adopt a stupid, sectarian, and dogmatic attitude and refuse to unite with people unless and until they have made such a leap and have repudiated bourgeois right in all its expressions. But the point is that, while carrying out a process of unity-struggle-unity with a broad range of people--and, with regard to the "struggle" aspect of this, boldly putting forward our communist views and aims and engaging others, in a good way, in discussion and principled wrangling over this, while uniting with them in opposition to the oppression and exploitation, the outrages and injustices, that we can find common ground to resist--those of us who are, and are determined to be, communists, must carry on a consistent struggle, of a different kind, and in a different context, among our own ranks, to continue to deepen and strengthen our grasp of and our application of the communist outlook and method and our striving for the aims of the communist revolution.

To put this another way, "stand" is not enough. Even among communists, there is a lot of confusion about this. Sometimes people say, "he or she has a really good ideological line," and by that they mean the person has a good stand--is really dedicated, filled with hatred for oppression, and so on--but stand is not enough. Zhang Chunqiao wrote something about this (at least it is claimed that he wrote something about this, and I'm willing to believe it, to take it as fact and go with it). After the coup in China, the revisionists, in one of their attacks on the "gang of four," said that Zhang Chunqiao had insisted that theory is the most dynamic factor in ideology. The reason these revisionists were raising this was to say, "oh, he's just a dogmatist--he's all theory and no practicality, no dignity of immediate actuality." [This is a reference to a statement by Lenin that practice has the dignity of immediate actuality as well as of universality. But, in the hands (and minds) of revisionists, what Lenin was getting at has been vulgarized and perverted into the notion that theory is unimportant, or only of very secondary importance, and furthermore practice is reduced to practice in only a narrow and immediate sense. This ignores the fact that, in the same philosophical writings in which he made this observation about practice, Lenin also emphasized that theory, as abstraction, is a higher and more concentrated reflection of reality than practical experience, of which theory is an abstraction (of course, Lenin was speaking of theory that is correct, that correctly reflects, and concentrates, reality as it actually is, and as it is moving and changing). And the revisionist rendering, and narrowing, of the sphere of practice and its importance ignores the decisive truth that Lenin also insisted on: Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement.]

What is attributed to Zhang Chunqiao is very important. Mao said that communist ideology consists of stand, viewpoint, and method. And stand is important--if you don't have an orientation of standing with the masses of people, why would you want to take up this science of communism and do anything with it? But stand itself is not going to carry you beyond a certain point.

Theory *is* the dynamic factor, because how do you change your ideology, your world outlook? How do you change your understanding of a question, how do you even change your sentiments about things? Think about that, how do you actually change even your

sentiments? You do so if and when you come to understand something in a different way, especially if you are a person trying to be scientific, trying to actually achieve the great things that we are setting out to achieve--which require a scientific approach to achieve (even if we don't always remember that).

Theory is the dynamic factor in ideology. If you don't study, if you don't wrangle with Marxism (or, as we say today, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism), if you don't strive to figure out how it applies, and to continue developing it while applying it, you are going to get dragged down by spontaneity: by the powerful pulls exerted by the prevailing relations of exploitation and oppression--and the dynamics driving things in a society, and a world, dominated and shaped by systems of exploitation and oppression--and the corresponding ways of thinking that have a dominant position and are widely disseminated and drummed into people, through the mass media and other means of molding public opinion and conditioning people's outlook. Without a continuous and ever more conscious struggle against the pulls and influences of all this, even your stand is going to deteriorate. Sooner or later, if you simply seek to rely on stand, if you do not continue to ever more deeply ground yourself in communist theory--or if you follow a pragmatic approach of making theory dependent on and conditioned and even defined by whatever are the requirements of the immediate situation and struggle--you are going to give up on the goal of making revolution and achieving socialism and ultimately a communist world. If, in your thinking, you do not make the rupture--and continue deepening the rupture--beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right, even your understanding of communism and communist revolution will remain within, or be reduced back down to, a variation of bourgeois democracy, to yet another expression of a society and world in which bourgeois relations and bourgeois rule are dominant. You will either give up on the goals of communist revolution openly and overtly or, as often happens, you will continue to say (and perhaps even to believe, on one level) that you are still "for" these objectives, but you will have consigned them to some distant future, while acting as if they have lost any real meaning and are completely severed from the tactics that are necessary in the present circumstances, and/or in your own thinking you will have actually watered down "revolution" to what is in reality some gradualist, reformist notion of change; you will have turned socialism into "at best" some ideal of improvement in the social welfare of the people and a further extension of bourgeois-democracy, without any shattering and transforming of the structures and institutions of power and the power relations that dominate in society and the world, without the transformation of the underlying social relations and economic relations and processes that enslave the vast majority of humanity, and without any radical change in the thinking of the people; you will have turned "communism" into merely some meaningless utopian notion, in some far-off never-never land. In short, you will have "denatured" revolution, socialism and communism and disconnected them from what is happening at any given time and from the "practical necessities" of the present struggle.

So stand is not enough. Theory is the dynamic factor in ideology. To maintain the correct stand, but also to go further in your grasp and application of communist ideology, you have to take up and wrangle with the cardinal questions of line and theory--not in a way

that reduces them to something relevant merely in relation to the situation and struggle you are most immediately and directly dealing with, but as they present themselves in a far broader, worldwide and world-historic dimension, and in the connection between that dimension and the more immediate situation. You have to steep and continually re-steep yourself in what communism, as a world outlook and method, is all about and why and in what ways it is a scientific approach to reality--the most thoroughly, systematically and comprehensively scientific approach to reality and its motion and development. If comrades do not study and grapple with communist theory in this way, and the application of *that* --and not something else--to the many social questions and world affairs that they think about and act on; if, as a key part of that, they are not continuing to familiarize themselves with, and to grapple with, the body of work and method and approach of our Chair; then the powerful pull of spontaneity, and what is out there in the movements of opposition and more broadly in society and in the world--all that will lead them to increasingly apply and take up some *OTHER* world outlook and method.

For example, let us take a sphere which is becoming an increasingly crucial and intense arena of struggle, with profound implications for the whole direction of society, and for the world as a whole: religion, and in particular religious fundamentalism of various kinds, including the growing influence of fundamentalist Christian Fascism within the U.S. in general and particularly within the ruling structures of the U.S. and its role in the world. In today's situation in particular, there are a number of books, including some written by progressive religious people, which speak to crucial aspects of all this and provide valuable (or in some cases invaluable) insights. I myself like to--and think it is very important to--read many books about religion by many people with many different viewpoints. I not only find this useful, I often find it very invigorating. But, at the same time, I don't confuse that with--or think it is more important than, or even as stimulating as--analysis (and synthesis) by someone who is engaging these questions with the communist world outlook and method, and with the objectives of the communist revolution in mind. What you find interesting and significant--this fundamentally depends on, and is conditioned by, what you are aiming for. The point is that it is only by applying the communist world outlook and method that it will be possible to engage reality, to grasp its essential features and dynamics, and to transform reality in the most fundamental ways, in the interests of and with the goal of achieving the emancipation of the great majority of the world's people, and ultimately humanity as a whole. And, yes, it is very important to understand that others, proceeding from different world outlooks and methods, can and do have important insights and make important analyses, and contribute in important ways to the understanding of key aspects of reality. But it is the case that, even in order to engage most deeply and fully--and to learn the most from--things that are brought forward by people proceeding from viewpoints other than a communist one (on religion and religious fundamentalism, and other critical questions) it is necessary to continue to deepen our grasp of and to apply the scientific world outlook and method of communism.

In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin talked about how, in order to become fully class conscious, the proletarians have to not only, and not even mainly, engage in more immediate struggles relating to their working and living conditions, but beyond that they have to take up the all-around struggle against the system, and they have to engage with what's happening among all strata in society and come to understand how various phenomena get posed and taken up among all these different strata. But he also says: they have to learn to do that **from the communist point of view, and no other.**

That is a profoundly important point. And, as a way of giving further emphasis to this point, let me cite the following reflections by a comrade:

"In recent months I've had occasion to return to *What Is To Be Done?* and--coupled with study and reflection on some other points as well, including the campaign to promote and popularize our Chair--it's led me to a renewed appreciation for the almost gravitational pull of spontaneity: no matter how high you aim to fly, if you don't fight the pull, you'll come back down. It's worth thinking about the huge percentage of one-time revolutionaries--both parties and individuals--who've come crashing down on those rocks. They almost all came into things with genuine revolutionary convictions. But one day, after years or even decades of battle, they somehow find their name at the bottom of a contract for a sell-out, maybe without even being conscious of how they got to that point, or even having signed it. That's the strength of spontaneity--quite apart from your convictions, unless you find the ways to *divert* the natural stream of things, you're gonna end up drifting downstream to a place you once swore you'd never go...."

"Are we doing everything we can to make revolution? Are we focusing on the right questions? Are we pushing hard enough--or in the right direction - on the limits of the possible? Are we looking enough at things from our final goal back, and are we forging strong enough links between that goal . . . and the many pressing tasks of today? Are we thinking rigorously enough about the points raised by people who don't agree with us on strategy, but who may be on to something we need to learn from nevertheless...?"

All this is of decisive importance if indeed we communists are to be communists, consistently and in the all-around way that we are called on to be, in a way that is firmly and ever more deeply grounded in and constantly basing itself on the scientific, critical and creative nature of the communist world outlook and method, its application to reality, and its ongoing development in that way; that is guided by our strategic goals of revolution, socialism, and ultimately a communist world, and is, at every point, an embodiment of the living link between those strategic objectives and what is to be done at the given time, in order to continue advancing toward those largest objectives and not to be strategically diverted, derailed or defeated in the pursuit of these world-historical and world-emancipating aims.

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