

# MATERIALISM VS IDEALISM... THE FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTION OF CAPITALISM, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY RESOLUTION OF THIS CONTRADICTION, Part 2

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**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.

This work by Bob Avakian is being run in *Revolution* in 6 installments. The first installment appeared in issue #37 (March 5, 2006). The second installment appeared in last week's issue, #39. In this issue, we continue the section of the talk that began in issue #39. The complete work, "Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom," can be read and downloaded online at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).

## Necessity and Freedom

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It is the essence of an idealist and utopian view of what we're all about, and of communism, that somehow communism will mean that there will no longer be necessity. It is true that, in communist society, in a communist world, the character of necessity and the interrelation between necessity and how people deal with necessity will be radically different than it is now, but there will still be necessity and the need to transform it. There will still be the character of the productive forces and the production relations that generally correspond to that. There will still be an economic base, there will still be relations of production, and—again, not being mechanical, but understanding this in a dialectical sense, understanding that, yes, there is relative autonomy and initiative in the superstructure—there will be, at any given time, a superstructure that more or less corresponds to the relations of production. And there will still be all the dynamism involved in all this. Productive forces will continue to develop, and this will continue to transform the production relations from relatively appropriate forms for the development of the productive forces into fetters on the productive forces—to more having the character and the effect of being fetters than of being the appropriate forms for the development of those productive forces. That's how it works.

And once again the superstructure will come into conflict with the new production relations that are being developed, and there will be struggle to transform the superstructure further, in line with the changes in the production relations—changes which, in turn, are being called forth by the development of the productive forces. Even

in communist society, this will be true. As Mao said, even 10,000 years from now—assuming that humanity makes it that far, and we have something to say about that, in case we've forgotten—but assuming humanity makes it that far, 10,000 years from now these will still be the underlying and driving contradictions of society (between the forces and relations of production and between the economic base and the political and ideological superstructure), even with all the complexity this gives rise to and even with all the ways in which the various things it gives rise to react back upon these underlying and driving contradictions.

This has to do, once again, with a materialist understanding of necessity, and of the dialectical relation between necessity and freedom—that freedom doesn't lie in seeking to evade, seeking to wish away, seeking to do "an end run around," or simply seeking to vault in one bound over, necessity, but lies in *confronting* and *transforming* necessity on the basis of the actual contradictions that reside within that necessity, because all of reality consists of matter in motion and consists of contradiction. This is a fundamental dividing line between idealism and metaphysics, on the one hand, and Marxist materialism and dialectics on the other hand—whether you understand the relationship between freedom and necessity and where freedom is situated in relation to necessity, and how freedom is wrenched out of necessity.

Of course, all this has to be understood in all its complexity, and not in a crude and linear way. But keeping that in mind, it is crucial to understand that this is what the advance of society will continually be constituted of: confronting and transforming necessity, above all on the societal level and with the roles of individuals finding their place within that, and not in some framework divorced from that, or standing outside of it, or somehow flying above it like a heavenly horse flying free (as they used to say in China), somehow seeking to, in some individual sphere, transcend necessity: "That stuff doesn't affect me, I don't care what they do over there in Iraq, that's got nothing to do with me." Yes, it does, and if you don't recognize it now, you'll be forced to recognize it sooner or later, because this is all interwoven and interknit. And if you think you can just get around that, reality will assert itself anyway and demonstrate, sometimes quite dramatically, that you cannot just do that.

To take an example I have cited a number of times, you cannot just define words any way you want to, because they have a social context, and a social meaning, an historically evolved meaning at a given time. This goes back to epistemological questions (questions of the theory of knowledge, of what is truth and how human beings can come to know what is true). I've pointed this out before, for example in discussing how Huey Newton's definition of power is an instrumentalist definition of power: "power is the ability to define phenomena and cause them to act in the desired manner." No. Defining a phenomenon any way you want does not give you the ability to cause it to act in a desired manner. Somebody pulls out a gun and shoots it at you—and if, somehow in the time before it hit you, you were able to say, "This is not really a bullet coming at me, it's a pillow, I choose to define it as a pillow"—that won't work. *[laughter]* It's still a bullet. *[laughter]* Necessity is still confronting you, and you have to deal with that necessity (if

you have time). You better get behind something, if you can. *[laughter]* You better have some kind of armor, if you can. You're not going to deal with that bullet by defining it as a pillow or a marshmallow. *[laughter]* So this is fundamentally wrong.

Power actually resides in the ability to *correctly understand* objective phenomena and necessity and to *transform* them, transform this in the way it can actually be transformed—which is full of contradiction, so there's not one way, always, or even most of the time, or in general. Things can be transformed in different ways according to the contradictions that are driving them, but they can't be transformed in some way that bears no relationship to the defining and driving contradictions. That's why I say, you cannot turn a bullet into a marshmallow or a pillow simply by defining it as such.

Or take another example that is a big phenomenon, and big point of contention, in the culture and more generally these days. Some people, and in particular some Black people, say "I will define the word 'nigger' so that now it means 'my friend, my partner.'" No. It means something else. You don't *have* the ability to define it that way because, just like a bullet, this has been historically and socially defined in a certain way and you can't change that meaning by a mere act of your will or desire to have it mean something else. Many years from now, when humanity has long since moved beyond the kind of society where oppression of whole peoples exists, along with other forms of oppression and exploitation, maybe then that word ("nigger") will have absolutely no meaning, or might mean something entirely different. But right now, at this stage of history we're in, with the world the way it is, its meaning has been and is still defined by the historically established oppressive social relations of which the word "nigger" is an expression. And if you're going to deal with what it means and everything that's behind that word, you have to confront it as it actually is, according to that historically and socially established meaning—until we have radically transformed those social relations of which it is an expression.

## Necessity and Accident, Causality and Contingency

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Now here also enters in the relation between necessity and accident, or between causality and contingency. There have been, and there are, no predetermined pathways in the historical development of human beings and of human society (in its interaction with the rest of nature). But once again, through this process, this continual interaction, of necessity and freedom—and, yes, causality and contingency (or necessity and accident) and their dialectical inter-relation—there has developed a certain "coherence" to history. And it has brought us to the threshold where it is possible—not inevitable but possible—to make the leap to communism.

One of the points I have made before is that, as with all things, causality and contingency, or necessity and accident, are a unity of opposites. And as Mao said about the universal and particular, what is causality in one context is accident in another, or contingency in another (and vice versa). I've used this example before: Why did Columbus end up in the Americas, thinking he was going somewhere else? In one context—in the framework, for example, of the peoples who were unfortunate enough to

have Columbus land among them, with the subsequent unfolding of events after that—this was an accident, because he intended to go somewhere else, and his arrival in the Americas did not come from within the internal dynamics of the societies in the Americas at that time. So, to the peoples there it came as an accident. And on another level it was an accident because Columbus was trying to get somewhere else. But was it *entirely* an accident? No. There were obviously causes and reasons why he ended up where he did—for example, things having to do with the winds, having to do with lack of knowledge of certain things on his part, and so on and so forth. And you can divide each of those things, in turn, into necessity on the one hand, and accident on the other (or causality and contingency). Each thing can be divided into its contradictory aspects in that sense as well.

But, at any given time, there is a principal aspect to things, and that principal aspect gives relative identity to that thing, even while it is moving and changing. So that capitalist society, for example, holds within it the future of socialist society—particularly as represented politically, and in terms of the class struggle, by the proletariat, and in terms of production by the socialization of production. But capitalist society is still defined by the fact that the production relations and the superstructure on top of that are *capitalist*. So it's contradictory, but the principal aspect gives it its defining quality and essence, **relatively**—relatively in the sense that it exists in a larger framework of other contradictions in the world, and relatively in the sense that it is full of contradiction and motion and development itself, and those aspects of the future are also asserting themselves within all that, in contradiction to the essential capitalist character.

So we have to understand things in terms of the motion and development of contradictions, and not in static terms. We have to get away from metaphysical and ultimately religious or virtually religious views of phenomena in the world, including human society and its historical development. There have been, as I said, no predetermined pathways in the historical development of human beings and human society. There could have been things which in one aspect were accidents that could have wiped out human beings before they really got a foothold, or even after they did—and there still could be. However, that has not happened up to this point. In the same way, human society was not predestined to head toward communism, but it has, through all of its contradictory and complex development, gotten to the threshold of that, where the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation—this contradiction characteristic of, and fundamentally defining of, capitalism—is more and more acutely asserting itself.

## Coherence, Constraint and Transformation

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There is, then, as Marx pointed out, a certain coherence in human history. Each generation does inherit the material conditions and corresponding social relations and ideological and political superstructure from previous generations—from the previous development of society—both that brought about through the accumulation of partial changes and that brought about through revolutionary leaps, leading to radical changes.

It is not just a matter of changes through gradual accumulation, but also change brought about through revolutionary leaps leading to radical changes. It is, at any given time, on the foundation of the existing material conditions, and in particular the existing productive forces, that further changes, both quantitative and qualitative, both partial and revolutionary, are brought about; but even revolutionary changes, and what they bring forth, are conditioned by what they arise out of. This is also a very important point.

This has been spoken to in an important paper written by a leading comrade in our Party, where it talks about the relation between constraint and transformation: that in the natural history of evolution over billions of years—and in social evolution and the historical evolution of human society—things arise out of the constraints, and the transformation of the constraints, which exist at a given time. This is bound up with the point that, in human society, at every point each generation confronts the character of the society—grounded in the productive forces and the production relations that more or less correspond to those productive forces—confronts this as something external to it, as necessity. And there is the related question of where that necessity, those existing material conditions, came from—how they have developed (and in fact are continuing to develop) through a very complex and contradictory process, and not some straight-line march which is predetermined and predestined. This is the way it works.

This is why Marx spoke about the "birthmarks of capitalism" that exist in the early stages of the advance toward communism—in other words, in socialist society under the dictatorship of the proletariat. These "birthmarks of capitalism" exist in socialist society because (continuing the metaphor) it emerges, and in fact can only emerge, out of the womb of capitalism. In contrast to what the anarchists and utopians might think, or wish, in reality you don't get to say, "Let's draw up the ideal society and work back from that. Why do you want to have leaders? Why do you want to have a state? That's just creating the problems we're trying to get rid of. Why don't we just envision a society that doesn't have that?" Well, anybody can envision it. That's easy. Smoke a little ganja, or whatever, [laughter] and you can envision all kinds of shit [laughter], even good shit. But that doesn't get you where you need to go. You have to proceed from where you are toward what's actually possible on the basis of transforming the necessity you continually face and the new necessity that gets brought into being, the new constraints that get formed, by transforming the old necessity, the old constraints. You don't get to go *a priori* (in advance of, and in actuality divorced from, engaging reality) and think about what you'd like society to be, then superimpose that over reality, and try to bring the ideal into being in that way. That's complete idealism, philosophically (again: thinking that ideas are the determining thing in relation to material reality, that material reality is merely an extension of ideas, or in any case that ideas can in and of themselves create or change reality, as in the expression "thinking makes it so"). That has nothing to do with actually changing reality, and in particular transforming society and advancing toward where society, yes, can go—not is bound to go, but can go—to communism.

So you have these "birthmarks" of capitalism when socialist society is brought into being through revolution. Lenin said: we don't get to make revolution with people as we would **like them to be**; we make revolution with people **as they are**. Now, yes, in making revolution even, in the first leap, getting over the first hump, waging the struggle for the seizure of power and seizing power, people do undergo radical change. But they're still not "ideal" people. And, as I will talk about later in discussing the "parachute" point,<sup>1</sup> people don't undergo change once and for all and "irrevocably," so that they can't possibly go back—things can't ever go back, people can't ever go back to the way they were before the revolution—well, we've learned from bitter lessons of history, if we didn't know it before, that this is just not true. You make revolution with people as they are in a given time—and there, too, you transform necessity into freedom.

So there is no "stately and ordered process" that has led from one stage of society to another (from early communal to slave, to feudal, to capitalist and then socialist society—and then on to communism). There is no "grand waltz of history" (one, two, three; one, two, three) or no "feudal minuet," nice and dainty and orderly, which has unfolded as society has gone forward somehow inevitably toward communism. There is no "grand process" leading inevitably to communism. We must combat tendencies to that kind of thinking (this was marked in Stalin, for example) which borders on a religious viewpoint (if, in fact, it does not "violate the law" and "cross over that border"! ). But human historical development, with all its complexity and diversity, throughout the world and through thousands of years, has in fact—though not "by design"—laid the foundation for and made possible—not inevitable but possible—the world-historic leap to communism. It has brought the world to a situation where it is bound together more tightly than ever, and where capitalism and its fundamental contradiction is the defining and determining aspect of human society, in the world in its entirety, and in all parts of the world—and where this contradiction is finding ever more pronounced and extreme expression; where the conflict between the forces and relations of production, and between the base and superstructure, characteristic of capitalism is becoming ever more intensified; where the need for the resolution of this fundamental contradiction, through the proletarian revolution, in particular countries and ultimately on a world scale, is asserting itself ever more powerfully. But then, once again, to achieve that revolutionary transformation requires the subjective factor, the conscious revolutionary forces, to lead masses of people to bring reality in line with that need, through wrenching and resolute struggle.

## Grotesque and Extreme Expressions of Capitalism's Fundamental Contradiction

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What then is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, what is the particular way in which, in the era of capitalism, the basic contradictions of all human society—between the forces and relations of production, and between the economic base and the political and ideological superstructure—find expression? It is the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation. This is the fundamental, defining, and driving contradiction of capitalism and of the era in which capitalism is still dominating in the world. And if you want to look at an extreme and grotesque phenomenon—at the

way in which the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, between socialized production and private appropriation, is assuming an extreme, perverse, and grotesque form today—you can look at who is the president of the United States right now *[laughter]*. Someone who insists on pronouncing the word "nuclear" as "nuke-u-lur" (even though he himself went to prestigious prep schools and universities and could very well pronounce the word correctly). Now, why do I say this is an extreme and grotesque expression of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism? Because this is the man who has his finger on the "nuke-u-lur" trigger. And what is this but an expression in the superstructure of the contradiction between (to use more everyday terms) the vast technology that has been produced, collectively, by millions and millions of people, and the fact that, at the same time, this is all under the domination and control of, and in fact is suffocated in significant ways by, a tiny handful of people in a small number of countries, ruled over by a political power structure which has brought forward this monstrosity as its chief executive. You couldn't ask for a more grotesque expression in today's world of the contradiction fundamental to capitalism, between socialized production and private appropriation.

Now, if you go to the masses of people and say, "The fundamental contradiction we're dealing with today is socialized production versus private appropriation" they will likely, and very understandably, respond: "What the fuck are you talking about?!" Well, you can simply say: "W—that's what the fuck I'm talking about." *[laughter]* Then, of course, you have to explain the larger meaning of all this. Again, this takes work. But this is reality—although, again, you don't see it that way spontaneously—even we communists don't all spontaneously see it that way. Yet, in reality, this is nothing other than an extreme, perverse, and grotesque expression—just one, but an extremely grotesque, perverse expression of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism—that in the superstructure, on the basis of this private appropriation of socialized production, this is what gets brought forward as the political leader of the "free world."

And, again, if you want a more generalized way to look at it—one that's maddening in an even more general sense, that is a howling and maddening contradiction—look at the fact that this guy "W" is the one who has his finger on the "nuke-u-lur" button, and more generally the fact that this ruling class in the United States, more than any other ruling class, has amassed tremendous military power to reinforce its system. This is nothing other than an expression of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism and of the motion and development in today's world of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production and between the base and the superstructure. To break this down, we need to focus on the question: how do they do this, where does this military power come from? Through the historical development of capitalism in the U.S. And we know what that's been all about: wars were waged, people were exterminated, slaves were kidnaped and employed—again, back and forth between the superstructure and the base—they conquered a territory in North America, amassed tremendous wealth, and spread their tentacles throughout the world, in waves and ever more deeply. And on the basis of, quite literally, sucking the life-blood out of people all over the world, they have amassed tremendous wealth and are able to assign a significant portion of that



wealth to employ scientists and others to develop weapons, to devote production, in turn, to produce weapons, and to train and develop an army to deploy those weapons. It is nothing other than a grotesque and maddening and howling expression of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, that they are able to do that and on that basis they are able to reinforce their rule over the very people whose life-blood has provided the material foundation out of which they have built this in the first place. It is an extreme, howling, and maddening expression of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism—and, more generally, of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production and between the economic base and the superstructure.

Now, of course, people don't see it this way spontaneously [*laughs*]. And, as I said, we, who have a basic understanding of the nature of capitalism and what it really does and what it really means for people throughout the world, also don't fully understand spontaneously how all this is rooted in the fundamental contradiction of capitalism—it takes work. And in order to translate it to the masses so they can understand it, you can't put it in the terms I just did. But there are ways to translate this into popular terms so that people can learn about the world and how it actually is, and how it actually moves and changes—and what their role is in relation to that. And through our newspaper, *Revolution*, as well more generally, that's what we have to do. That's one of the most essential things we have to do: bring this to the masses of people so that when they struggle, and as they struggle, and even as we organize them to struggle, they are more and more consciously understanding where this struggle needs to go, what the problem is and what the solution is, what it's rooted in and where it's tending, and why we have to struggle in a certain way to take it where it needs to go, in order to move beyond all this.

## The Two Forms of Motion of Capitalism's Fundamental Contradiction

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Now if we go further in examining the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, between socialized production and private appropriation, then we come to the question of the two forms of motion of this contradiction, or the two expressions of this contradiction. Twenty-five years ago, when we made the analysis that the principal contradiction in the world was between the two imperialist camps (one headed by the U.S. and one headed by the Soviet Union, which was then still masquerading as a "socialist" country but was in reality a state-capitalist-imperialist power), this was a very contentious thing within the international communist movement; and for that reason, but for the more fundamental reason that we need to really understand the world in its actual dynamics and motion and development, we dug into this question of not just what is the fundamental contradiction of this era and what was the principal contradiction in that period, but how do you understand that whole question and how do you arrive at the correct determination of what is the fundamental and what is the principal contradiction in the world. And this was, as I say, controversial in the international communist movement, because a lot of people were stuck in a formulation that came out in the mid-1960s from China, that the principal contradiction in the world was essentially between the Third World and imperialism (or between the oppressed nations and imperialism). This is



another one of those things where people didn't think there was anything to discuss or wrangle with: "What's the question? The principal contradiction in the world is oppressed nations versus imperialism—that's it, let's move on to the next question."

But the world doesn't stand still, the world moves and changes. Even when we don't consciously act on it, it still moves and changes—in fact, more maddeningly when we don't act on it and consciously seek to change it. So, in taking up the question of what actually was the principal contradiction in the world at that time (the beginning of the 1980s), we had to dig into this: how do you get down to the material foundation of this, how do you understand this in a materialist way and not in a metaphysical way, as if "it is this way, that's always the way it was and forever shall be, amen" (like the Christian "doxology" or some other religious incantation). Or, in more "communist" terms: "this is the way it was when I became a revolutionary, that's the way it is, so what's the discussion?" No. The world is moving and changing.

So we had to dig down deeply, and we discovered this analysis by Engels discussing essentially the fundamental contradiction of capitalism and its development; and Engels identified these two expressions, or two forms of motion, of this fundamental contradiction: One, the contradiction, in terms of the class struggle, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; but the other is the contradiction between (as we can say it for shorthand) organization and anarchy—organization and planning in a particular enterprise, or a particular branch of the economy, versus the overall anarchy that flows out of the basic nature of commodity production and exchange, which is generalized under capitalist society, even to include labor power as a commodity (selling your work for wages, for shorthand, but more essentially selling your ability to work for wages).

So we saw how Engels identified these two forms of motion. And then, proceeding from that basic analysis, we came out with something that really became controversial. We said, overall at this stage of history, out of these two forms of motion or two expressions of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, the anarchy/organization aspect (or form of motion or expression of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism) is the principal one. **Wham!!!** Then many people in the international communist movement said: "How could that be? If you say that, you are taking all the initiative out of the hands of the people. What could the people do about the anarchy/organization contradiction? The people could wage the class struggle, but how could they wage the anarchy/organization contradiction?"

Again, this gets back to the point I've been hammering at up until now. What does it mean to wage struggle? It means to transform necessity. The class struggle consists of transforming necessity. The struggle for production consists of transforming material reality or necessity. Gaining knowledge means transforming necessity into freedom or into knowledge. Everything consists of transforming necessity into freedom, and then confronting (and needing to transform) new necessity in so doing. So, in order to wage

the class struggle in the deepest, most all-around and most powerful way, you have to understand what the necessity *is* that you are up against. What is the material reality that is confronting you, and where is that material reality coming from?—to put it simply.

And we could determine that, given the character of capitalism, as a generalized system of commodity production, the anarchy/organization contradiction is the principal form of motion, or principal expression, of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, between socialized production and private appropriation. Yes, we are dealing with capitalism in its imperialist stage when there is more monopolization, and there's more planning on a larger scale; but, as Lenin pointed out, this only takes the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, between socialized production and private appropriation, and specifically between planning and anarchy (or organization/anarchy), and raises it to an even higher and more acute expression, and spreads it throughout the world in a fuller way. So it is, as we have put it, the driving force of anarchy—a driving force inherent in the very motion of commodity production and exchange—which plays the main role in terms of how the fundamental contradiction of capitalism plays itself out in the world. Now, as we have stressed, this is a very dialectical thing, something in motion and in interconnection and interpenetration with other things in the world, and more specifically with the other form of expression (or form of motion) of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, that is, the class struggle. The class struggle, most essentially between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, obviously is very important and reacts back on the motion of the anarchy/organization contradiction. In the Set the Record Straight presentation by Raymond Lotta, it is pointed out that when one-sixth of the territory of the globe was wrenched out of the hands of the imperialists through the Russian Revolution, this brought new necessity to the imperialists. And this affected the overall motion of the anarchy/organization contradiction and of the working out of the whole fundamental contradiction in the world in a very significant way. So, obviously, with that major change in the world, things in the superstructure, and in particular the class struggle for the seizure of political power in the realm of the superstructure, in turn reacted in a profound way back on the contradictions, the underlying contradictions of capitalism, including the driving force of anarchy, or the anarchy/organization contradiction and how it played itself out. And in general there is a dialectical back and forth—mutual interaction and mutual influence—between the development of the class struggle (as one form of motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism and of the era in which capitalism is still dominant in the world) and the motion of the anarchy/organization contradiction (the other form of motion of that fundamental contradiction of capitalism).

But our analysis was, and is, and correctly and very importantly so, that out of all this complexity, the main driving force in the working out of this fundamental contradiction is the compelling and driving force of anarchy. Now if, for example, three-quarters of the world were socialist, this would probably change at that point (the point is not to set a particular "quantitative marker," a certain specific point at which the balance of things would change, but to indicate once again that this is not static but changes, and will change, with major changes in the world, and in particular those brought about through

the revolutionary struggle—or, understanding this in broad and not narrow terms, the class struggle). But, assuming things do go forward to communism, at some point the conscious planning and approach to the economy that will increasingly characterize human social organization, will on a world scale have a much more profound effect than the remaining anarchy of capitalist production—even though socialism, by the way, folks, won't totally eliminate anarchy in another sense. There will still be, even in socialist (and, for that matter, even in communist) society, some forms of what we could call anarchy. Not the anarchy that comes from commodity production and exchange, but the "anarchy" of, once again, necessity asserting itself. Of course, this will be in a qualitatively different framework and have a qualitatively different meaning and content. But today in the world it is the compelling force of anarchy that is mainly setting the stage, the objective conditions for things, including for the revolutionary struggle in various forms.

Look at what globalization has done, and is doing. Now, yes, globalization has been able to go forward because of political events, too: the class struggle in China going in a negative way, leading to the restoration of capitalism there; the political changes—not a change in the nature of the class rule in the Soviet Union, but the change in the nature of the *form* of the class rule, bourgeois class rule, in what was the Soviet Union and its empire—which has, in turn, reacted back upon globalization. But in this overall back and forth, it is globalization, and everything that this expresses and is bound up with, that is more shaping and determining what happens in the world. Why are so many peasants being driven from the countryside to the city? Why have millions of peasants in Brazil and Mexico, and generally throughout the Third World, been driven off their land in the past few decades? Not principally because of the class struggle—although, where there have been revolutionary wars, this may have intensified that—but essentially because of the workings of capitalism, because of the driving and compelling force of anarchy. Why are so many people leaving one part of the world and going as immigrants to whole other parts of the world? Why are people from the Philippines working in Saudi Arabia or in Kuwait? Why are people from El Salvador working in the United States? Why are people from South Asia finding themselves in Canada? It is principally the driving and compelling force of anarchy which is picking up and hurling people all these different places and driving tens of millions of people, indeed hundreds of millions, from the countryside to the cities.

## The Contradictory Motion, and the Dynamism, of Capitalism

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So because of its basic contradictions and "inherent nature," the motion of capital, in the ways I've discussed it, gives rise, at one and the same time, to tendencies for capital to be concentrated and centralized—the tendencies for capital to be drawn together in ever larger combinations and aggregations of capital, to be more and more monopolized, if you will—and, on the other hand, the tendency for capital to break apart and to take shape (to "re-form") as *different* aggregations of capital. Constantly this contradiction is asserting itself: the tendency for capital to more and more combine and centralize and, on the other hand, the tendency for capital to break apart and re-form, often in larger aggregations of capital. And if we look at this monopolization and centralization

phenomenon vs. its opposite—vs. this breaking apart and re-forming—another way to put this is that there is a contradiction between centralization and monopolization within capital vs. the fact that capital always exists as *many capitals*. And it's worth it to get into this a bit.

We have seen in recent decades, for example, that major airlines have gone out of business—international airlines and major airlines in the U.S. And other airlines have been reorganized. "External" capital has come in and taken over and reorganized these airlines, for example. And some of the capital that was invested in these airlines was taken out of them and invested in far-flung ways, not only in other parts of the U.S. economy, but all over the world. So if you could actually put little "post-it" things on this capital, you'd see that this capital would be all over different places, all over the world. If you wrote "airline" on it and then followed it, you'd see that capital which used to be invested in an airline is now all over the place in the U.S. economy and the world economy. So the capital that was aggregated together in that form broke apart and then reassembled, so to speak, with other capital into new formations, because it was more profitable to do that. Here again, what this is an expression of is the compelling and driving force of anarchy: essentially because of this compelling and driving force of anarchy, the capital that was invested in airlines goes other places.

Or you can look at another everyday thing: TV and cable TV. You had the networks, the three big networks, owned by big aggregations of capital—GE and others. And then all of a sudden this guy over here, Murdoch, is building up all this capital and this empire, a media empire, he has based in Australia—and **boom**, he comes into the U.S. media, and here comes Fox: Fox Network News challenging CNN, the Fox Network challenging the major three networks for prime time shows. And then, besides that, you've got cable TV: HBO brings us *The Sopranos* and *Deadwood* and all these other things, and they have a certain selling point: you can say "fuck" on those cable networks. *[laughter]* Look at *Deadwood*—you couldn't have *Deadwood* on prime time networks. *[laughter]* Right? I mean, every other word, it's "cocksucker" and whatever. But capitalists are coming in there, in the sphere of cable, to "fill a certain void," if you will. And part of this is an expression of how new technology is developed which makes possible and facilitates the reconfiguration of capital. Now cable TV is challenging network TV in every sphere.

And you have companies in the U.S. that used to be major companies that are out of business, or have shut down a whole line of production. When I was a kid, Kaiser, for example, not only had its health care systems, so called, but they had an automobile, the Kaiser. (I'm not talking about the German ruler, from an earlier period, when I refer to the Kaiser—I'm talking about an American automobile.) But it went out of business and that capital went somewhere else. And the auto companies narrowed down to an even smaller number. There used to be American Motors, which was in Milwaukee and some other places—it made the Nash Rambler at one point. That's nowhere to be found. The automobile companies in the U.S. got narrowed down and the capital in auto got consolidated. But then other international amalgamations of capital joined in—for example, with Chrysler now. And in Italy and Japan and other places you have these

massive aggregations of capital in automobile production that are competing with the U.S. auto corporations. The international dimension, and the international competition, in all this has been heightened, at the same time as much of the capital based in different countries is increasingly interconnected and interwoven. And some of these corporations that have gone out of business had millions and millions (or billions) of dollars of capital. It didn't all disappear—it went to other places. Some of it went bankrupt, but some of it was withdrawn and went to other places.

Meanwhile, think of one of the symbols or paradigms or emblems of powerful capital these days: Microsoft. It didn't exist a few decades ago. But capital went into that area when new technology made it possible, and now you have this massive aggregation of capital in Microsoft.

As we have pointed out—and this is important to recognize and to emphasize—capitalism is a dynamic system. Capitalism is always tending to aggregate together, concentrate and centralize, more and more monopolize, as well as breaking apart and re-forming, often in even larger aggregations of capital. And it is the dynamic of the compelling force of anarchy that, essentially, is driving this.

We even saw this when we went to analyze the Soviet Union. Before they did us a favor and came out openly and proclaimed that they were bourgeois—before they got "Gorbachev-ed"—there was a big debate about what was the character of the Soviet Union, and was it socialist? We took part in a major debate, in the early '80s, focused on the question: The Soviet Union, socialist or social imperialist? And in the history of our Party (and the forerunner of our Party, the Revolutionary Union [RU]), we had generally taken up the position of the Chinese Communist Party in identifying the Soviet Union as social imperialist (socialist in words but imperialist in deeds and in essence). But then we did what, frankly, all too many people don't do, these days especially—we said, "Well, since we're putting this forward, we better actually analyze it more deeply and see if it's true." [laughs] So we set about to analyze it: The RU came out with *Red Papers 7*, which made a beginning analysis; and the Party, after it was formed in 1975, went on from there and further developed that analysis in the context of that debate around socialism or social imperialism. And there was this grouping, the Communist Labor Party, and one of their people, Jonathan Arthur, wrote an article back in the '70s which argued: There cannot be a reversal from socialism back to capitalism—you cannot stuff the baby back into the womb after it's born. [laughter] Which proves, again (harking back to the disagreement with Huey Newton's formulation) that you can define phenomena in a certain way but that does not necessarily cause them to act in the desired manner if it doesn't correspond to what they really are. The Soviet Union *really was* social imperialism, and that asserted itself. So, inept and inaccurate analogies notwithstanding, a country that had been socialist actually did go back to capitalism.

But in analyzing this at the time, before this became openly and irrefutably the case (before Gorbachev and what Gorbachev set in motion), we had to dig down and we had to analyze: what is the nature of Soviet society, is it really a capitalist society, and if so,

how does it work? And what we discovered was the phenomenon where in fact you had state capitalism, with a very high degree of monopolization of capital, yet it was continually breaking down into many capitals. Different aggregations of political associations, in ministries and leadership bodies and regional councils, and so on, were turning themselves into capitalists and turning the finances and resources they were responsible for into capital, competing with other centers of capital that were forming in different ministries, in different regions, in different divisions of the economy. So, proceeding from a materialist (and dialectical) analysis of reality, and specifically of what had happened in the Soviet Union, we came to grasp more deeply how, once the law of value and "profit in command" were made the driving and organizing principles of the economy in that society, with the first crucial leap, backward, in the mid-1950s (with the rise to power of Khrushchev) and further leaps taken in the mid-1960s (under Kosygin and Brezhnev), then, even in the form of state capitalism, the compelling force of anarchy asserted itself once again as the essential driving and determining force in the economy and in the society overall and its role in the world.

## The Anarchy of Capitalism and the Illusion of Peace, and Peaceful Change, Under Imperialism

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So what is at work, what is driving things, is the compelling force of anarchy. This is a basic reason why Kautsky's theory of "ultra-imperialism"<sup>2</sup> is wrong—the notion that all the different imperialists can get together and make an agreement to divide the world among themselves peacefully, and just keep it going that way forever. Now, it is true, especially with the destructive forces these imperialists have now—on the basis of the productive forces under their domination (the resources and technology and the masses of people, with their knowledge and abilities)—with the military power they have built up on that basis, and in particular with nuclear weapons (I almost said "nuke-u-lur" but it's *nuclear* weapons) [*laughter*—it's true that, in these circumstances, the rivalry among the imperialists, when it's taken the form of wars, has taken place in the last several decades essentially as proxy wars (with states or other forces that are the "proxies," or essentially the instruments, of various imperialists fighting it out, in place of the rival imperialists themselves). But it nevertheless has repeatedly taken the form of military struggle. And in the superstructure as well as the economic base, it has not been possible to maintain, even to the degree that this was attempted, some sort of order that held together in the same form, or arrangement, because the driving force of anarchy continually asserts itself in unevenness and the opportunity for some to get ahead of and crush others in the realm of capitalist competition and rivalry. This is basically why they can't just "order" the world and divide it peacefully among themselves, even with the constraints they face because of nuclear weapons. And just because nuclear war has been avoided before doesn't mean it will be avoided forever, by the way—we shouldn't fall into that sort of erroneous, metaphysical (almost religious) notion either.

So, again, we discover that, because of the driving, compelling force of anarchy, capitalism continually tends both to monopolize (to aggregate, to concentrate and centralize) more and more, and to break apart and re-form. The compelling force of

anarchy is driving both of those tendencies. Capitalism is a living dynamic system that is continually changing things and, if we're going to make revolution in this world, we have to approach it with this understanding and not with a set of sterile formulas that we seek to superimpose on reality and then try to make, or torture, reality to conform to these *a priori* notions, to wishful thinking about the way the world is, or to dogmatic, rigid, undialectical and unmaterialist imaginings of how the world is.

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Understanding all this correctly, in a living way and scientifically, we can see how all of this is an expression of the way in which capital moves—or is driven—by its fundamental contradiction, and in particular the expression this takes in *the contradiction between organization and anarchy* within the motion of capital.

This fundamental contradiction of capitalism, its two forms of motion, and their inter-penetration—all this, especially in the era of imperialism, plays out on a *global* scale, as well as within particular countries. And it will continue to do so throughout the present era—the era of the transition from the bourgeois epoch to the epoch of communism, from the epoch in which capitalism is principal and determining in the world, to the epoch when capitalism, its fundamental contradiction and everything this gives rise to, will have been resolved and surpassed through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the revolutionary transformation of the material and the political and ideological conditions, of the economic base and the superstructure, throughout the world.

## Revolution in the Superstructure—Rooted in the Contradictions in the Economic Base

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Another way to get the materialism of this is through another one of these typically "Mao-esque" statements by none other than Mao, in speaking to the fact that when the underlying material conditions "cry out" for it, revolution must then be made in the superstructure: you cannot make fundamental transformations in society, or any qualitative change in the character of society, without first seizing state power and then going to work on the contradictions that remain in the economic base and in the superstructure, and in their constant interplay. This is another reason, a fundamental reason, why we want state power—why it's good to want state power, and why we should crave state power. And Mao, in his typically Mao-esque way of speaking to this, said: "When tools are frustrated, they speak through people." Now, of course, this can be misunderstood or misconstrued—once again, you can turn anything into its opposite, especially if you take it and apply it in a mechanical way—but understood correctly, dialectically, this statement by Mao reflects a profound reality and truth. It speaks to the fact that when the relations of production have become more a fetter on the productive forces than they are an appropriate form for the development of those productive forces, and when the superstructure needs to be transformed in order for those production relations to be transformed, then the possibility of revolution to qualitatively



transform those contradictions becomes qualitatively more expressed. The need for that becomes qualitatively more expressed and the possibility of it also becomes qualitatively greater.

So, in that sense—not understanding it in some sort of ahistorical way, or in some sort of mechanical sense—you enter the era of revolution when the possibility of revolution, as well as the need for revolution, becomes qualitatively heightened, because the relations of production have become, not only in essence but in a pronounced way, a fetter on the development of the productive forces, including the masses of people in particular. And revolution takes place, in a concentrated and essential way, in the struggle for state power and the seizure of state power by the rising class, which represents new relations of production which can "unfetter," can liberate, the productive forces.

Once again, this is why we need and want state power, because the ability to transform society in its economic foundation and in its superstructure—in all its production and social relations, in the political character, institutions and structures in society, in the culture and the thinking of the people—all that resides in and gets concentrated in who, or in other words which class, has state power. And that, in turn, gets concentrated in terms of the character of that state power—not only who has it, in some general or abstract sense, but what is the character of that state power and what is that state power serving and furthering.

So "when tools become frustrated, they speak through people" is Mao's way of saying all this, boiling it down in a unique kind of way. To put this in other, more fully elaborated terms (and building on what has been said up to now in this talk), we can say: When the contradictions between the forces and relations of production, and between the base and superstructure, become acutely posed, then people become conscious of this. People come forward who are conscious representatives of the class which represents the ability to unfetter the productive forces further and liberate them, in conflict with the class which is holding onto the old relations of production and the old superstructure, which are now acting as a fetter on the productive forces, since those productive forces have developed in such a way that they are now straining against the outer integument, as Marx once said (the outer shell and constraints), of those old production relations and that old superstructure. This is what makes it possible to make revolution in a fundamental and underlying sense. And those who become conscious of this, particularly in this era, become conscious of leading a revolution to actually rupture with the whole previous character of society—not only capitalism but, beyond that, all previous forms in which society has been divided into classes, and into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed.

As I have spoken to in a number of talks and writings, this revolution in the superstructure—the seizure of political power—makes possible the transformation of the economic base, and the superstructure, in dialectical relation to each other. And it makes possible the development and strengthening of the socialist country and its state as a base area and source of support as well as inspiration for the advance of the world

revolution—in dialectical relation, in turn, with the defense of the socialist state itself and the further revolutionization of the socialist society—all of which involves profound, and at times very acute, contradictions. So if you want to know another reason why we want state power, it has to do with the advance of the world revolution. Imagine, if we had state power in the hands of the proletariat in this country instead of in the hands of the imperialists—even just that equation changing—imagine what that would do, all the good it would do, for the world and the world's people. And, then, on top of that, imagine if we use that state power not only to more and more mobilize the masses to transform this particular society, but to support and advance the world revolution—imagine what that would do in the world, the great good that would do for the world's people!

But, as I said, all this involves profound and at times very acute contradictions. I just spoke to some of that, and that can perhaps sound kind of academic until you actually think about what's captured in those descriptions: The seizure of power makes possible the transformation of the economic base and the superstructure in dialectical relation to each other.

Now, I'm going to come back and talk about this more, but I just want to touch on—let's just think for a minute about—the contradictions involved. It all sounds nice. You know, there it is in one paragraph, you can do the whole thing [*the following in a kind of satirical voice*]:

"Sounds easy—seize state power and then that makes possible the transformation of the economic base and the superstructure in dialectical relation to each other. [*laughter*] And it makes possible the development and strengthening of the socialist country and its state as a base area and source of support as well as inspiration for the advance of the world revolution [*laughter*], in dialectical relation to the defense of the socialist state itself and the further revolutionization of the socialist society. Sounds easy." [*laughter*]

Now I'm not mocking myself, but this can be turned into that kind of dogmatic drivel, okay? This is very complex. We have seen, from the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist states, how profoundly complex and contradictory and difficult this is. State power is truly great and opens up all kinds of possibilities, but it also presents you with profound new necessity. Now, fuck it, I'd rather have that necessity any day than what we have now—but you don't get to wipe away all necessity. Transforming the economic base correctly, in dialectical relation with transforming the superstructure—that involves truly profound, and yes, inter-related, contradictions: how to handle development of the ownership system from a lower to a higher form (of social ownership); how to transform the relations among people in work—for example, people in management and people carrying out manual labor, or people in all the various fields of technology in relation to people carrying out manual labor and in relation to people managing. How do you handle the arts and culture, science, and the intellectual and academic spheres, in relation to transforming the economic base? How

do you transform those spheres themselves in a way that actually serves the advance toward communism, while doing that correctly in relation to changing the economic base?

These terms concentrate a lot of contradictions. For example, transforming the economic base: how to do that fundamentally on the basis of mobilizing the masses to do this in an ever more conscious way. Yes (and I'll speak about this a little later), there is an element of coercion in this, but the orientation and objective must be to do it fundamentally and increasingly on the basis of the conscious initiative and activism of growing numbers of masses of people. And then there is the question of how to do that to the maximum extent possible at every point, without overstepping things.

Look at the Great Leap Forward in China.<sup>3</sup> Look what they were trying to do, and look what they ran into. These are very acute and profound contradictions that are very difficult to handle correctly when you're living in a world where there are counter-revolutionaries, both within your own country and internationally, and at the same time there are others who are fundamentally within the camp of the people but whose privileges are, to one degree or another, being undermined by what you're doing. It becomes very complex to handle that in a non-antagonistic way. I'll talk about that more as we go along.

Or in transforming the superstructure, how do you actually have an opening up of wrangling in the realm of ideas, an intellectual ferment and the kind of role for dissent that I've been giving emphasis to, and yet not give up the whole game? You think that's easy? No, it's not. That's why I keep invoking this metaphor of being drawn and quartered.<sup>4</sup> That's why, if we don't get the solid core and elasticity<sup>5</sup> right in fundamental terms, we don't have a chance, even if we somehow stumble into state power (if you can imagine that).

Then you put in the whole international dimension. And you can't be idealist—if you don't increase production, then how are you going to support the world revolution very much, and how can you defend the socialist country itself, at the same time as you're trying to carry out transformations in the economic base, in the relations among people in production, as well as in the superstructure, including in the outlook of the masses of people? That requires an underlying material basis. Now, you can fall into the "theory of productive forces"—which says, first we just develop the economy, then it will be easy to transform the relations among people, and the superstructure—and you end up with what they have in the Soviet Union and in China now. But on the other side, if you just say, "well, let's do what they always accuse us of, let's 'communize poverty'"—then all these exploitative relations will reassert themselves and the old political power, the exploiting classes and the political power that reinforces such exploitation, will seize the state away from you, to say nothing of what the imperialists would do if you mess up in that way.

So these are all very profound contradictions that repeatedly pose themselves in a very acute way. And I don't say this to spread despair and defeatism. I say it to emphasize the importance of a scientific approach to revolution and of bringing forward growing numbers of people—within the party and more broadly in society, first as part of building the revolutionary movement toward the seizure of power, and then on a whole other level after power is seized—to take up these challenges.

Notes:

1. The discussion by Bob Avakian of the "parachute" point took place in another part of this talk, which is not included in what is now being published in Revolution.

2. Karl Kautsky was a leader of the German Social Democratic Party, which was the largest socialist party in the world in the period leading into World War 1. But, because Kautsky, and the party he led, fell increasingly into a non-revolutionary understanding and outlook and adopted gradualist, reformist positions, in opposition to a genuinely revolutionary and communist viewpoint and program, when World War 1 broke out, Kautsky and the German Social Democratic Party leadership overall (and, in fact, the leadership of the majority of socialist parties in the world at that time) went back on their pledge to oppose their own government in such a war and to work to turn the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war in their own countries; they capitulated to imperialism (specifically, the imperialism of "their own country") and, in the case of Kautsky and some others, this went along with taking a counter-revolutionary position against the Russian revolution and the new socialist state it brought into being. One of the fundamentally incorrect positions which Kautsky adopted was his theory of "ultra-imperialism," which argued, in essence, that the imperialists could peacefully divide the world among themselves. This theory of Kautsky's, and related errors, were major factors leading to capitulation to imperialism when the outbreak of war among the imperialists, World War 1, shattered the illusions that were spread and reinforced by this notion of "ultra-imperialism."

3. The Great Leap Forward was a mass movement initiated under the leadership of Mao Tsetung, in the late 1950s, only about a decade after the country was liberated from imperialist and reactionary rule and the socialist stage of the Chinese revolution begun. The Great Leap Forward was centered particularly in the countryside, where the great majority of the people in China live, and where, for centuries before the victory of the revolution, they had been weighed down by feudal oppression, as well as the effects of imperialist domination of the country, leading to tremendous poverty and backwardness in the countryside in particular. The Great Leap Forward involved the mass mobilization of peasants to develop small-scale industry throughout the countryside as well as to carry out many larger-scale public works projects, not only to meet the needs of the people and of industrial development but to serve agriculture. But the Great Leap Forward was not merely aimed at developing the economy in this way. An important aspect of this mass movement was to develop higher levels of collectivity of ownership and of cooperative labor, and correspondingly in the distribution of basic necessities and

social services, in the countryside, and in this way to make leaps on the path to overcoming the historically established differences, gaps, and inequalities between the city and the countryside, industry and agriculture, workers and peasants, and between men and women, as an important part of building the new socialist society on the road toward the final goal of communism, worldwide. The Great Leap Forward was met with opposition and sabotage by revisionists (phony communists) within the Chinese Communist Party itself and by the revisionist leadership of the Soviet Union, which pulled out its aid and technical personnel—the Chinese economy had, up until that time, been largely based on the Soviet model and was structured so that aid and technical assistance from the Soviet Union was a key component—and the Great Leap Forward took place at a time when there were successive years of serious and widespread drought in China. For these reasons—along with the fact that a mass campaign on this scale was something completely new in Chinese society (and, in fact, was unprecedented in the relatively brief history of socialism as a whole, including the experience of the Soviet Union), and there were bound to be, and there were, errors as well as some excesses—significant dislocations and shortages and real hardships and suffering, including starvation on a significant scale, occurred during the Great Leap Forward. However, not only were the immediate severe problems addressed and overcome but, within a relatively short period, China basically solved its food problem—for the first time in the history of the country, the basic nutritional requirements of the masses of peasants, and the Chinese people as a whole, were met—and, beyond that, despite errors and serious problems, and as a result of correcting them while building on important new things that had in fact been brought into being through the Great Leap Forward, the economy of China, together with the social relations and the outlook of the people, made important, indeed historic, advances in the next 15 years or so in which China continued on the socialist road, and in particular through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in the years 1966-76, until the death of Mao and, shortly after that, the seizure of power by revisionists, led ultimately by Deng Xiaoping, who took China back down the road to capitalism.

4. This metaphor of being drawn and quartered, and related questions having to do with how the proletariat should exercise state power so as to make socialist society a vibrant and lively society and advance toward communism, can be found in "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World," which is included in the book *Bob Avakian: Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005). This "Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology" is also available online at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).

5. The concept of "solid core with a lot of elasticity" is discussed by Bob Avakian in a number of talks and articles, including the talk *Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition to Communism*, which appeared in the Revolutionary Worker newspaper (now Revolution) between August 2004 and January 2005 and is available online at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us). It is also discussed in several essays that are included in the book *Bob Avakian: Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*.

