

Re-envisioning Revolution and Communism: WHAT IS BOB AVAKIAN'S NEW SYNTHESIS?

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REVOLUTION newspaper

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Fight the Power,
and Transform the People,
for Revolution

Revolution#129, May 18, 2008

[The following is the text of a speech given in various locations around the country this spring. It has been slightly edited for publication.]

Part I: "Humanity Needs Revolution and Communism"

We're talking today about Bob Avakian's new synthesis of a re-envisioned revolution and communism. To get into this, we need to talk first about why we **need** revolution and communism.

I want to read from an article in our newspaper, *Revolution*, on an ACLU survey of the behavior of the 4,600 cops in New York public schools. They reported a daily diet of harassment and verbal humiliation, and instance after instance of outright brutality. This included, among others, the case of Biko Edwards, who was walking toward his chemistry class when a vice principal stopped him. When Biko protested not being allowed to go to class, the vice principal called in a cop. The ACLU report describes what happened next:

Officer Rivera then grabbed Biko and slammed him against a brick door divider, lacerating Biko's face and causing him to bleed. Officer Rivera then sprayed Mace at Biko's eyes and face, causing Biko's eyes to burn. Rather than treat the student, Officer Rivera then called for back-up on his radio, and proceeded to handcuff Biko... [Biko] was taken to a hospital where he spent approximately two hours being treated for his wounds, and spending most of his time in the hospital handcuffed to a chair... He faces five criminal charges.¹

For those of you who know of Steven Biko, the South African revolutionary after whom this young man was very likely named, there is a sharp—and bitter—irony here. For Steven Biko was beaten to death in prison by South African police during the apartheid

era—by a racist government whose main backer was the United States. The outrage done to Biko Edwards echoes this and goes on every day, in every ghetto school, in New York and around the country.

What kind of a system does THIS do to its youth?

And let me share with you from an article that appeared just a few weeks ago in the *New York Times* magazine, reporting on an American counter-insurgency unit in Afghanistan. Among other horrors, it describes a night-long assault on a village and how, after the assault, to quote the article, “Lt. Matt Piosa, an earnest, 24-year-old West Point grad...radioed that the village elders were asking to bury their dead. They’d also collected wounded civilians. The tally was bad—5 killed and 11 wounded, all of them women, girls and boys.” I invite you to read the whole article to get just a small sense of what the **murderers** that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton call our “brave men and women in uniform” actually *do*.²

An army is an extension of the society it defends; what *kind* of a society produces an army that fights like *this*?

Take a spin on this globalized best-of-all-possible worlds. Talk to the families of the **150,000** peasant farmers in India who, ruined by global capitalism, have killed themselves in the past decade, usually by drinking pesticide. Travel to Angola, in Africa, where, to quote another *Times* article, “children stripped to their underwear dance through sewage-clogged creeks and slide down garbage dumps on sleds made of sheet metal into [shit]-fouled puddles,” while oil executives jet in and out to cut deals in luxury hotels.³ Stop off in Eastern Europe, where **thousands** of women each year are kidnaped and turned out as sex slaves for that same global market.⁴ Then go to Mexico and visit the family of any one of the 400 men and women a year who die of thirst trying to cross the Arizona desert in a desperate search for work.⁵ Think about these people; and tell me—tell them—tell yourself—that this world doesn’t need to be fundamentally changed, bottom to top. Tell me that this world doesn’t need revolution.

But then the question comes up: can there BE a revolution that would *really* change things? Didn’t people try that, and fail? And even if a revolution *could* change all that, how would you ever go about doing it in a country like this?

These questions have been central to Bob Avakian’s work—to what we call the new synthesis—and they are what I’m going to get into today. I obviously can’t thoroughly cover 30 years of Bob Avakian’s work in two hours. But what I hope to do is to give you a sense of a whole new way of approaching human emancipation and fundamental change, building on the best of what’s gone before but taking it to a new level.

So, let’s get into it.

Embarking on a New Stage of Revolution

160 years ago, Marx and Engels proclaimed in *The Communist Manifesto* that the workers of the world—the international proletariat—had nothing to lose but their chains and had a world to win. That manifesto put forward the basics of the pathbreaking theory that would guide that struggle.

25 years later, the first, brief attempt at proletarian revolution occurred with the Paris Commune; and nearly 50 years after that, the first real breakthrough—the first real consolidated socialist revolution—was made in the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Lenin and, after Lenin's death, Stalin. This was followed in China—where the revolution came to power in 1949 and where 17 years later the leader of that revolution, Mao Tsetung, launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a revolution within the revolution to both prevent China from reverting to capitalism and to actually take it further toward communism.

This whole first stage of the communist revolution came to an end in 1976. When Mao died, there was a counter-revolutionary coup in China that imprisoned and/or executed those who had stood with him in leading the Cultural Revolution. The policies that they had fought so hard against were put into effect, and capitalism was restored. Today there are no genuine socialist countries in the world. And people all over the world feel, and struggle with, that weight every day—whether they know it or not.

So, how to go forward in the face of *that*? How to embark on a new stage of revolution? In this situation, Bob Avakian has led in defending, upholding and building on the monumental achievements of those revolutions and the illuminating insights of its greatest thinkers and leaders. But he has also deeply analyzed the mistakes, and the shortcomings in conception and method that led to those mistakes. And on that basis, he's forged a coherent, comprehensive and overarching theoretical framework—that is, a *synthesis*. While this definitely comes out of and builds on what has gone before, this advance has also involved real ruptures with the past understanding and experience as a crucial element, which is why we call it the *new synthesis*.

Today I'm going to discuss this in three realms: philosophy, or how we understand the world; politics, especially but not limited to the political conceptions that guided the first attempts at building socialist societies and carrying out socialist transformation; and strategic conception, which focuses on how one would actually make revolution in a country like this.

Part II: A Philosophy to Understand—and Change—The World

Now by philosophy I mean a more-or-less worked-out way of understanding the world that guides, or influences, how people see their place in it and what they think can be or should be done about it. If you think that people are “hard-wired to be selfish because of their genetic inheritance”—that's a philosophy. It's a way of understanding all of nature and society, and it's going to guide what you think can and should be done.

If you say that you don't have a philosophy, you just go with what works—sorry, that's a philosophy too, the made-in-USA philosophy of pragmatism. If you take up *that* philosophy, you don't think too much about the underlying causes of things, the larger dynamics that shape the world—you just accept the world as it is and limit yourself to tinkering around the edges.

And if you say that all philosophies are just “social constructs” which are all equally valid—or invalid—for getting at the truth; and if you even question the existence of such a thing as truth; well, that too is a philosophy—relativism—a very current one. Unfortunately, if predictably, it's gone along with a lack of conviction in firmly enough opposing and actually fighting the all too *real* crimes of the powers-that-be.

Philosophy matters, in other words, to what you DO.

Well, communism also encompasses a philosophy. And at the very heart of the new synthesis has been Bob Avakian's work to critically interrogate, or analyze, the philosophical foundations of communism—and to put those foundations on a more fully scientific basis.

To understand how this is so, we're going to have to touch on a few very complex concepts. Some of these concepts at the beginning are going to be complicated and perhaps unfamiliar—but stay with me—all this has extremely important implications for the “real world”—and I hope things become clear.

Marx's Breakthrough

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels had been students of the dialectical method developed by the German philosopher Hegel. Hegel had grasped that everything in the world constantly changes and develops. This development is driven forward by the conflicting forces that both coexist and struggle within every phenomenon and process. Even when something appears to be relatively stable...struggle, change and development are not only going on within it, but giving it its very character. And Hegel put forward that through this struggle of opposites, one aspect eventually becomes dominant, resulting in a leap to something fundamentally new.

To take one example—which Hegel by the way could not have known—the sun looks like a solid red-hot ball; in reality, it is a mass of continuous thermonuclear explosions which transform the hydrogen at the sun's core into helium, which radiates heat and light. And our sun will go through stages of development, changing its composition and its size and the amount of heat and light that it gives out, until eventually it dies—and becomes the food for new stars. It is a case of the unity, struggle and mutual transformation of opposites—giving rise to something new.

But Hegel located the source of all this development in a pre-existing realm of ideas, which then played out in the material world. In this sense, Hegel was philosophically *idealist*. Now, idealism in the realm of philosophy has a different meaning than it does in everyday life. In everyday life, idealism usually means that someone cares about more

than just themselves. But in philosophy, idealism refers to the notion that ideas came *before* the material world, or exist in a higher realm independent of that world.

Take religion. “In the beginning was the word”; or “everything is controlled and created by a god who exists in a different, non-material realm”; or “all my suffering is really just part of God’s purpose for me”—these are all just forms of philosophical idealism. Or take that book *The Secret*, which says that you create your world by the thoughts you think. Again, idealism—because in reality, your thinking develops in relation to and in the context of the particular society you were born into and your place in that society, and the “choices” it presents you with.

Opposed to idealism is materialism. And again, the everyday and philosophical uses of that word differ. Today when most people speak of materialism they mean something like consumerism...love of bling. But in the realm of philosophy, materialism stands for the outlook that seeks the causes of phenomena, including our thoughts, in the actual dynamics of the material world. Consciousness is the property of a particular form of matter that thinks—that is, humans.

During the time of Marx, materialism was predominantly mechanical—that means that the materialists of the day grasped that the laws of the physical world could be known, but tended to see these laws as somewhat static and machine-like, a kind of clockwork universe. They had been able to see how the earth revolved around the sun, and the gravitational laws that accounted for that, and the ways in which it could keep going; but they didn’t know about the way that the sun itself had arisen, gone through development, and would die out—so their views were constricted, and their philosophy reflected that. They could not quite account for how qualitative change—the coming into being of totally new things, or “leaps”—could arise from material causes.

Marx, and Engels, took Hegel’s great insight of *dialectics*—that everything changes on account of the struggle of opposed forces—and they stripped it of its idealism; and they took the *materialist* understanding that reality exists independently of and prior to all thought and stripped *that* of its mechanical character. The synthesis was dialectical materialism: the understanding that everything in the world goes through constant change and development through the contradictory forces within it, and that human thought itself arises from and reflects this process—and reacts back on it.

Putting the Study of Society on a Scientific Foundation

They applied that to putting the study of human society on a scientific foundation, and they developed *historical* materialism. They analyzed that, first of all, people must produce the necessities of life, and that they must enter into relations with each other to carry out that production—that is, *production relations*.

These production relations in turn roughly correspond to a certain level of development of the productive forces—that is, the technology, resources, and knowledge of the people in any given society at any given time. In slavery, the production is carried out

through relations between people in which one class literally owns another. These production relations of the slave system generally correspond to large-scale agriculture in which the tools are very primitive.

In capitalism, production is carried out through relations between people where one class—the capitalists—owns the factories, warehouses, and so on and where the other principal class—the workers, or proletarians—owns nothing but their ability to work, and must sell that ability in order to survive. The capitalists don't own the workers outright, but instead pay them wages when they can profit off them and fire them when they can't—as we can see around us right now, by the way. And these production relations correspond to the existence of large-scale means of production requiring a collectivity of people to work them; when people go into a factory to make steel or tractors, they have to work together to do that.

Both capitalism and slavery are exploitative, but the relations of production are *different*. So different types of societies have different production relations. Further, different kinds of production relations gave rise to different kinds of governments, different conceptions of human nature, different forms of the family, different kinds of art, different understandings of rights and duties, and different moralities.

For example, the Bible—including the New Testament—was written during an era when an important part of production was carried out through slave relations. That's why there is no sense anywhere in the Bible that slavery is a horrible crime against humanity—unless it happens to be done to the Israelites in the Old Testament by non-Jewish people. And the Bible was thus easily used by the slave masters of the Old South to justify slavery.

Today, when slavery no longer corresponds to the interests of the dominant class, the political and cultural consensus finds it to be horrible. But the exploitation of the workers by the capitalists, and the casting off of these workers when they can no longer be profitably exploited, is just seen as “the way things are, and human nature”—just like slavery used to be. Like the abolitionists before the U.S. Civil War, but on a much more scientific basis, we need to bring forward that this is NOT human nature any more than slavery was, but is just the result of *capitalist* relations—and we need to bring forward our *different* and opposed morality, based on a whole different set of production and social relations.

Let's take a scientific, historical materialist approach to the case with which I began this talk. What led to Biko Edwards and all the other students getting brutalized? Was it “unruly behavior” for no good reason? Well, you have to look at the whole social context and the whole larger history of what led to that incident. You have to ask: how do the underlying production relations of society—and the differing ways that Black people have been forced to find their relation to that, over history—shed light on this? You have to scientifically analyze what has driven the transformation of African-Americans first from slaves, kidnaped and ripped from their homes and brought here in chains to build up the great wealth of this country; and then to sharecroppers confined on plantations

after the Civil War; and then driven and drawn to the cities as mainly industrial workers in the most exploited and oppressive jobs...and now to a situation where the majority of African-Americans are either wage-slaves or treated as surplus people—and in the case of Black youth like Biko Edwards, treated as criminals. (And to again quote the *New York Times*, one of nine young Black men are in prison—the highest incarceration rate in the world.⁶)

You have to analyze the institutions and ideas that arose and were established and promoted in each of these periods. You have to analyze how white supremacy went through changes, but still remained very powerful in all the institutions in society. You have to look at all this in relation to every other significant phenomenon in society. And then on the basis of all that you can begin to *scientifically* analyze where all this oppression came from and comes from—and what has to be done to get rid of it. So that's an example of a historical materialist approach.

Overcoming Limitations

It is hard to overstate the importance of this discovery and of Marx's contributions generally to human thought—and human emancipation. He, along with Engels, set the theoretical foundation—they lit the way.

But there were, not surprisingly, limitations in the way that Marx and Engels went at this, and these problems got compounded by serious methodological shortcomings on the part of Stalin, who led the Soviet Union and the international communist movement for nearly 30 years following Lenin's death. What's worse, these errors came at the very time an advance in understanding was urgently called for. Mao—the leader of the Chinese Revolution—fought against some of these problems, but Mao himself was straining against an inherited framework and was not free from its influences. And these shortcomings had consequences.

Now, Bob Avakian has identified and deeply criticized weaknesses along four different dimensions of communist philosophy. These concern: one, a fuller break with idealist, even quasi-religious, forms of thought that had found their way into the foundation of Marxism and had not been ruptured with; two, a further and qualitatively deeper grasp of the ways in which matter and consciousness mutually interpenetrate with and transform each other; three, a critique of a host of problems associated with pragmatism and related philosophical tendencies; and four, a radically different epistemology, or way of getting at the truth. In doing all this, he has put Marxism on a more fully scientific basis.

To begin with, Avakian has excavated, criticized, and broken with certain secondary but still significant religious-type tendencies that have previously existed within the communist movement and communist theory—tendencies to see the achievement of communism as an "historical inevitability" and the related view of communism as almost like a heaven, some kind of "kingdom of great harmony," without contradictions and struggles among people.

But communism is *not* inevitable. There is no "god-like" History with a "Capital H" pushing things to communism. And while communism *will* bring about an end to antagonistic and violent conflicts among human beings, it will still be marked by contradictions, debates, and struggles—which will be carried out without violent conflict, *and which will in fact be a very good thing*, since this will continually contribute to the achievement of further understanding and further advances in transforming reality in accordance with the overall interests of humanity.

The view that the triumph of communism is "inevitable" and driven forward by History (with a "Capital H") and the tendency to see communism as some kind of utopia, without contradiction and struggle, was rather pronounced in Stalin, but has existed in Marxism to some degree more generally. In some significant aspects and to a significant degree, Mao broke with these kinds of views and methods; but the point is that there was still, even in Mao, an aspect of "inevitablism" and related tendencies, and Avakian has carried further the rupture with these ways of thinking, which are suggestive of an element of religiosity within Marxism, even while that element has never been principal or defining in terms of Marxist theory itself. In this regard (as well as in an overall sense) Avakian has not only upheld Mao and synthesized Mao's contributions to revolution and communist theory, but he has carried forward the rupture that Mao represented from Stalin, and on that basis Avakian has now made some ruptures with some of Mao's understanding too.

To say that communism is not inevitable is NOT to say that history is just a jumble. Indeed, there IS a coherence to history, as Marx put it, based on the fact that the productive forces (again, the land, technology, resources and people with their knowledge) are handed down from one generation to another and are constantly developing; and that when the relations that people enter into to carry out production become a fetter on the further development of those forces, big change ensues. Southern slave relations, which for decades coexisted with and fed northern capitalism, eventually became a fetter on the expansion of northern capitalism—and you got a civil war.

Like I said—*big* change.

Today, the fundamental contradiction of this society is between socialized production (the fact that people have to work collectively to produce things these days) and the fact that the means to produce that wealth and the product of those means is still owned, controlled and appropriated by individuals. This contradiction finds expression in all the different forms of the class struggle, on the one hand, and in the fact that development can only proceed through the headlong, expand-or-die clash of different blocs of capital on the other. This contradiction will continually pose and re-pose itself for resolution, in different ways.

Now whether that gets resolved favorably—whether we advance to the communist way of life that is now possible—this is not "guaranteed." It depends upon us and whether we carry out the hard work to develop both our scientific understanding of society and nature, and our ability to wrench freedom out of the challenges we face.

Like religious belief, the “inevitability guarantee” may console or sustain you, but it is not true and it cuts against facing reality as it is. It actually fetters your thinking in regard to the different possible pathways of human development—pathways which are subject to very real constraints and are “determined” in that sense, but which do not run in a *predetermined* direction.

And communism will not be a heaven, or kingdom of great harmony; as I said, like everything else, it will change and develop through the working out of contradictions by struggle—with the (rather huge) difference being that this struggle will no longer take place violently, through antagonistic social groups, and people themselves will have transcended the narrow and often vicious thinking conditioned by capitalism, as well as patriarchy and national oppression, that we now see as human nature.

The Role, and Potential Power, of Consciousness

Second, and related to this, Avakian has developed a far deeper understanding of the potential role and power of consciousness. Put it this way: to the extent that you *do* scientifically and deeply grasp the complex and multi-level contradictory character of society, with all its different constraints and its many possible pathways...to that extent, your freedom to act on and to affect that situation is immeasurably magnified.

Previously, the importance of the economic base (that is, the production relations) was not just recognized—but over-emphasized. This was a tendency toward *reductionism*—that is, reducing complex phenomena to a single over-riding cause, flattening out processes that have different levels to them in a way that doesn’t correspond to and actually distorts reality. Yes, the political institutions, the ideas, the morality of society—in other words, the *superstructure* of society—all ultimately grow out of its economic relations; this is a foundational insight of Marx.

But these institutions and ideas of the superstructure have a relative life of their own; plus they operate, and affect each other, on a lot of different and interpenetrating levels. They can’t just be flatly reduced to linear outgrowths of the production relations or class relations. Let’s take an example. White racism—the notion that there are different “races” of people, and that Black people are an inferior race—is a pseudo-scientific canard, or empty lie, that arose in the early 19th century. It grew out of and was reinforced by slave relations and in particular the slave-holding class. But its influence stretched far beyond that, becoming bred into the bone of the very notion of what it means to be an American and what democracy is all about—a point gone into in great depth in Avakian’s talk on Jeffersonian Democracy.⁷ And that idea has taken on a life of its own, affecting the thinking of everybody, and will have to be struggled against in its own right in socialist society, even as its material roots are being dug up.

While both Lenin and especially Mao made very important contributions toward a more correct and dialectical understanding of how this relation between the base and superstructure “works,” neither quite grasped the scope and fluidity of this relative independence deeply enough, or in a layered enough way.

Rupturing with Pragmatic Tendencies

Third, there have been other negative philosophical tendencies and problems in method, many of which relate to pragmatism—a philosophy, as I said earlier, that opposes the investigation of the deeper underlying reality in the name of “what works” and which also will maintain that ideas are true insofar as they are useful. This latter point begs the question of “useful for what?” and, more important, actually denies the real criterion of truth—whether an idea corresponds to reality. The idea that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction was useful to Bush—but that didn’t make it true.

These erroneous philosophical tendencies, particularly with Stalin, infected and even permeated the communist movement. Here I will ask you to bear with me as I try to explain—because remember, these had serious consequences. They included *instrumentalism*, which refers to the use of theory more as an instrument to justify some short-term goal than as a means to dig for the truth; *empiricism*, in which the evaluation of truth is based on direct and immediately observable experience, in a narrow framework; *apriorism*, which means imposing categories on the world, rather than drawing these concepts *from* the world itself, in a complex interplay between practice and theory; and *positivism*, a method which tends to limit and confine science to the description and codifying of observations, focusing on criteria of quantitative measurement and prediction.

To focus on positivism for a minute, this view denies or deems meaningless the analysis of deeper levels of dynamics and direction. Because of that, it tends to wall off phenomena from larger contexts and different levels and also attempts to reduce things and processes to a single, simple cause. And it consequently tends to negate, or deny, the ways in which theory can and must “run ahead” of practice—the ways, that is, in which deep analysis of experience (broadly conceived) can provide deeper insights into the underlying dynamics and tendencies inherent (or potential) within reality and open up new pathways to the transformation of that reality. Without theory “running ahead,” people would be unable to conceive of anything qualitatively different than what is already known; without theory running ahead, how could Marx and Engels have written the *Communist Manifesto*?

Let me give a somewhat notorious example to give a sense of the consequences of these wrong methodological approaches. This concerns a geneticist named Trofim Lysenko in the Soviet Union during the early '30s. Lysenko insisted that acquired characteristics could be inherited: in other words, if you were real skinny but you bulked up through lifting weights and steroids, your kids would inherit that kind of physique. Well, that view actually is wrong. But because Lysenko had a whole program on how to grow a lot of wheat very quickly in a country that was subject to famine, and because he achieved some short-term success in this by doing some plant grafts, this was declared to be true.

Let’s take this apart. There’s pragmatism—judging the truth of an idea based on “if it works” for one or another short-term goal. And there’s empiricism—judging truth solely by a narrow set of empirical experiences. Instead, you have to put what you are doing

and what you are learning in the context of what we know at any given point to be true—our fullest and most accurate possible picture, or model, of objective reality. Then you have to also relate it to the available relevant evidence from other sources. How did Lysenko's theory relate to what we knew to be true, including Darwin's theory, and some of the different work done to prove it? If there were contradictions between Lysenko's results and what might be predicted by Darwin's theory, how should we understand those contradictions?

But that was not how they proceeded. And the results were disastrous—not only for those geneticists who were denied the right to work and repressed even more harshly in some cases because they disagreed, and not only for the Soviet sciences more generally—but for the ways in which it taught people to approach and evaluate ideas in every sphere.

Or let's take an example of apriorism, as well as positivism. Stalin had an a priori assumption that once agriculture had been mechanized and once production, in the main, had been put under socialized ownership in the '30s, there would then no longer be antagonistic classes in Soviet society. But struggle nonetheless continued. Since Stalin's a priori "model" of a socialist society without class antagonisms couldn't account for this, he was led to conclude that all opposition must be the work of agents for imperialism. The results were grievous, from numerous angles.

Now this was, importantly, later criticized and opposed by Mao, one of whose great contributions concerned the continuation of class struggle under socialism—and who, as part of that, also did quite a bit of criticism of Stalin's philosophical tendencies to downplay and not recognize contradiction. But these tendencies of positivism, instrumentalism, and so on did great damage, and they had not been fully identified as such and systematically ruptured with prior to Avakian.

Avakian's Radical Advance in Epistemology

Finally, and extremely important, Bob Avakian has criticized and ruptured with long-standing epistemological views in the communist movement. Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge—how we come to understand the truth. These wrong epistemological views include the idea that "truth has a class character." Actually, truth is just truth and bullshit is just bullshit—regardless of who says it. Now materialism and dialectics as an overall method *should* enable you to better get at the truth, if you are thoroughgoing in their application to reality—but whatever idea you come up with has to be judged true or not based on whether it fundamentally corresponds to reality, not how you went about getting it.

In fact, people who do *not* use that method—indeed, people who detest that method—can, as it turns out, discover important truths. There are NOT separate realities for different classes and there are not separate "truths" for different classes—it's not, "it's a proletarian thang...you wouldn't understand." There is one reality. Because the proletariat *as a class* has no need to cover up the fundamental character of human

society, dialectical and historical materialism corresponds to its *fundamental interests*; but to reduce this rather sweeping point to “truth has a class character” can lead to refusing to learn *anything* from bourgeois thinkers, or even thinkers who are neither bourgeois nor in the Marxist framework. It can even lead to thinking that just because someone is from the proletariat they have some sort of special purchase on the truth.

Here too we have to learn from the negative experience of Lysenko. The view took hold that because Lysenko hailed from the working masses and because he supported Soviet power...and because those who opposed him in large measure came from what had been privileged classes in the old society and did not support Soviet power...well, this was just further proof of the rightness of Lysenko’s theories. But class origin has nothing to do with—or should have nothing to do with—evaluating whether your ideas are right or wrong.

Nor is it the case that the truthfulness of ideas is determined by whether they are “useful” in some immediate sense. This pragmatist approach has led to, to be blunt, “spinning” or even twisting reality—in the case of Lysenko, again, his theory was deemed true because it seemed immediately useful.

Now, it’s not a question of “going for the truth” divorced from the struggle to change the world. And it’s not that the “truth will set you free.” It won’t, without struggle. But if you don’t more or less correctly understand the world—if you don’t know what’s true—you won’t get free either. You’ll do things that don’t correspond to the actual dynamics and contradictions of reality and you won’t be able to transform that reality—at least not in a direction that’s going to get you closer to revolution and communism.

There’s a tremendous richness involved in this process. The insights of non-Marxists or even anti-communists can neither be dismissed nor just adopted whole; they have to be critically sifted and synthesized and often recast. But if you cut yourself off from this—which became the “tradition” in the communist movement—how can you hope to have a sense of this world we live in, which is constantly changing and generating new and unprecedented things? You actually need the clash of ideas, you need debate and contention and ferment and people pursuing paths that may not apparently “contribute to things” and which may turn out to be dead ends...but which may, on the other hand, yield new insights into reality. The view that “truth has a class character” short-circuits and distorts this vitally necessary process.

And let’s be honest here. There are truths that, in a short-term and more linear sense, run counter to the struggle for communism but which, when taken up in a larger context, and with the method and approach that Avakian is bringing forward, actually contribute to that struggle. This includes the “truths that make us cringe”—truths about the negative aspects of the experience of the international communist movement, and of socialist societies led by communists—but also, more generally, truths that are discovered that reveal reality to be, in certain aspects, different than previously understood by communists, or people more generally.

In relation to the importance of “truths that make us cringe,” it’s worth returning to Lysenko one last time. Anti-communists traditionally point to the Lysenko saga as proof that communism is bound to distort the truth...and to suppress intellectuals. Some communists dissociate themselves from the Lysenko incident in a facile way, and some just ignore it, but in the main they really don’t want to “go there”—from the standpoint of how communists *do* correctly apply Marxism to lead every sphere of a new society. Avakian, to the contrary, insists on fully confronting this experience, having returned to it in several different works, and drawing the deeper lessons—what were the misconceptions in method and outlook that led to this...what was the setting that generated pulls to do this...and what do communists have to do to rupture with this sort of outlook and, on a deep level, this sort of practice, so that they really can take the world to a better place.

Because, again, the question here is not only “going for the truth,” but doing so on the basis of a thoroughly scientific, dialectical materialist, outlook and method, *and* correctly grasping the link between this and the struggle for revolution and ultimately communism—and getting *the full richness of what is involved in this*. Recognizing the importance of and insisting on pursuing truth in this way—unfettered by narrow, pragmatic, and instrumentalist considerations of what seems most convenient at the time or what appears to be more in line with particular and immediate objectives of communists...pursuing the truth by applying the scientific outlook and method of dialectical materialism in the most sweeping, comprehensive, and consistent way in order to confront reality as it actually is and, on that basis, transform it in a revolutionary way toward the goal of communism: this is radically new and represents a key part of the richness of the new synthesis being brought forward by Bob Avakian. This is the full meaning of what is concentrated in his statement that: “Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism.”

You can contrast this statement with “Everything that is in the interests of the proletariat and will help us get to communism is true.” This latter viewpoint—with its pragmatic and instrumentalist content and approach—has, to far too great a degree, held sway in the history of the international communist movement—and, in fact, it is the opposite of what is concentrated in the above statement by Avakian. And this is a key part of the radical rupture that his method and approach embodies and of the richness of the epistemology he has been bringing forward and fighting for communists to take up.

Again, in the last half hour I have been able to only barely touch on this critical philosophical and methodological foundation of the new synthesis. To get more deeply into this, I would refer you to the books *Observations* and *Marxism and the Call of the Future*.⁸ But now I want to move on to the political implications of all this.

Part III: The New Synthesis: Political Implications—The International Dimension

Here I’m going to focus on two things: internationalism; and democracy and dictatorship in the transition to communism.

Now again, I need to give a little background. Marx and Engels called on the workers of the world to unite. The material basis for that call was that capitalism had not only ushered in the epoch of modern nations and nation-states but the existence of the world market; and that the proletariat was a single international class and had to transcend the division into nations, as well as classes, in order to reach a world without any antagonisms between peoples.

By the late 1800s monopoly had come to dominate the advanced capitalist countries, and banking and industrial capital had merged into huge financial blocs; these nations had begun exporting not just goods, but capital itself to the less developed nations. They were building factories and railroads in those countries and drawing them into “modern life” in a new way—but on an oppressed, subordinate basis. Competition among the great powers for spheres of influence intensified, as did militarism and war to back that up; and all this has continued and intensified down to today, through the two world wars—which together took over 60 million lives!—and then the triumph of the U.S. in the so-called Cold War against the Soviet Union. Production today is more than ever international in character; but ownership, control, and organization of capital is still rooted in separate, and contending, nations—and these nations are still basically divided into oppressed and oppressor.

Oppressor nations like the U.S. don't just plunder oppressed nations like Mexico. Instead, the entire economy of an oppressed nation is tightly integrated into the imperialist accumulation process *on a subordinate basis*—warped and disarticulated to serve that process. Crises now find expression as intense geopolitical conflicts over redivision of the world between the imperialist powers, conflicts that can erupt and have at times erupted into horrible firestorms—as they did in the two world wars. These wars posed heightened opportunities for revolution...though if you were empiricist or positivist, it *appeared* to be the opposite, and at the outset of World War 1, for instance, virtually the whole international socialist movement with the notable exception of the Bolsheviks led by Lenin, and a few other forces, collapsed into betrayal.

At the same time, these wars performed the function of “classical crises” under capitalism: the destruction of the old framework of capitalist accumulation, which had become too fettering, and the forging of a new one. Avakian led in deepening Lenin's analysis of imperialism, and the model that I just laid out also ruptured with what had become the dominant line in the communist movement—a view that imperialism was in a general crisis and was headed straight to collapse.

Based on all this, Avakian developed the principle that the class struggle in any particular country was more determined on the international plane than by the unfolding of contradictions within a given country somehow outside of, or divorced from, that context. The revolutionary situation that enabled Lenin to lead the Bolsheviks to seize power arose out of an international conjuncture of world war that radically affected the situation in Russia and enabled a breakthrough to be made; Lenin's internationalism and his qualitatively deeper grasp of materialism and dialectics enabled him to see this

possibility when, initially at least, everyone else in the leadership opposed the idea of going for revolution. Similarly, the Chinese Revolution occurred in a specific international context of World War 2 and invasion from Japan.

Now you can pervert this to mean that you can't do anything if the international "balance of forces is unfavorable." That's not true—and revolution, or even revolutionary attempts, within specific countries can radically affect that balance of forces. But you *are* playing in an international arena, and you have to understand the dynamics on that level; the "whole" of the imperialist system is greater than the sum of the separate nations that make up its individual parts.

So you can't understand it from "my country out"—and doing it that way is another example of positivism, by the way. And you can't see internationalism as something that you "extend" to other countries; the whole world has to be your point of departure. You have to come at revolution in "your" country as your share of the world revolution. Communists do NOT represent this or that nation; we're (supposed to be) about eliminating all nations, even as we know we're going to have to "work through" a world where there will be nations for a long time yet to come, even socialist nations, and where there will have to be a whole period of first achieving equality between nations *in order* to transcend them. But through that whole period, the communist movement has to keep its "eyes on the prize" of a world community of humanity, and relate everything it does to *that*.

Ironically, if you do come at it from "my country out" you will miss the real possibilities of revolution in the particular country in which you happen to be located. You won't see how unexpected upheaval in this or that part of the world, or this or that aspect of the system, can afford openings that can be seized upon. You'll be mentally landlocked, so to speak, in nationalism, and you won't even see the basis to wage a successful struggle for national liberation. And that landlock has been part of what's led to conservatism and, even worse, capitulation in what were times of great danger...but, yes, also times of great *potential* for revolutionary advance.

This whole wrong approach was consolidated in the context of a situation in which the Soviet Union came into being encircled by antagonistic imperialist powers attempting to strangle it, climaxing in the Nazi attack which took over 25 million Soviet lives. Defending the first socialist state was a real necessity. But this defense existed in contradiction with—in relation to—the necessity to advance revolution in other countries at the same time. In failing to recognize or denying the existence of this contradiction, the Soviet Union all too often sacrificed, or tried to sacrifice, the revolutionary struggle in these countries to its own defense. And this same blind spot persisted, frankly, in Mao. If you don't recognize this as a contradiction, and if you don't come from the foundational fact that imperialism has integrated the entire world into one and that the revolutionary process is an integrated, worldwide process—even as different countries have their own discrete, if inter-related, revolutions—you won't have a chance of solving this.

Avakian was far from facile or scholastic in his criticism; he insisted on a full appreciation of what the socialist states actually faced. But on that basis he delved into what they thought they were doing and why, and made a searching criticism of their theoretical understanding.

As part of that, Bob Avakian developed the principle that the proletariat in power must “put the advance of the world revolution above everything, even above the advance of the revolution in the particular country—build the socialist state as above all a base area for the world revolution.” He also very importantly formulated the principle that revolutionaries have to at one and the same time seek to make the greatest advances possible in building the revolutionary movement and preparing for a revolutionary situation in all countries, while also being alert “to particular situations which at any given point become concentration points of world contradictions and potential weak links...and where therefore the attention and the energy of the proletariat internationally should be especially concentrated.” Here I will refer people to two works in which this is deeply gone into—*Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will* and *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation*.²

Beyond that, Avakian upheld and deepened Lenin’s understanding that the division of the world between imperialist powers and oppressed nations had given rise within the imperialist powers to a section of the working class, and an even bigger section of the middle class, that not only benefitted materially from the parasitism and plunder of imperialism, but came to politically identify with their imperialist masters. He followed out Lenin’s point on the need to therefore base yourself among those sections of the masses that did not benefit so much or were, in any case, more inclined to oppose imperialism. And this means that communists have to be willing to be unpopular and to go against the tides of national chauvinism within the imperialist countries—whether it take the form of really nasty outbreaks of ugly American chauvinism, or the equally murderous form of passive complicity.

Part IV: The New Synthesis: Political Implications—Dictatorship and Democracy

The new synthesis also has extremely important implications in regard to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Marx called the necessary transit point to a communist society. In short—how *does* the socialist state maintain itself as a power in transition to a world communist society without states—and not become an end in itself? How does it continue to advance—and **not** get turned back to capitalism?

Avakian has spent over 30 years deeply summing up the experience of the socialist revolutions in the Soviet Union and China, including the conceptions, assumptions, methods, and approaches of the great leaders who led those revolutions. Here too, I’m mainly going to briefly outline or sketch out some key markers, and point people into the works.

In large part, what was written by Avakian in *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity* applies to the whole first stage of the communist movement:

In the history of the communist movement and of socialist society, the basic orientation has been one of dealing with the material reality and the conditions of the masses of people as the priority, as the focus and as the foundation, as opposed to the bourgeois approach of ignoring—or, in fact, reinforcing—the oppressive conditions of the masses of people, the great majority of humanity. And it is very important to grasp firmly that, in the name of the *individual* and “individual rights,” advocates in one form or another of this bourgeois approach actually uphold the interests of a class—and the dynamics of a system in which that class, the bourgeoisie, rules—where masses of people, literally billions of individuals within the exploited and oppressed classes, are mercilessly ground down and chewed up, and where *their* individuality and any notion of *their* individual dignity is counted as nothing.¹⁰

The communists of the Soviet Union and China led the masses to use their revolutionary power to do amazing and unprecedented things. The ownership of the means of production was socialized, and channeled to meeting the material requirements of society and the needs of the people. In the space of a few years, women in those countries went from among the most enslaved and suppressed in the world to the most liberated. The people went from being mainly illiterate to almost entirely literate, with education and culture thrown open to those who had been locked out of it before. The Soviet Union in particular carried out tremendous strides toward equality for what had been called the prison-house of oppressed nations and peoples. And health care began to be provided for all, where before the revolution most people had never seen a doctor.

But you can't just leave it at that. Necessary as it is, it's not enough to just stand firm and defend—and cherish—those achievements in the face of the endless barrage of slander and distortion. It's not enough just to go deeply into where those revolutions were starting from, and the relentless and unspeakably vicious forces they were up against.

Upholding Achievements, Listening to Criticisms

One must also listen to and deeply examine the criticisms of that experience—from every quarter—and ask the question: at what cost? The proletarian state must hold on to power in the face of life-and-death resistance from the overthrown exploiters and vicious attack from without; but must that make it necessary to curtail and even chill and repress dissent, and ferment, and a diversity of ideas and approaches—including ideas and approaches oppositional to socialism? The new power faces a world-historic task in bringing the masses into intellectual life and the arts, and in forging a whole new culture, and amazing things were done in that regard in China in particular—but must that entail a restriction on the pursuits and inquiry and experimentation by people who were trained as artists and scientists in the old society, or even in the new? There is for the first time the basis—and a huge need—to approach the question of freedom as a positive and collective undertaking—“how *we're* going to transform the world, and serve the people,” not “I want to get mine”; but must that mean that there is no need or little positive role for individuality, and individual space? There is a need to “get things done”—

but how does that relate to the proletarian state as a radically different form of state, drawing the masses increasingly into the actual overall direction and direct administration of the state?

You can't answer those questions for real if you are facile about it. Think for a minute about the Civil War in this country, and the period of Reconstruction, right after the slaves had been freed and were supposed to have been given land and political rights. Now for many years, the story that was told in the schools—and even more so, in the culture, with works like *Gone with the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation*—was that Reconstruction was a terrible period in which white people underwent horrible suffering. (By the way, this should actually give you some perspective on the stuff you see on the socialist revolutions almost every week in the book review section of the *New York Times*.)

What actually happened is that in order to break the power of the southern planters, the northern capitalists at first deprived some of them of political rights for a while and militarily backed up the former slaves in attempting to vote, hold office, and claim land. But as these southern planters were reintegrated into the ruling class on a now subordinate basis, and as other contradictions in other parts of the U.S. began to boil up, the northern capitalists pulled out their troops and allowed their *former* enemies to organize the Ku Klux Klan, to institute slave-like systems of convict labor and sharecropping, and to deprive the Black masses of any rights at all—and to enforce this both through laws and through lynch mobs. This orgy of vengeance that overturned Reconstruction was officially labeled as “The Redemption.” And history was rewritten by the victors, until a new generation in the 1960s went back and unearthed the real, *objective* truth of the matter.

To have actually achieved the goals of Reconstruction would have required depriving the former slave-holders of political rights and enforcing that. Quite frankly, it would have been bloody, and some innocent people might have suffered...but it would have been *worth it*.

To not have almost 5,000 lynchings in the period after the defeat of Reconstruction, and the effects of that on millions of Black people?

Worth it.

To not have had the destruction of the spirit that went with the whole system of segregation?

Worth it.

To stop the institutionalization of things like convict labor, and chain gangs, and terrible schools, and all the other things that dog people today, sometimes in different and sometimes in almost unchanged forms?

Worth it.

Now let's turn the page to the communist revolution, which is far more thoroughgoing, fundamental and radical than Reconstruction was ever intended to be and that came to power in far more difficult situations. These revolutions faced not only the overthrown exploiters—who, as Lenin once said, retain all their know-how and sense of entitlement and connections from before, and who come at you with ten times the viciousness and trickery once they lose their paradise—but also the militarily much more powerful imperialist powers. The Soviets fought a Civil War from 1918 to 1921 that cost millions of lives and basically destroyed what little industry they had, and they faced in that Civil War interference and invasions from 17 different military powers, including the U.S. And again, there was the Nazi invasion—not even 20 years after they won the Civil War.

However, even fully coming to grips with that, we still have to interrogate what was done, analyze the shortcomings in both practice and theory, and truly prepare ourselves—and the masses—to do better the next time.

More Deeply Breaking With Bourgeois Democracy

As part of doing better—and even in order to answer the question of “at what cost” on the right basis—it's been necessary to make a more thorough rupture with bourgeois-democratic influences and the whole conception of “classless democracy” within the communist movement. Avakian, in his landmark book, posed the question *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, and emphatically answered it YES!

Now I want to get into this by quoting two short statements from Avakian that we often run in our newspaper. The first one is:

The essence of what exists in the U.S. is not democracy but capitalism-imperialism and political structures to enforce that capitalism-imperialism.

What the U.S. spreads around the world is not democracy, but imperialism and political structures to enforce that imperialism.

And then, from a different angle, this:

In a world marked by profound class divisions and social inequality, to talk about “democracy”—without talking about the *class nature* of that democracy and which class it serves—is meaningless, and worse. So long as society is divided into classes, there can be no “democracy for all”: one class or another will rule, and it will uphold and promote that kind of democracy which serves its interests and goals. The question is: *which class* will rule and whether its rule, and its system of democracy, will serve the *continuation*, or the eventual *abolition*, of class divisions and the corresponding relations of exploitation, oppression and inequality.

Let's talk about the implications of that. To begin with, you cannot use instruments of capitalist dictatorship—the armies, prisons, courts, and bureaucracy which this system has developed and shaped *to reinforce and extend* exploitation and imperialism—you

cannot use those very same things to *abolish* exploitation, uproot oppression, and defend against imperialists. And you cannot use the tools of bourgeois democracy that have been designed, first, to settle disputes among the exploiters and, second, to atomize, bamboozle, and render passive the masses of people, as a means to mobilize and unleash people to consciously understand and transform the whole world. While it is true, as Lenin put it, that socialism is a million times more democratic for the *masses* of people, socialism is not and cannot be an extension of *bourgeois democracy* (which is founded on exploitation) to the exploited. And that lesson is not only scientifically founded, it's been paid for in blood.

The "4 Alls"

The proletarian dictatorship—and the proletarian system of democracy—has to be different. It has to serve the abolition of antagonistic divisions between people and the relations, institutions, and ideas that grow out of and reinforce those divisions. Now the new power will do a lot toward that end right away—including taking over these socialized means of production and beginning to use them to meet the material needs of the people and to further the world revolution.

But the morning after victory you will have a society in which people have grown up as members of different social classes. Even leaving aside the big capitalists—which you better not, since they'll still be around, unreconciled to their dispossession—there will still be distinctions among the people: between those who have been trained in things like medicine, administration, and engineering, on the one hand, and those who lack those kinds of training and have had to work in foundries, the hospitals, or the fields, or have not been able to find any work at all, on the other. And there is also the force of habit from centuries in which the only way that people have come together to carry out the production of life's necessities has been mediated by—or carried out through—relations where one main class exploits another, and where there is a strict division between those who work with their minds and those who work with their bodies.

Moreover, you will have to deal with *all* the social relations and ideas that have been conditioned and reinforced by those relations of exploitation. The new power will immediately set about destroying the pillars of this system like white supremacy and male supremacy, and instituting real equality. But even after you initiate these transformations, and even after people's thinking will begin to be liberated in many ways and reflect the new socialist relations, the centuries of exploitation will nevertheless still have a big effect in people's thinking. It will be like post-traumatic stress syndrome after a rape; this society and all the people in it have been traumatized by hundreds and thousands of years of oppression and the results in people's thinking—the racism, the sexism, the USA Number One national chauvinism and the nativist hatred of people from other countries, the elitism, even the feelings of inferiority that are drummed into the masses—these will all be struggled against, but they will not just disappear. And those ideas will feed on the still-remaining inequalities and economic relations which contain aspects of capitalist-type relations but which can't be wiped out overnight—what is called

“bourgeois right.” Political ideas and programs that represent those relations will grow in this soil and assert themselves, and provide a basis for new-born capitalist elements to contest for power. And the new power will have to mobilize the masses to identify, understand, and overcome them.

So it's not so easy as “well, we just change the economic relations, and the rest falls into place”—and to the extent communists have thought or still think like that, it does a lot of damage. Every arena of society will have to be transformed and revolutionized, over a much longer period of time than anticipated by Marx or Lenin. And all of these realms—as Marx scientifically put it, all the class distinctions, all the production relations on which they rest, all the social relations which arise on that basis, and all the ideas that correspond to those relations—or the “4 alls” for short—will have to be abolished in order to get to, and as part of the process of reaching, communism.¹¹

A Different Kind of Dictatorship and Democracy

So you will need dictatorship over the former exploiters and those who aim to restore exploitation; and you will also need democracy among the masses to truly carry through on the needed transformations. But these will have to be dictatorship and democracy of a qualitatively different character than what we have now. Again, you can't just turn things upside down, with different people wielding the same instruments. There have to be forms through which masses of people are actually coming to life and creating a far different society, and changing themselves in the process, on a scale that frankly can hardly be imagined from within the mental confines of “what is” under this system.

That has to mean mobilizing—and unleashing—people, leading them and learning from them, to overcome the inequalities and the social relations of the old society, all of which undermine the advance toward a new form of society. It means equipping ever broader masses of people with the theoretical tools to critically analyze society and to evaluate whether and how concretely it is moving in the direction of communism, and what needs to be done to go as far as possible in that direction at any given time.

Now this approach goes straight up against the idea that mainly what you have to do under socialism is “deliver the goods”—make sure that people's living standards are rising, that their lives are more secure, and so on—and leave things in the hands of the people “who know how to do that.” In other words, “feed 'em and lead 'em.” This is what is known as a *revisionist* approach—keeping the name of communism, but revising the revolutionary heart out of it. And this was the line of the people who finally did seize power in China after Mao died, and overthrew those who had been grouped around Mao, and we've now seen where that ultimately leads—a capitalist hell with a socialist label.

So the question is this: Are the masses going to be people who only fight and produce? Or are they going to be emancipators of humanity? Can the masses really face the world as it is, understand it, and transform it?

The answer is, they CAN. But not spontaneously and not without leadership. People cannot take conscious initiative to change the world if they don't know how it works. That takes science. And because things have been set up in such a way to lock masses out of working with ideas, they need to get that science from people who *have* had the opportunity to get into it. Again, they need *leadership*.

And make no mistake about it—everybody is getting led, in this society, in one direction or another. Right now a lot of people who claim they *don't* get led are pouring all kinds of effort, resources and hope into this Clinton vs. Obama thing. And once Clinton, Obama, or McCain is in office, whichever one wins will set the terms. They will tell you what to do, and—as they have been telling you—they will do that to serve American domination of the world and the “social order” within America.

So the question is not *whether* there will be leaders, but what *kind* of leaders, serving what goals. Bob Avakian put it this way in *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*:

[S]o long as that is true, the essential questions will remain: What is the *content and effect* of that leadership—where will it lead people, and how? What does it enable people to do, or prevent them from doing? Does it contribute to their capacity to actually comprehend reality, and to act consciously to change it, in accordance with the fundamental interests of humanity—or does it interfere with and undermine that?¹²

It's important to think about this in relation to what I explained earlier about the still-remaining advantages and power retained by the overthrown imperialists and their international connections. The proletariat cannot share power with the bourgeoisie, or it will get eaten alive—as I said earlier, this has been dealt with scientifically, in polemical works by Avakian like “Democracy: More Than Ever We Can and Must Do Better Than That” (which appears in the book *Phony Communism Is Dead...Long Live Real Communism!*) and, yes, these are lessons paid for in blood. On a still deeper level, only the proletariat has an interest *as a class* in actually abolishing those 4 alls, and the state either has to be an instrument for abolishing those “alls”—or else it will reinforce them.

Because of all that, you will still need an institutionalized leading role for the proletarian party in the socialist state, so long as there are antagonistic classes and the soil out of which class antagonisms can grow. (Once those classes are abolished, there will then no longer be a need for institutionalized leadership, or for a state altogether.)

At the same time, we have to recognize and deal with this as a *contradiction*—to constantly revolutionize and revitalize the Party so that it continues to provide *that* kind of leadership and does not turn into new oppressors.

This is no small problem—and it is one Avakian has devoted a great deal of attention to and is a big part of what I'm getting into next: a qualitatively different approach to—and a new synthesis on—the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Solid Core, with a Lot of Elasticity

To be clear: we are talking about changes from and ruptures with much of the approach in the societies that up to now could be said to have been genuinely socialist and genuinely revolutionary but which nonetheless had significant shortcomings. This is not, as someone humorously put it, “run the good plays, don’t run the bad plays”—this is a whole different approach, founded on the breakthroughs in communist world outlook and epistemology that I touched on earlier; a way to *correctly* answer the question “at what cost” and a way to lead things in a different way, and to a higher level.

Let’s take the question of having an official ideology, which has been a feature of previous socialist societies. Now, as I said, the Party does have to lead in socialist society, and the Party itself has to be unified around communist ideology, which enables it to lead people to correctly understand and transform reality. The Party, however, is a voluntary association. But what happens if *everyone* in society, in the Party or not, has to profess agreement with this ideology in order to be heard, or even to just get along?

Well, the fact is that most people are not going to really take this up as their outlook in the direct aftermath of revolution, fresh out of capitalist society. Bob Avakian has used the metaphor of a parachute to describe how things become compressed at the time of the revolution, how society splits into two poles—one fairly tightly adhering to the revolutionary camp, and the other defending reaction. But *after* the revolution that compressed character of the people’s pole opens back out, like a parachute. As Avakian wrote in *The Basis, the Goals, and the Methods of the Communist Revolution*, after the revolution has come to power:

...all the diversity of political programs, outlooks, inclinations, and so on—which reflect, once again, the actual remaining production and social relations that are characteristic of the old society, as well as what’s newly emerging in the society that has been brought into being as a result of the revolutionary seizure and consolidation of power—all these things assert, or reassert, themselves. And if you go on the assumption that, because people all rallied to you at that particular moment when only your program could break through—if you identify that with the notion that they’re all going to be marching in lockstep with you and in agreement with you at every point all the way to communism— you are going to make very serious errors...¹³

It’s not the second coming, where everyone gets saved and “sees the light”—thank god! It’s a socialist society. You can lead people to do a lot of new things, a lot of important and emancipatory things, and set off a whole process in which people change society and themselves in a positive direction...but it can’t be done as if everyone has suddenly not only understood, but begun to adhere to and apply the communist method, stand, and viewpoint. And if you try to lead as if that *is* the case, you (a) are not going to be acting in correspondence to what is true, and (b) are going to, as a result, dam up and distort the whole process through which people come to know the truth and you will give rise to a phony, stifling, or chilled atmosphere.

There has to be a *leading* ideology—and the difference in socialist society is that we'll openly express it, rather than mask it the way the capitalists do—but the people who aren't sure they agree with it should feel free to say so and the people who don't agree should definitely say so and it should get debated out.

A similar principle has to be applied to politics. On one level, the Party has to take initiative and mobilize people, and unleash them around key objectives. It has to set the terms of debate. And yes, this can be and has to be a lively and inspiring and mind-opening process—and it has been in the past, not only in China but at least for the first decade and a half or so in the Soviet Union.

But what about spontaneity from below? What about things that seem to go off in a whole different direction, or that oppose the main political terms and activity that are being put forward by the Party? What about scenes in the arts that arise on their own, like the coffeehouse scenes of the '50s and '60s with the "Beats," or the hip-hop scene and graffiti crews that arose in the South Bronx 30 years ago, or the spoken word poetry slams of the '90s—things that would arise from the people, many of which might have an oppositional, or at least "not in control," character to them? What about political groups that want to debate questions without Party people around, or take actions that go against projects, even important projects, that the Party and the government itself are involved in? What about teachers who want to teach theories and interpretations that don't coincide with the Party's understanding?

To be frank, there really hasn't been much room for this sort of thing in the previous socialist societies. In *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Avakian criticized a tendency in both China and, more so, the Soviet Union "toward constriction...of the process of socialist transformation; and, insofar as this tendency exerted itself, it led to some mishandling of the relation between the goal and the process, so that whatever was happening at a given time became, or tended to be identified with, the goal itself—rather than being understood as part of a process toward a larger goal. And, along with this, there was a constriction of the relation between the necessary main direction, in fundamental terms, and what were objectively 'detours' or departures from—but were seen and treated as dangerous deviations from—that main direction. This, to a certain degree and sometimes to a considerable degree, led to a stifling of creativity, initiative, individual expression and, yes, individual rights in the overall process, especially when these appeared to conflict—or actually did conflict, in the short run—with the expressed goals of the socialist state and its leading party."¹⁴

On a very basic level, you actually need intellectual ferment to understand the world. Ferment, debate, experimentation—intellectual "air"—gives you a window into all of what's churning beneath society's surface at any given time, and the possible roads to resolution and advance opened up by that churn; it helps you see where you may be proceeding wrongly, or one-sidedly. Without this, the dialectic between the Party and the masses—between leaders and led—would tend to be too "one-way"; the critical and creative spirit would grow blunt, on both ends.

For if you try to give people critical tools in a hothouse kind of atmosphere, it just doesn't "take"—people have to be led but they also have to learn for themselves, and the leadership itself has to be transformed and revolutionized in the course of that. To get that process right requires ferment, contestation, and just out-and-out wildness. There was no small amount of this in the Cultural Revolution—but we're talking with the new synthesis about something on a far greater scale, with different elements and dynamics to it.

And let's frankly come to grips with this: after ten years of the Cultural Revolution in China—the *best* of the previous conception of socialism—most people did not really understand the stakes of that last battle. Well, the different character and greater dimension of ferment in the new synthesis is one big part of the answer to how to do better next time.

"Going to the Brink of Being Drawn and Quartered"

Avakian has made the contrast between the metaphor of casting out a line, as if you're fly-fishing...and the "solid core with a lot of elasticity," expressed by this sort of motion. Let's take an example. You could have a situation where the socialist government had decided to build a dam somewhere to meet some very pressing material needs of the people—and by the way, a revolutionary society here is going to have pressing material requirements and needs because we are not going to be sucking the blood of the people of the planet anymore!—and someone like Arundhati Roy (who is a very prominent and non-communist Indian novelist and progressive activist) might be agitating against it. And with the new synthesis, you wouldn't just tolerate that—you'd be giving her air time and funding her, even as she might be organizing against you and leading demonstrations and maybe even some kind of massive sit-in. You'd have to get in there and mix it up and debate. If she was right—even in part—then you'd be learning from her. And if she wasn't right, you'd still have to win people over—not in a debate against a straw man but against a passionate, articulate and convinced advocate of the position.¹⁵

And it would NOT be risk-free—because people whose motives are *not* good would almost certainly operate and maneuver within all that, and attempt to turn it into something that goes over into actual attempts to destroy the socialist state. And let's not forget that if you *give up* power, if you let bourgeois forces (old or new) restore capitalism, you'd be committing a great crime against all the people who sacrificed to win that power and, even more so, humanity more generally.

The solid core will set the terms and the framework. But within that, it's going to unleash and allow the maximum possible elasticity at any given time while still maintaining power—and maintaining it *as* a power that is going to communism, advancing toward the achievement of the "4 alls," and together with the whole world struggle. Now there's going to be constraints on the solid core at any time in doing that, including what kinds of threats you're facing from imperialism. Sometimes you'll be able to open up pretty wide, and sometimes you may have to pull in the reins; but strategically, overall, you're mainly going to be trying to encourage and work *with* the elasticity, trying to learn from it

and trying to figure out how you lead things so that it all becomes a motive force that is actually contributing—even if not so directly or immediately, in the short run—but *overall* contributing to where you want to go. And it's going to be challenging and complex and full of risk figuring this out.

That's why Avakian talks so much about "going to the brink of being drawn and quartered"—and SEEKING to do that! The role of dissent is INTEGRAL to this model of socialism, even as there are ways at any given time that it would radically complicate the whole thing. Again, unless you are ready to go to the brink of being drawn and quartered—and drawn and quartered refers to a torture where they pull your limbs in four different directions!—your solid core will end up very brittle...and the elasticity won't be very...well, elastic. And just to be very clear: this is a strategic concept which is not the same as—and should not simply be identified with, or reduced to—being pulled in a lot of different directions by a lot of different challenges, or having a lot of different tasks to do. This conception of "going to the brink of being drawn and quartered" is speaking to something much different, something more complex, more profound and strategically important than that.

In addition to dissent of this kind, Avakian has also brought forward for discussion as part of this model the ideas of: contested elections where key issues facing the state are vigorously debated out with real stakes; a constitution (including the constraints that it puts on the Party); an expanded view of individual rights; the existence of civil society, with associations that are independent of the government; and a whole new way of tackling the contradiction between mental and manual labor, including a different view on the role of intellectuals—all of which I can only mention here, but would be eager to go into during the question period.

One last question on this point: who IS the solid core? The solid core is not identical to the Party and it's not identical to the proletariat, in some kind of monolithic way. At any given time the solid core represents a minority—in the first phases of socialist society, it's those firmly committed to the whole objective of getting to communism; and then you've got various gradations of people, from different classes and strata, grouping themselves in relation to that. The solid core has to have *roots* in the proletariat, and the leadership has to constantly bring forward and unleash new people from among those who are "on the short end" of the contradictions left over from capitalism—for example, people who were not trained in mental labor in the old society, or women from various strata (as well as men) who want to push forward women's emancipation.

But the proletariat itself is not a static thing—it contains a lot of diversity and undergoes very dynamic change both from its participation in all spheres of society and from the whole process of living with and transforming—and learning from—the middle strata. You have different classes and you have various levels of commitment to the communist project, and you're trying to work with that contradiction—but not from the top down. This is about unleashing a process and then getting into the process with the masses.

This is very different from previous conceptions, which rested on a sort of “reified” view of the proletariat—a view which confuses the world-historic role of the proletariat as the class embodying the new relations of production with the individual people who happen to be in that class at any given time. As I touched on earlier in the discussion of “class truth,” this “reification of the proletariat” was reflected in a lot of emphasis on the class origins of people in evaluating their opinions and putting them into positions of leadership or responsibility, and held that if workers and peasants were in such positions, you were somehow guaranteeing against revisionism. This was very pronounced with Stalin, but also found expression with Mao and the Chinese Revolution in different ways.

Once More on the New Synthesis

So we’ve covered a lot in terms of the political implications of the new synthesis, particularly in regards to socialism. But before we move on to strategy, and on the basis of everything I’ve just said, I want people to think about how much—and with how much profound importance—is captured in the following description of the new synthesis from Part 1 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*:

This new synthesis involves a recasting and recombining of the positive aspects of the experience so far of the communist movement and of socialist society, while learning from the negative aspects of this experience, in the philosophical and ideological as well as the political dimensions, so as to have a more deeply and firmly rooted scientific orientation, method and approach with regard not only to making revolution and seizing power but then, yes, to meeting the material requirements of society and the needs of the masses of people, in an increasingly expanding way, in socialist society—overcoming the deep scars of the past and continuing the revolutionary transformation of society, while at the same time actively supporting the world revolutionary struggle and acting on the recognition that the world arena and the world struggle are most fundamental and important, in an overall sense—*together with* opening up qualitatively more space to give expression to the intellectual and cultural needs of the people, broadly understood, and enabling a more diverse and rich process of exploration and experimentation in the realms of science, art and culture, and intellectual life overall, with increasing scope for the contention of different ideas and schools of thought and for individual initiative and creativity and protection of individual rights, including space for individuals to interact in “civil society” independently of the state—all within an overall cooperative and collective framework and at the same time as state power is maintained and further developed as a *revolutionary* state power serving the interests of the proletarian revolution, in the particular country and worldwide, with this state being the leading and central element in the economy and in the overall direction of society, while the state itself is being continually transformed into something radically different from all previous states, as a crucial part of the advance toward the eventual abolition of the state with the achievement of communism on a world scale.¹⁶

Let me put it like this: the first stage of our movement was epochal and heroic—it deserves and demands deeper study and it must be defended and upheld. But the best of that understanding alone would not and will not get humanity to communism. With the new synthesis, that prospect has been re-opened; as one comrade put it to me, it's like a new branch on the evolutionary bush.

Part V: Strategic Implications—Making Revolution

This is an incredibly inspiring vision of a different society—a society that the vast majority of people would truly want to live in.

But how do we get to this new society? That leads me to the final part of this presentation, the question of strategy for revolution—particularly in the imperialist countries. Again, I'll be able to only touch on a few key concepts here, and this will be even more compressed than the earlier part of the presentation.

First off, revolutions are serious. Revolutions in a country like this can only take place when society as a whole is in the grip of a profound crisis, owing fundamentally to the nature and workings of the system itself, and along with that there is the emergence of a revolutionary people, numbering in the millions and millions, conscious of the need for revolutionary change and determined to fight for it. If you're a vanguard, everything you do has to be about getting to *that* situation—everything you do has to be measured in relation to *that*—everything you do has to be about *revolution*. Anything short of that won't cut it—and leads to capitulation.

Objective, Subjective...and Hastening While Awaiting

But again—how do you get there? One important concept here is what is scientifically called the “relation between the objective and subjective factor.” The objective factor includes the material conditions of society and their underlying dynamics; the broader political and ideological currents that are swirling in relation to—and in some ways autonomous of—that; the (contradictory) directions in which all these are moving and changing; the moods, sentiments, and ideas of different sections of the people; and so on. And the subjective factor refers to the people who are trying to change all that—often we mean the Party by that, but sometimes you can use that to refer to the broader movement, depending on the context.

Now this is a *dialectical* relation: the objective and subjective are different, but they interpenetrate and mutually transform each other. The objective factor is like the field on which the Party is playing, and it overall sets the terms and framework. But that framework is not fixed and determined—the field is constantly changing dimensions—and the objective factor can be influenced by the subjective factor. Sometimes the Party itself is a big part of the objective situation—it can be leading a big struggle, or the focus of an attack, or making a big impact with an ideological initiative. People will be talking about it because of that, so you've got the subjective factor as part of the objective

factor. And at the same time, the objective factor enters into the subjective—the Party is influenced in different ways by the moods and thinking of the masses and the people who come around and work with and join the Party.

But the conventional wisdom in our movement has been to erect a conceptual brick wall between the two and to adopt a passive attitude toward the objective factor—to reduce communist work to taking up initiatives which basically mirror what the masses are already doing, or are ready to do, and then “organize” that. This kind of view doesn’t challenge people ideologically, other than to “take up the struggle” at hand. Bob Avakian has pointed to the “determinist realism” at the root of this—the idea that the parameters of revolutionary work are very narrowly determined and hemmed in by what already exists and the assumption that it will indefinitely continue in the same direction, without radical breaks or sudden changes, without anything impinging on that direction, and without the possibility of new things emerging in unexpected ways out of existing contradictions.

But in actual fact reality teems with contradiction. History, like nature, is full of sudden leaps. Because of that, very bold initiatives undertaken by the subjective factor (so long as they are founded on the real dynamics of material reality) can have a galvanic and electrifying effect; they can be “game-changing,” to use an extremely overworked but still expressive cliché. But the determinist view is not alive to or alert to events that can potentially change the whole equation—depending on what the vanguard does.

Now you can’t just jump off the revolution on the basis of sheer will. That will land you and the masses in a very bad situation. But overwhelmingly, the main trend in imperialist countries has been to give up on revolution in fact if not in word, and to not grasp, or to oppose, the great potential dynamism of the subjective factor, or consciousness.

On the foundation of a correct and deep understanding of this contradiction, Bob Avakian has adapted a concept of Mao’s: hastening the development of the revolution, while awaiting favorable developments in the objective situation—those times in which everything goes up for grabs. But this too is dialectical and not mechanical—you are working on conditions with the expectation and understanding that this becomes part of not just preparing for major changes in the objective situation, but bringing about, and to the greatest extent possible shaping, those changes when they do come. You’re straining against the limits, straining against the framework. And you’re doing it all with an awareness that the sharp contradictions of this system find expression from many different and unexpected directions. To quote again from the recent talk *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*:

[A]lthough changes in what's objective for us won't come entirely, or perhaps not even mainly, through our "working on" the objective conditions (in some direct, one-to-one sense), nevertheless our "working on" them can bring about certain changes within a given framework of objective conditions *and*—in conjunction with and as part of a "mix," together with many other elements, including other forces acting on the objective situation from their own viewpoints—this can, under certain circumstances, be part of the coming together of factors which *does* result in a qualitative change. And, again, it is important to emphasize that nobody can know exactly how all that will work out.¹⁷

So whether you take up this line and orientation of "hastening while awaiting" isn't just a moral question—it has everything to do with whether a revolutionary situation will even emerge, and whether, quite frankly, whether you will even be oriented and able to recognize the potential for one.

In light of that—and in light everything we've gone over today—the following (also from *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part 1) is one of the most important passages in the overall body of work of Bob Avakian. Now this uses a lot of scientific terms, many of which I've introduced earlier; but in order to get into this we should know that philosophically the term "necessity" refers to the objective reality at any given time—the contradictory directions in which things are moving and developing, and both the constraints on that development and the possible pathways of it—and the term "superstructure" refers to the political institutions, culture, ideas and so on in society, as distinct from the production relations.

So, here's what Avakian writes:

But fundamentally (and, so to speak, underneath all this) freedom does lie in the recognition and transformation of necessity. The point is that this recognition and the ability to carry out that transformation goes through a lot of different "channels," and is not tied in a positivist or reductionist or linear way to however the main social contradictions are posing themselves at a given time. If that were the case—or if we approached it that way—we would liquidate the role of art and much of the superstructure in general. Why do we battle in the realm of morals? It is because there is relative initiative and autonomy in the superstructure. And the more correctly that's given expression, the better it will be, in terms of the kind of society we have at a given time and in terms of our ability to recognize necessity and carry out the struggle to transform necessity.¹⁸

Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism

This is central to the very important strategic concept of "**Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism**." And this concept also goes up against a whole tradition in the communist movement of what is called "economism." Economism originally meant confining the attention of the workers to battles around wages, working conditions, unions, and so on

but has come to encompass any sort of strategy that focuses on mobilizing the masses to fight for “palpable results.” No one ever quite “fesses up” to not wanting to bring communism to the masses—they just say that “now is not the time,” and that “the battle around immediate demands is the best way to get in position to do that...later on.”

Lenin took on that very view 100 years ago in his pathbreaking book *What Is To Be Done?*. Lenin pointed out that communism is a science that arose outside the proletariat and has to be brought to it from without. He said that communists must be tribunes of the people who can seize on every major event to put before all their communist convictions and he counterposed that to the mentality of trade union secretaries, who lead struggles around the immediate needs of their members. And he said that to do this, and to carry forward the many other tasks involved in a revolution, you need a vanguard party, made up of proletarians and people from other strata who take up the communist outlook and dedicate themselves to the communist cause.

Today, all this remains very contested. And today what’s involved in this struggle is the question of whether the masses are going to be led to be the conscious emancipators of humanity—or, instead, will they be treated as foot soldiers who are fed pablum and essentially ruled over by people who have been trained to deal in the realm of ideas. I spoke to this earlier in reference to the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it finds sharp expression right now.

Look: becoming emancipators of humanity is a gigantic rupture and you don’t do it without leadership. Again: people can *not* take conscious initiative to change the world if they don’t know how the world works; that takes science; and they have to get that science from people who have had an opportunity to get into it. Without that—without a vanguard that is actually worthy of the name—communist revolution’s never gonna happen. And to feed the masses pablum while you yourself have what one comrade has called your “temple of secret knowledge”—and to do that in the name of “the masses”—would be beneath contempt, if it weren’t so destructive and dangerous and pervasive.

“Enriched” What Is To Be Done-ism is called that because, in addition to rescuing and reviving all the crucial principles developed by Lenin, Avakian has emphasized the importance of enabling the masses to engage with all spheres of society from the angle of knowing and transforming the whole world, as well as the need to “break down” to the extent possible the barriers to that engagement; and, very critically, he’s emphasized the importance of boldly promoting communism itself and of putting before the masses the biggest questions of the revolution—the questions that we’ve been getting into here.

Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism is a whole ensemble, and is not reducible to one single form of activity—and to get a sense of this, I strongly recommend studying part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*. In brief, though, while coming from the orientation of hastening while awaiting a revolutionary situation, it encompasses the pivotal role of the revolutionary newspaper; the need to boldly spread communism in everything we do; the importance of promoting the works of Bob Avakian; the need to organize people around the slogan “Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for

Revolution,” to spread revolution and build resistance to the key ways that the system comes down on the masses; recruiting people into the Party; and undertaking political initiatives around societal “fault lines” that concentrate key social contradictions at any given time—like the struggle to drive out the Bush regime.

Also very important is the strategic orientation of the United Front Under Proletarian Leadership. This is both an orientation and a method—a strategic approach to realigning different class forces in a way that the goal of revolution and the revolutionary communist outlook that we’ve been discussing today are brought to the forefront and established in the leading position. This takes place through a complex process of what we call unity-struggle-unity—that is, forging unity with people of very diverse backgrounds and outlooks around key social questions, both critical “fault lines” of the system and a wider range besides; carrying out struggle within that unity over questions of how to see the world, ideologically and politically; and through that process of serious engagement developing that unity to a higher and more deeply founded level. Through all this, we aim to repolarize the political situation—to overcome divisions and disunity and distrust, and to lead the united front that will be necessary to not only make a revolution but to carry things through all the way to communist society.

In light of **all** this, I want to call attention to the book *Away With All Gods! Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World*, that is officially coming out next month but is available at the table, and which very powerfully challenges religion and the ways in which religious beliefs are a fetter on people. Getting this out there very boldly is exactly the kind of thing involved in challenging people to break with mental enslavement and step up to be emancipators of humanity.

“On the Possibility of Revolution”

Finally, it is important here to touch on a very big question: is it possible to win, in a country like this? In regard to this, I want to briefly read from the very important article that appeared in our paper, “On the Possibility of Revolution.” The article states:

In a talk last year, “Bringing Forward Another Way” (which has just been run as a series in *Revolution* and is posted, in its entirety, online at revcom.us), Bob Avakian calls attention to the fact that there are “two things we don't know how to do”—namely, meeting repression and actually winning when the time comes. Now the point of saying these are two things we don't know how to do...is to call attention to the fact that we'd better work on these things—in the appropriate way and not in inappropriate ways.”

He goes on to say, with regard to the question of winning when the time comes:

“We have to take up the question and approach the question of winning in a very serious and not in an infantile way, and not in a way which makes it even easier for this kind of concentrated power of reaction [embodied in the imperialist ruling class] to crush any attempt to bring a new world into being.”

To give further emphasis to this orientation, Avakian then includes in “Bringing Forward Another Way” a statement which was published in *Revolution*, “Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation—in Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortions of Revolution.” This statement begins:

“Revolution is a very serious matter and must be approached in a serious and scientific way, and not through subjective and individualistic expressions of frustration, posturing and acts which run counter to the development of a mass revolutionary movement which is aimed at—and which must be characterized by means that are fundamentally consistent with and serve to bring into being—a radically different and far better world. Revolution, and in particular communist revolution, is and can only be the act of masses of people, organized and led to carry out increasingly conscious struggle to abolish, and advance humanity beyond, all systems and relations of exploitation and oppression.” (“Some Crucial Points” originally appeared in *Revolution* issue 55, July 30, 2007, and is reprinted as an appendix to the pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, page 91.)

In line with this orientation, in “Bringing Forward Another Way,” proceeding on the basis of what is said in “Some Crucial Points,” Avakian calls for study, and wrangling in the realm of theory and conception, in regard to the problem of winning when the time comes. As he puts it:

“Now, in previous talks I've spoken about two tracks in relation to winning, in relation to the seizure of power when there is the emergence of a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary people of millions. In light of what I've just read (which was the whole of ‘Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation—in Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortions of Revolution’), and with that as a template, if you will, or a foundation—and from a strategic, not immediate, standpoint—we should understand the role and the dialectical relation of these two tracks. These are separate tracks, and only with a qualitative change in the situation (as spoken to in what I just read from ‘Some Crucial Points’)...can there be a merging of the two tracks. Until that point, they can only correctly be developed, and have to be developed, separately.

“The first track, which is the main focus and content of things now, is political, ideological, and organizational work, guided by the strategic orientation of united front under the leadership of the proletariat, having in view and politically preparing for the emergence of a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary people on a mass scale. This is what it means to ‘hasten while awaiting’ the development of a revolutionary situation.

“The second track refers to and is in essence developing the theory and strategic orientation to be able to deal with the situation and be able to win when the two tracks can and should be merged—with a qualitative change in the objective political terrain, with the emergence of a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary people (as I have spoken to that here and as is set forth in a concentrated way in “Some Crucial Points”). What is appropriate now in this regard is attention to the realm of theory and strategic thinking and understanding, learning in a deep and all-sided way from experience of different kinds. There is a need to study all these different kinds of experience and for it to be synthesized from a correct strategic perspective—all in order to accumulate knowledge to deepen theoretical understanding and strategic conception.”

And, elaborating on a point made by Mao Tsetung, Avakian has emphasized the fundamental orientation that it is extremely important not to be bound by superstition and convention—and by what has, up to this point, been held to be true—but instead to approach all problems with critical and creative thinking, grounded in scientific principles and methods.¹⁹

So, on that big question, of winning when the time comes, I want to strongly recommend that either people pick up the pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, which contains that article, or go online to revcom.us, and read that article, which was guided by the method of Bob Avakian.

Conclusion

This then is the outline of the new synthesis—a re-envisioning of revolution and communism, aiming for a radically different society, and ultimately a communist world, without exploitation and without oppressive relations among people. This new synthesis has “ideologized” revolution back onto the scene and objectively represents, as Avakian says, **“a source of hope and of daring on a solid scientific foundation.”**²⁰

We here need to seriously take this up, get into it and make it a powerful ideological and political force for transforming the world, while at the same time engaging more fully, in an ongoing way, with the extensive, rich, and continually developing body of work, as well as the method and approach, that is being brought forward by Bob Avakian.

I want to close, then, by reading a passage from the end of *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, that envisions the communist future we're fighting for:

It is only possible today to conjecture, and to dream, about what expressions social contradictions will assume in the future communist society and how they will be resolved. How will the problem be approached of combining advanced productive forces, which require a significant degree of centralization, with decentralization and local initiative (whatever “local” means then)? How will the rearing of new generations of people—now carried out in atomized form, and through oppressive relations, in the family—be approached in communist society? How will attention be paid to developing specific areas of knowledge, or to concentrating on particular projects, without making these the “special preserve” of certain people? How will the contradiction be handled of enabling people to acquire all-around skills and knowledge and at the same time meeting the need for some specialization? What about the relation between people’s individual initiatives and personal pursuits on the one hand, and their social responsibilities and contributions on the other? It seems that it will always be the case that, around any particular question, or controversy, there will be a group—and as a general rule a minority at first—that will have a more correct, advanced understanding, but how will this be utilized for the overall benefit while at the same time preventing groups from solidifying into “interest groups”? What will be the relations between different areas and regions—since there will no longer be different countries—and how will the contradictions between what might be called “local communities” and the higher associations, all the way up to the world level, be handled? What will it mean concretely that people are truly citizens of the world, particularly in terms of where they live, work, and so on—will they “rotate” from one area of the world to another? How will the question of linguistic and cultural diversity versus a world union of humanity be handled? And will people then, even with all their understanding of history, really be able to believe that a society such as we are imprisoned in now actually existed—let alone that it was declared to be eternal and the highest pinnacle humanity was capable of reaching? Again, these questions, and many, many more, can only be the object of speculation, and of dreaming, today; but even to pose such questions, and to attempt to visualize how they might be addressed—in a society where class divisions, social antagonism, and political domination no longer exist—is itself tremendously liberating for anyone without a vested interest in the present order.²¹

Is this not a future worth devoting your life to?

Get with the new synthesis! Be part of emancipating humanity.

FOOTNOTES:

1. “Criminalizing the Classroom: The Over-Policing of New York City Schools,” NYCLU, ACLU, March 2007 [[back](#)]

2. “Battle Company Is Out There,” Elizabeth Rubin, *New York Times* magazine, 2/24/2008 [[back](#)]

3. "In Oil Rich Angola, Cholera Preys Upon Poorest," Sharon LaFraniere, *New York Times*, June 16, 2008 [\[back\]](#)
4. Anita Gradin, European Union Commissioner, Martina Vandenberg, "The Invisible Woman," *The Moscow Times*, October 8, 1997 [\[back\]](#)
5. Latin American Working Group [\[back\]](#)
6. "U.S. Imprisons One in 100 Adults Report Finds," Adam Liptak, *New York Times*, 2/29/2008 [\[back\]](#)
7. Audio of the talk *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy* is available online at [bobavakian.net](#) and [revcom.us](#) [\[back\]](#)
8. Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Chicago: Insight Press, 2005) and Bob Avakian and Bill Martin, *Marxism and the Call of the Future: Conversations on Ethics, History, and Politics* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing/Carus Publishing, 2005) [\[back\]](#)
9. *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, published as Issue No. 50 of *Revolution* magazine (December 1981), available online at [revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld](#) and *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation*, in *Revolution* magazine (Spring 1984), available online at [revcom.us](#) [\[back\]](#)
10. *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity* in the *Revolution* pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation* (May 1, 2008), p. 31. Available online at [revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution](#) [\[back\]](#)
11. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50*, in *Marx-Engels Selected Works*, Volume 1 [\[back\]](#)
12. *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity* in the *Revolution* pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation* (May 1, 2008), p. 52. Available online at [revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution2](#) [\[back\]](#)
13. *The Basis, The Goals and the Methods of Communist Revolution*, available online at [revcom.us/avakian/basis-goals-methods](#) [\[back\]](#)
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