BRINGING FORWARD ANOTHER WAY

by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

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RCP Publications
Box 3486, Merchandise Mart,
Chicago, IL 60654-0486
773-227-4066
rcppubs@hotmail.com

Editors' Note:
The following is an edited version of a talk by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, to a group of Party supporters, in the fall of last year (2006).

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By Way of Introduction

In relation to what I am going to get into here, the 7 Talks I gave recently (plus the Q&A and the Concluding Remarks accompanying those Talks),[1] in addition to *Views On* and *Basis, Goals and Methods*,[2] serve as background. Obviously, I'm not going to try to repeat much that was said in those talks, but they should remain a point of reference for much of what I am going to say here and provide a foundation for it.

What Is Driving the Wars Being Waged, and Wars Being Threatened, by "Our Government"?

I want to begin by looking at not just the freedom and the ambitions of the imperial rulers of the U.S., and in particular the core of that ruling class now, grouped in and around the Bush regime, but also their necessity and how they perceive that necessity. We have talked a lot about the ways in which they have seized on a certain freedom, for them, as a result of the demise of the Soviet Union in particular, and their ambitions of making U.S. imperialism an unchallenged and unchallengeable power in the world. But it's also important for us to understand, and to enable others to understand, how they are seeing their *necessity*—particularly how this is seen by that core of the ruling class which has been driving things for the last number of years. Our responsibility lies in, first of all ourselves understanding, but second of all giving people as broadly as possible, at any given time, a full, scientifically based picture of what is going on in the world, where the dynamics are driving things—and why—and what are the means for acting to radically transform all this, with the objective of getting rid of all these horrors and bringing a new world into being—a transformation, in other words, that would be in the interests of the great majority of oppressed people, indeed the great majority of people throughout the world and ultimately humanity as a whole.

At any given time, many people will be out moving in relation to, and in opposition to, the crimes of this system—and we obviously need a lot more of that. Those who are part of this broad movement will have various levels of understanding and different views about what this is all part of, what it stems from, what to do about it, and so on. It is our responsibility at any given time not just to unite with whatever motion there is and to work to develop this into a much broader and more powerful political resistance, but also to be continually digging down more deeply, to understand more fully what's driving things and therefore how to move in relation to it, and through uniting and struggling with a broad diversity of people and forces, to enable people to move in greater numbers, and to greater effect, in the direction in which things need to go in order to actually deal with the root cause of all this.

Recently I read the book *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, by Thomas Ricks, who is a military correspondent for the mainstream, bourgeois media, the *Washington Post* in particular. This is very interesting—this is not simply Thomas Ricks, the military observer, writing—this book represents and incorporates a section of the U.S. military opening up its deep concern, anger, and, in a sense, protest about how the Bush regime has conducted the war in Iraq, with many of them coming to the conclusion that it should never have been launched in the first place—or, if it were going to be launched, then there needed to be a whole plan for what they were going to do after they toppled the Hussein regime, a plan which, in any real sense, they did not have. There is a lot of speaking bitterness from these military people that comes out in this book. In a real sense, besides Ricks' own analysis, this book acts as a conduit and a vehicle for what a lot of these military officials are saying, on the level of colonels and even up to generals, some still active-duty, some of them retired.

At the beginning of the book one of the things Ricks does, which is important, is that he discusses the role and motivations of people like Paul Wolfowitz (former assistant secretary of defense, and now head of the World Bank) and others of these "neo-cons" who were driving forces in insisting on overthrowing the Hussein regime—they were insisting on this even before Bush came into office. Ricks discusses how Wolfowitz and the neo-cons generally were viewing the situation, not only in Iraq but in the Middle East overall, and why they were so determined to invade Iraq and overthrow Hussein. As I was reading this, I thought of a metaphor which then later was explicitly used by Ricks: Among other things, these neo-cons in particular saw the

1. The audio files of the 7 Talks, along with the Q&A and Concluding Remarks for those talks, are available for listening and downloading at bobavakian.net and revcom.us/avakian.

2. *Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom* and *The Basis, the Goals, and the Methods of the Communist Revolution* are drawn from a talk given by Chairman Bob Avakian to a group of Party members and supporters in 2005. Both works are available online at revcom.us/avakian/avakian-works.

Middle East as a swamp breeding all kinds of terrorist mosquitoes; and their calculation was that, even though Saddam Hussein as such was no threat to the U.S. (or even to his "neighbors" in the region), still if they left the Middle East the way it was, it would just keep on generating these poisonous creatures and this would get in the way of all their fundamental objectives in terms of U.S. imperial domination in that region, and in the world as a whole—objectives which are not those of the neo-cons alone but were, and are, shared by the ruling class as a whole, even with some significant differences among them over how to go about achieving those objectives. So this metaphor of drying up the swamp, which was explicitly invoked by Ricks in this book (*Fiasco*) clearly does capture the thinking, or an important part of the thinking, of people like Wolfowitz and these other neo-cons, who have been very influential in the Bush regime.

Another way to say this is that Iraq was not just seen as a "target of opportunity," to use their terminology, but invading Iraq was something they needed to do in order to begin installing in that part of the world regimes that would actually more fully serve U.S. imperial interests and would be "enablers" of their agenda in that part of the world (and their agenda overall). And if they didn't do this, if they left Iraq as it was under Hussein, then the whole "mix" in the Middle East—with Iran, on the one hand, and Saddam Hussein on the other, and Saudi Arabia and all the rest in the region—would just keep producing these intolerable conditions from their point of view. So they were looking at this in this way: If we don't get to this and do this pretty soon, this is going to be all out of control.

Yes, they saw real opportunity and some freedom they could seize on, in moving against Saddam Hussein, and this was part of their wild ambitions for further remaking the world under even more firm U.S. imperial domination; but they also were acting out of a sense of real necessity—perhaps more so than I, at least, had recognized previously. As they see things, a policy of maintaining the (relative) stability in the Middle East, as that has existed, has led to a very bad situation, breeding terrorism and getting in the way of everything they need to do, and reacting back against it. This not only comes through in how Ricks speaks to things in the book *Fiasco*, it was also *explicitly stated by Bush* in a recent speech, or in a series of recent speeches by Bush and others in the Bush regime.

How the Bush Regime Views "Stability" and "Peace" in the Middle East

For example, in September (2006) Bush and Rumsfeld gave extremely important speeches where they were talking somewhat honestly from their own point of view. [*laughs*] Now, it is important to recognize and keep in mind that their point of view doesn't accurately reflect reality, and it involves a distorted understanding, even on their own part, of what they themselves are doing—of what their objectives really are, as well as what their actions in pursuit of their objectives will actually lead to "in the real world," as the saying goes. But, nonetheless, these speeches by Bush and Rumsfeld were not simply deliberate distortions and demagoguery—they were a combination of demagoguery and actual articulation, by Bush and Rumsfeld, of their views and objectives. So for example, in a speech in Washington D.C., September 5 of this year (2006), on the "global war on terror," Bush said:

"The only way to secure our nation is to change the course of the Middle East."

And then again on September 11 (2006), speaking about the Middle East, Bush said explicitly:

"Years of pursuing stability to promote peace had left us with neither."

The "War on Terror": What Is Really Going On—and Why

By taking these comments by Bush—and subjecting them to critical and scientific analysis, to get to the essence of what these comments are actually speaking to—we can begin to see more fully the real motives and motive forces involved in the Bush regime's approach to not only Iraq but to the Middle East as a whole, as a region of great strategic importance. We can see even more clearly how the Iraq war is not a "distraction" or a "diversion" from "the war on terror" but is, in fact, a central part of what this "war on terror" (or, as we have also identified it, the "juggernaut" of the Bush regime) really is all about. In its essence, this is a war *for empire*.

As our Party pointed out from the beginning of the juggernaut by the Bush regime—in other words, from shortly after September 11, 2001 and with the U.S. war against Afghanistan following shortly after that—oil, in the more limited sense, has never been the essence of what this jugger-

naut has been all about.[3] Yes, for the U.S. imperialists as a whole (and not just the Bush regime) controlling the oil, in the Middle East in particular, has been very important in terms of a whole ensemble of strategic relations in the world, including with regard to maintaining a superior position vis-à-vis other imperialists (in Europe, Japan, etc.); but all this has never been just about grabbing Iraq's oil, for example. That is involved, but what is more fundamental and essential are strategic calculations—the perceived freedom and perceived necessity on the part of this core of the ruling class, grouped in and around the Bush regime, now, and the ways in which this relates to the strategic interests of the U.S. empire and its ruling class as a whole.

As I'll talk about further as we go along, this relates to the fact that the "war on terror" is, on the one hand, a misnomer—it is not an accurate characterization of what is really going on, in fundamental terms, and this catchphrase "war on terror" involves a whole bunch of demagoguery, and a whole lot of deliberate deception—but at the same time there is also some truth to what's being described with the term "war on terror." Once again, this is the complexity of the reality that we have to understand, more and more deeply, in order to act to change it in accordance with the fundamental interests of the great majority of people, not just in the U.S. but throughout the world.

There is both demagoguery and instrumentalism on the part of Bush & Co. (by "instrumentalism" here I mean torturing reality in the attempt to make a distorted version of reality an instrument of certain aims), but there is also some truth with regard to the so-called "war on terror." That is, from the point of view of these imperialists, looking at a whole strategic arc from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan all the way over to places like Indonesia (a country with a large population where Islam is the dominant religion and Islamic fundamentalism is also on the rise), if things were allowed to continue as they have been for a number of years, this would rebound against the interests of U.S. imperialism in very serious ways. Forces of militant, even fanatical, Islamic fundamentalism do not pose a positive alternative for the masses of people—including those currently drawn to or swept up in this fundamentalism—but to a significant degree and in significant ways they do pose a real obstacle to the aims and designs of the U.S. imperialists in particular at this point. These Islamic fundamentalist forces are what the Bush regime (and the U.S. ruling class as a whole) are largely referring to, at this point at least, when they talk about "terrorism"; and these Islamic fundamentalist forces do use methods and tactics that to a large degree can legitimately be described as "terrorism," including deliberate attacks on civilians.

At the same time, it is very important to keep in mind two things in this regard: First, it is the imperialists, and the U.S. above all, who, going back over many generations, have, by far, directly carried out (or in some instances have backed and been ultimately responsible for) the most monstrous acts of death and destruction, including the slaughter of millions and millions of civilians, in all parts of the globe, from the Philippines to Vietnam to Chile, the Congo, Iran, Indonesia, Iraq, and Afghanistan… and on and on… not to mention the actual use of nuclear weapons by the U.S.—the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japanese cities at the end of World War 2, with all the horrors that involved.

And, second, the way in which these imperialists use the term "terrorism" is deliberately calculated to be so broad and vague that it can be turned against any force, of whatever kind, that poses an obstacle to these imperialists—including revolutionary movements and revolutionary wars which do not involve, on the part of the revolutionary forces, deliberate attacks on civilians or the destruction of civilian infrastructure and which have the participation and support of masses of people. Even where all that is true, the U.S. imperialists will not hesitate to label these revolutionary forces "terrorists" if what they are doing runs counter to the interests of U.S. imperialism.

So, once again, there is a great deal of hypocrisy and deception in the use of this term "war on terror"; and at the same time it is also the case that this refers to a war that the Bush regime—and, in fundamental terms, the imperialist ruling class as a whole—feels compelled to wage in order to deal with obstacles to its interests, objectives, and grand designs of unchallenged world domination.

This Is Not *Our* War—and This Is Not Our "Quagmire"

The interests, objectives, and grand designs of the imperialists are not *our* interests—they are

3. See, for example, "The New Situation and the Great Challenges," a talk given by Bob Avakian in the latter part of 2001. The text of the talk, first published in *Revolutionary Worker* [now *Revolution*] #1143, March 17, 2002, is available online at revcom.us/a/036/avakian-new-situation-great-challenges.

not the interests of the great majority of people in the U.S. nor of the overwhelming majority of people in the world as a whole. And the difficulties the imperialists have gotten themselves into in pursuit of these interests must be seen, and responded to, not from the point of view of the imperialists and their interests, but from the point of view of the great majority of humanity and the basic and urgent need of humanity for a different and better world, for another way.

It is very interesting to read some of these imperialist analysts. For example, Michael Scheuer (a long-time CIA operative), who was the actual author of the book *Imperial Hubris* (although he wrote it under the name "Anonymous"), made some observations a couple of years ago that were pretty prescient. And you have to give people credit when they have real insight and foresight. [*laughs*] In that book, he said two things (or two things I want to focus on here). One, he said the Iraq War is for Osama bin Laden the Christmas present he never thought he'd get. (Of course, that statement is somewhat ironic, since bin Laden is obviously a Muslim and not a Christian, but still the basic point is valid and important.) And two, Scheuer said: you watch and see, things in Afghanistan are gonna start going very badly for the U.S. pretty soon—that initial victory there is not going to look so good in a couple of years either. Well, he's been proven right on both counts, you have to say. I mean, he's not the only one who saw that, but if you read that book he made these statements rather emphatically and without qualification, and they're proving to be true.

This ties up with the bind these imperialists are in: In a very real sense, there was an accurate perception on the part of the neo-cons and the Bush regime that, from the point of view of the interests they represent, they did have to do something to change the equation in that whole part of the world ("to change the course of the Middle East," to invoke once again Bush's phrase); and, on the other hand, look at the difficulties they've gotten themselves into as a result of their invasion and occupation of Iraq in particular.

Whenever I get a chance I like to check out what these right-wing demagogues are saying—the way in which they are (to use that phrase) "spinning" the propaganda of the Bush regime and its program. These days many of them are putting out a very different line than the one they used to justify and drum up support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003—all the talk about "Weapons of Mass Destruction" and ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, and so on. At the start, they had one set of rationalizations for the Iraq war, but now they've got another set of rationalizations, which more correspond to the situation they face now and how they are seeking to deal with that. Now you hear these people—these apologists for the Bush regime—saying that the Iraq War was really about… *Iran*! Why? Well, to paraphrase the propaganda:

"Look what's happening now in Iraq. Look at all the gains that Iran is making in Iraq. They've got all these Shias and Shia militias, all these forces there, that the Iranians are basically controlling. So now we gotta take it to Iran."

Of course, these difficulties the U.S. has encountered in Iraq are not the real—or not the most fundamental—reason that they are setting their sights on Iran. I will get into this further a little later in this talk, but the fact is that Bush & Co. had identified the regime in Iran as one it wanted to go after even before they invaded Iraq (remember how, early on after September 11th, they included Iran in the "axis of evil"?). But the fact is that, if they hadn't invaded Iraq and overthrown Saddam Hussein, they wouldn't be having the trouble they are having with these Shia forces in Iraq, and they wouldn't have this whole mess. So Bush and the U.S. ruling class certainly don't have "all freedom" in this situation, and they didn't have "all freedom" all along.

If they had let things go along the way they were, in the Middle East in particular, this would have meant perpetuating conditions that do give impetus to Islamic fundamentalism of the kind that causes real trouble for the U.S. empire. There is, as you know, tremendous suffering on the part of the masses of people throughout that region. There is the corruption of the regimes there, and the repressive nature of those regimes. There is the worsening of the material conditions of the masses of people and, along with that, the tremendous upheaval and dislocation of millions and millions of people in those societies, with the "traditional way of life" significantly uprooted but with no real positive radical alternative possible within the dominant social and international relations—none that would really meet the needs and serve the interests of the masses of people. Is it really surprising that this situation and its driving dynamics would lead people to gravitate to extremes? And there is a force of "Islamic extremism" which has been and is moving to organize people in relation to this—organize them around precisely an extreme version of traditional relations and traditional values and culture, which seem to be,

and in a real sense are, under attack from many sides, especially as the effects of globalization, and the imperialist system as a whole, increasingly penetrate into and make themselves felt within these societies.

So, it was the reckoning of those in and around the Bush regime—and, from the standpoint of their system and its interests, there was a logic to this—that they couldn't just leave things to develop as they were—they had to make some dramatic moves to "change the course of the Middle East."

Invasions...and Occupations... Upheaval and Chaos

But their problem is, as we are seeing, that whether it's Afghanistan or Iraq, these imperialists are good at invading countries and knocking over regimes, but then when they find themselves in the position of occupying the country and they have a population that gets aroused against them, it becomes a different dynamic, and it is not so easy for them. It is not so easy for them to maintain "order" and to impose the changes they want to impose in accordance with their interests. It is not so easy to impose this "from the top down"—which is the only way imperialist occupiers can impose changes.

In this connection—and referring back to the observations and predictions by Michael Scheuer about the difficulties the U.S. would have in occupying Afghanistan—I have to say that I cannot help noticing the great irony when I hear about these bourgeois feminists and others who got sucked into supporting the war in Afghanistan (or who rationalized their support for this war) on the basis that the U.S. invasion and occupation was supposedly going to bring reforms beneficial to women. Well, if you look at the situation now, the U.S. doesn't control much more in Afghanistan (if any more) than the Soviets did when they were occupying that country in the 1980s. And, if you are going to be honest and scientific, you have to recognize that the reforms that the Soviets brought in, during their occupation of Afghanistan, were a lot more thorough, particularly with regard to women. That's one of the things that provoked the ire of a lot of the Islamic fundamentalists.

Now, the Soviets did this from the top down; they imposed it by invasion and occupation and coups, and so on. Then, when they couldn't get very far with these reforms in this way, and they had trouble achieving a stabilized rule and order under their occupation, they backed off and conciliated with the forces of Islamic fundamentalism. After all, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan wasn't like the revolution in China, which came "from the bottom"—and which won the masses politically and mobilized and relied on them to carry out radical changes, not only in economic relations but also in the social relations and the customs and culture, and so on.

In contrast to this, the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, as well as the Soviet occupation before it, has represented and embodied an attempt to impose some changes from the top; but if you're going to talk about what was actually done, the Soviet reforms went further, particularly with regard to the status of women. Yet, in the end, the Soviet occupation could not succeed either.

And to get back to the main point here, the same thing has been shown in Iraq: It's one thing to go in and knock over a regime, especially one you've weakened by a previous war and ten years of sanctions, and so on; but it's another thing to maintain an occupation and to force things on the population you are now directly ruling over. At this point, many political strategists of the U.S. empire, and even many in their military leadership, are admitting this—many of the military people that are quoted in this Ricks book (*Fiasco*) are acknowledging, in effect: "Iraq was a pushover, their army was chump change, anybody with a formidable army could have gone in and knocked them over." Of course, they don't *quite* say that, because they want to talk about how great they are, what a great military power they are, but nonetheless they're pretty much acknowledging that, by the time of the 2003 invasion, the Iraqi military was a very weakened force, even compared to the first Gulf War in the early 1990s. Of course, if you go back and look at what many, if not most, of these "experts" were saying—and if you look at the propaganda of the Bush regime in particular—at the start of the present war, and in the lead-up to this war, there was an incessant chorus issuing dire warnings about how dangerous Saddam Hussein and his regime was: It was portrayed as one of the most dangerous and powerful enemies the U.S. faced in the world; it was ready to unleash a mushroom cloud over the U.S. itself as well as constituting a great danger to all of its neighbors.

Then they invade—and it doesn't go so well after Bush declares "Mission Accomplished" in 2003. And it's kept getting worse for them—and now they're really stuck. From the point of view of the imperialists—but we should also understand that this does involve fundamental ques-

tions that affect broad sections of the people in society, including many people with progressive sentiments and views in general—there is no easy way to deal with this. There's no easy way out for the U.S. imperialists—and admitting defeat is not an option they want to consider. As I emphasized at the beginning, our responsibility is to be thoroughly scientific. Our responsibility is not to just automatically dismiss whatever the imperialists say—"That's just a bunch of imperialist propaganda—next point, move on." While firmly maintaining our basic stand, in accordance with the fundamental interests of the masses of people, throughout the world, in opposition to the imperialists and their system of exploitation, domination, and oppression, we cannot be simple-minded. We have to be scientific and analyze reality in all its complexity.

It is a fact that it would cause a lot of upheaval and chaos in the Middle East if they just were to pull out of Iraq. It would encourage Islamic fundamentalists to step up their attacks against U.S. forces elsewhere; and given the worldview and the whole approach of those fundamentalists—which, as you know, is fundamentally different from ours and is *not* good—they would quite likely carry out further attacks against American civilians, to the degree they were able to do so. *But it is also very important to keep in mind that in the world today—and in the situation and lives of the majority of people throughout the world—there is already a great deal of upheaval and chaos*. And the dynamics that are now, to a large degree, driving things—the dynamics that have led to the current situation in Iraq and more generally in the Middle East, with ramifications and implications in every part of the world—this will, in any case bring a great deal more upheaval and chaos, affecting people everywhere, until there is a resolution of this of one kind or another.

Besides the moral bankruptcy of seeking to avoid chaos for yourself and the things that more immediately affect you, while many, many others are caught up in this and are suffering horribly—besides that whole moral dimension, which I will return to later, because it is in fact something that needs to be emphasized and joined with people—there is the reality that, even those now occupying more privileged enclaves in the imperialist countries and in other parts of the world will not be able to avoid being affected by great upheaval and chaos in the period ahead. *The essential question is not whether there will be chaos or no chaos, or whether it will end up affecting people everywhere, in one way or another. The question is: What will this all lead to, what will come out of it, what kind of world will emerge out of all this?*

Osama bin Laden and others like him are reactionary but they're not fools. Their program and the tactics which flow from that program—and from their basic worldview and values—are extremely reactionary and harmful to masses of people, even those they mobilize. But they are not without a sense of tactics, and even of nuance. Look at what bin Laden said in the context of the 2004 election in the U.S. In effect, he took the bourgeois democratic views and illusions that so many people in this society, including many progressive people, are mesmerized by and caught up in, and he threw it back in their faces. He said: "You have the right to vote your government in or out. You have the right to change the policies of your government through voting, so if these policies continue *you* are at fault." And more recently on CNN, I heard some Islamic fundamentalists in Britain saying the same thing about the British government and the British people.

If you think about it, this involves a kind of profound irony: people like bin Laden are taking these bourgeois democratic prejudices and illusions and using them for their own ends. Primarily, of course, statements like this from bin Laden and similar types are, from their point of view, aimed at justifying *to their social base* what they are doing—that it's justified to attack the civilians of countries like the U.S. and Britain. And there are a lot of people "in the Islamic world," including people drawn to the Islamic fundamentalist banner, who are very uncomfortable about these attacks on civilians. So statements like bin Laden's—about the right to vote out the government in the U.S. or Britain—are not primarily aimed at the people in those countries, but are aimed at the social base of the Islamic fundamentalists themselves. Now, from our radically different perspective and with our radically different objectives, we of course understand that such attacks on civilians are completely unjustified. But, at the same time, we must never lose sight of—nor fail to vigorously bring to light—that what has been done by the bin Ladens of the world pales in comparison to the truly monstrous and massive crimes that have been, and every day are being, carried out by imperialism, and in particular U.S. imperialism.

But the essential point I want to emphasize here is that, in a real sense, the situation that has been created through the U.S. "war on terror" so far, with its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (as well as its military actions in other parts of the world) is indeed a mess, and we shouldn't

have any simplistic notions of what's involved in all this and what's going to come out of it. There is not going to be any kind of smooth way out of this. And, I'm sorry, as much as I respect John Lennon, "just give peace a chance" is not going to deal with the heightening complexity, and intensity, of the situation. Now let me emphasize here again that we can, and must, unite with lots of people for whom sentiments like that—the desire for peace and the belief that peace can prevail if in fact it is just "given a chance"—are their defining and driving sentiments, but we also have to be struggling with people about what's really going on here—what is the root cause, what are the actual dynamics, and what is the real and fundamental solution.

There is not an easy way out. And many people sense this. I have heard and read about discussions with progressive people who say things like: "Well, it was terrible that the U.S. went into Iraq, but we can't just precipitously pull out now." Again, I am not talking about reactionaries here. People can sense that one result from a U.S. pullout from Iraq could be the strengthening of Islamic fundamentalist forces, and that these forces do not actually draw any distinction between the U.S. government and the people of the country. Now, let me be very clear once again: What I am saying here should in no way be understood to deny, or to lessen the importance of, the point that I have repeatedly stressed—that the interests of the masses of people in the U.S., as well as those of the great majority of humanity, are fundamentally different from, and opposed to, those of the imperialists; and the difficulties in which the imperialists find themselves as a result of their invasions and occupations must be seen, and responded to, from the point of view not of the imperialists and their interests but in accordance with the interests of the great majority of humanity, and ultimately humanity as a whole. My point here is that the situation is very complex and that bringing forward and rallying people to their own fundamental interests, on the massive scale that is required, cannot and will not be done with any naive and simplistic approach but only by coming to terms with what is really going on in the world, in all its complexity, and the challenges this poses—and struggling to win people to the correct understanding of this, and to acting on that understanding, in the context of and on the basis of grasping the actual situation and its dynamics.

Those who have been around since the 1960s will remember this, and those who weren't around then might find it interesting, and perhaps amusing: During the time of the Vietnam War, one of the justifications for the U.S. aggression against Vietnam was what was called "the domino theory"—if Vietnam falls, then that will set off a chain of falling dominos, not only in parts of Asia but with implications for the world as a whole. This was often expressed in terms such as: "If we don't stop them in Vietnam, pretty soon they'll be at our doorstep." Of course, underlying this was not only crude anti-communism (crude distortions of what communism is and what communists stand for and fight for) but, along with that, the basic assumption that people and countries all over the world constitute essentially nothing more than objects to be controlled, and exploited, by American (imperialist) interests and that it must not be tolerated for the U.S. to "lose" these countries to their own people. This came to be widely rejected, especially by the late 1960s, and one of the ways the "domino theory" in particular was ridiculed was by saying: "What are the Vietnamese going to do—take their boats (sampans, they were called) and sail over to California and attack us?"

Well, that kind of joke doesn't really go right now. Today, these Islamic fundamentalists are, first of all, coming from a whole different place than the Vietnamese liberation forces, which were genuinely revolutionary (even if their leadership was never thoroughly communist). Despite their shortcomings, the Vietnamese revolutionaries had a theory and strategy of people's war which was aimed against the imperialists and their armed forces but was not aimed against the people of the U.S. In fact, the Vietnamese put a lot of emphasis on drawing the distinction between the government and the people of the U.S., and on winning political support among the people in the U.S.—they did a lot of work which was aimed at gaining that support, or at least developing opposition to the war among broad sections of U.S. society. But things are different now, in some significant ways. It is definitely true that the Bush regime in particular seeks to manipulate things so as to continually manufacture fear among the people in the U.S. and the sense that they are constantly in need of repressive government actions "to prevent further terrorist attacks on America and the American people." But that is only one aspect of things. It is a definite orientation and aim, among at least some of the Islamic fundamentalist forces, to strike not just at the U.S. armed forces but also the people in the U.S. This is a very different situation than what obtained dur-

ing the period of the Vietnam war, and if we are going to really move people in the way that people need to be moved, in order to really act in their own interests in fundamental terms, we're going to have to take account of all this—of the situation in all its complexity. While many others may provide valuable insights into all this, and while it is definitely necessary and vitally important to unite as broadly as possible with others in opposing what the Bush regime (and the imperialist ruling class as a whole) is doing in the world, there is no substitute for our Party speaking to all this in a thoroughly scientific way, with our communist outlook and methodology.

More on the Aims of the Bush Regime—and on the Consequences

Returning to the objectives of the Bush regime, and to the actions they have undertaken in pursuit of those objectives (objectives which, once again, are shared by the ruling class as a whole, in fundamental terms), the fact is that, through their invasions of first Afghanistan and then Iraq, they have heightened the mess that they perceived in the first place. As they saw it, they were going to go in with military force, they were going to set up a regime on the basis of their military victory, and they were going to call it democracy—and their plans and objectives did envision combining certain outward forms of bourgeois democracy with a "free market economy." And then they were going to basically "run the table" with that—move on from Iraq to other parts of the Middle East, to impose the same "model" of society. Well, it hasn't turned out that way, and now they are confronting the ramifications and implications of that reality.

During the course of the Iraq war, and increasingly as the U.S. has run into trouble and become "stuck" there, the example, or analogy, of Vietnam has been invoked. So let's look at a crucial aspect of how the U.S. eventually got out of Vietnam. To be honest and blunt, they got out of it partly by arrangements they made with China, after Nixon began moving to "normalize relations" with China. And Nixon got some heat for that, too, within U.S. ruling class circles, because a lot of them didn't understand what he was doing. But what Nixon did was basically to enter into a different set of relationships with China than what had existed previously. Not different in the most fundamental sense, because China and the U.S. at that time still represented two fundamentally different and ultimately antagonistic social systems, one socialist and one imperialist; but each government, proceeding from its sense of how to further the interests it represented, moved to conclude certain agreements involving areas of mutual interest, particularly with regard to the Soviet Union, which had itself become capitalist-imperialist (although then in a state-capitalist form and with the continuing camouflage of "socialism") and was, at one and the same time, the most militarily powerful imperialist rival to the U.S. and the main danger to China, threatening it with military attack, possibly even with nuclear weapons.

As part of this agreement with China, Nixon was able to, metaphorically speaking, "stanch some of the geostrategic bleeding" that U.S. imperialism suffered as a result of having to admit defeat and pull out of Vietnam. And, as I have referred to, the Chinese had their own objectives, which had to do especially with working to stave off an attack by the Soviet Union. Again, the threat of such an attack was a very real thing. The Soviet Union, a nuclear superpower, had troops massed on the Chinese border and, it seems, was seriously considering an attack on China, including possibly with nuclear weapons. Now, from the standpoint of our Party, and our communist outlook and objectives, even understanding the very great necessity, the very real threat, the Chinese faced, we can still criticize and must criticize how they dealt with all that, in particular the way in which they allied with and covered up the reactionary and bloodthirsty nature of a number of regimes that were installed and/or kept in power by the U.S., and were key cogs in the imperialist alliance headed by the U.S.—regimes headed by such brutal tyrants as the Shah of Iran and Marcos in the Philippines.

But, once more, in scientifically analyzing, and yes criticizing, these moves by the Chinese government at that time, we cannot do what so many are inclined to do so frequently—to ignore the necessity that different forces have and act like they can do whatever they want. We can't do that. And we should struggle with everybody else that they shouldn't approach things that way either. We should struggle with other people about how to understand the world, but first of all we have to understand it correctly ourselves.

Israel and Its "Special Role" in Relation to U.S. Imperialism

I have heard that some people don't like my statement: "After the Holocaust, the worst thing that has happened to Jewish people is the state

of Israel." But this does capture something very important, and there is something very important to understand about the "special role" of Israel—not only in relation to U.S. imperialism in general, but also particularly in relation to the neo-con/Bush regime strategy.

Why is this Bush regime the most unrelenting and unqualified in its backing of Israel? Now, a lot of people—even some well-intentioned but confused people, as well as some people whose intentions and objectives are not good—argue that the reason the U.S. government is generally so one-sided, and the Bush regime in particular is so absolutist, in its support of Israel, is because of the Israeli lobby, or because of Zionist influence, in the U.S. Now there might, superficially, seem to be some support for that theory by looking at the neo-cons. It is true that in a significant sense this is a phenomenon of Jewish intellectuals who were once sort of Cold War liberals and have become hard-core right-wing ideologues. That, however, is *not* the essence of the matter. I do not know how different individuals among the neo-cons actually view the interests of Israel vis-à-vis the larger interests of U.S. imperialism. Whatever the case is with individuals in that regard, the fact is that, as a general phenomenon, these neo-cons are ardent advocates of both Israel and of the particular strategy for U.S. imperial domination in the Middle East (and on a world scale) with which the neo-cons are identified. And more fundamentally, this position, which the neo-cons urge, of unqualified hard-core support for Israel fits into and serves the larger imperialist strategy for the Middle East and ultimately for the world—and *that* is why this neo-con position has such influence. If their position did not serve the larger interests of U.S. imperialism, or if it ran counter to how those now at the core of the ruling class perceive those interests, then whatever the motivations and inclinations of particular individual neo-cons, they wouldn't have the influence they do.

To put it in basic terms, Israel is a colonial-settler state which was imposed on the region of the Middle East, at the cost of great suffering for the Palestinian people (and the people of the region more broadly). Israel could not have come into being without the backing of imperialism, and it acts not only in its own interests but as an armed garrison and instrument of enforcement for U.S. imperialism, which supplies the Israeli state with aid, and in particular military aid, to the tune of billions of dollars every year. But, along with this general nature and role of Israel and its relation to U.S. imperialism, if we take into account the strategic orientation that has guided the Bush regime—based on an assessment that for U.S. imperialism there is now not only a certain freedom but very urgent necessity to recast the whole nature of the regimes and of the societies across a wide arc centered in the Middle East—then you can see even more clearly how absolute support for Israel is crucial in all this. There can't be any wavering or even the appearance, or suggestion, of more "even-handedness" in dealing with Israel, on the one hand, and the Palestinians (and others in the region) on the other hand. You have to have your ducks in a row. You have to have your priorities very clear. You have to have a regime there, at the center of your policy for that region, which is completely reliable for U.S. imperialism.

If you look at any other regimes in the region, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are big allies of the U.S. But in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt, the situation is very unstable and potentially very volatile: there are serious tremors beneath the throne, so to speak—there is the growing danger of "social earthquakes" that could threaten to topple, or actually topple, those regimes. You don't have that in Israel. Hopefully, as things develop overall, there will not be just a "loyal opposition peace movement" among Israelis but the development of a much more powerful progressive movement with a much more radical view in Israel—and this is something that progressive people in Israel, or with ties to people in Israel, should work to foster and develop. But right now a positive and truly radical movement of that kind does not exist in Israel, and the dynamics with regard to Israel are not now such that the more that the regime in Israel is hard-core, the more it is going to run into antagonism with the bulk of its population. In the short term, the dynamic is essentially the opposite, unfortunately.

You can look at the recent Lebanon war—and in particular the massive Israeli assault on Lebanon—as an illustration of what the dynamic actually is now: the more massive and murderous the Israeli attacks were on Lebanon, the more that the people of Israel, in their great majority, rallied to the government of Israel. In part this was influenced by the fact that Hezbollah was launching missile attacks which caused some destruction and death in parts of Israel; but this was really on a very minor scale relative to the widespread death and devastation that Israel, with its arsenal of powerful and precision weapons, very deliberately and as a matter of policy, brought down on the civilian population of Lebanon, devastating whole sections of the

country, killing many, many times the number who died in Israel, and forcing huge parts of the Lebanese population to flee out of the country. Where was any real outpouring of opposition to this among the Israeli population?

The Danger of War Against Iran

And, on a larger scale, as Seymour Hersh has pointed out, this Israeli assault on Lebanon was viewed by at least some powerful people in the core of the U.S. ruling class, including Dick Cheney, as a dress rehearsal for an attack on Iran. It didn't go as well as they wanted, but that won't stop them from attacking Iran. They'll just try to sum up the lessons and—from their murderous point of view—aim to "do better."

Once again, in all this, the regime in power now in the U.S. is acting not only out of perceived freedom, but also out of real and perceived necessity. And the more their actions, proceeding on this basis, have failed to achieve their objectives, the greater the necessity has become—for themselves as well as for others: different strata and sections of society all over the world have now had this necessity imposed on them and find it impinging on them. And where is it all heading?

To return again to the situation in Iraq and the implications of this, whatever the U.S. does in regard to Iraq—whether, to use that now diminished phrase, it "stays the course" or tries to find some way out of the current occupation and tries to pursue its objectives in somewhat altered form—there is no easy way out of this for them. All this has already intensified the contradictions in the whole region—intensified them greatly in the whole region and even beyond that. And this will continue to be true and to assert itself and to further intensify, even though it won't necessarily, or likely, be a linear development, increasing in a straight upward line, but will more likely go through twists and turns and a kind of wave-like motion (with relative peaks and troughs), even as it continues to intensify overall.

And what is the response of significant sections of the ruling class, including some prominent leaders of the Democratic Party as well as a number of neo-cons, grouped mainly in the Republican Party—what is their response to this situation, to this mess that's been created in Iraq for them and for others? Well, as many of them see it, all this is further evidence of the need not only to persevere in this course but to spread the whole approach, and to go after Iran in particular. That's why you see people like this right-wing talk show guy Glenn Beck doing what he's doing—saying that the whole thing in the Middle East, including the Iraq War, is really about *Iran*, that war with Iran can't and shouldn't be avoided, and on and on. The ground is being prepared for war with Iran. Public opinion is being created. And so now we have the reinterpretation of things. Now, the whole problem is Iran.

Now, there is a section of the ruling class saying, no we've got to negotiate with Iran. They are arguing, in essence, that with regard to Iraq and the Middle East overall, it is necessary to do with Iran and Syria and others in that region what Nixon did with China in regard to Vietnam: find a way out of a war that has become a "quagmire" by negotiating with other forces in the region to bring about some kind of settlement that won't be a complete debacle and disaster, from the point of view of the imperialists. They're not posing it exactly that way, but that is, in effect, what one section of the ruling class is arguing for. But that's not going to be very easy to do, because there are a lot of other "wild cards" in the mix—including that there are other Islamic fundamentalists, Sunni fundamentalists, and so on, who are not beholden to Iran by any means and who in fact have acute contradictions with what's represented by Iran.

At the same time, there's a whole push now, from other sections of the ruling class, and in particular many of the neo-cons—people like right-wing commentator and strategist William Kristol—who are basically calling "W" a wimp. "W" now stands for wimp, because he hasn't taken things to Iran already—what's he waiting for? And, along with people like Kristol, there are other neo-cons who have insisted: "Look, the problem here is that we don't play well on the defense—we're good at the offense. We can't fight this battle in the Middle East by keeping it limited to Iraq, because that pushes us on the defense. We have to go on the offense and take it to Iran and other places."

And then there are Democratic Party politicians, like Barack Obama, who are joining in the chorus insisting that Iran must not be allowed to have nuclear weapons and, as bad as war with Iran might be, it would be *worse* to let Iran develop nuclear weapons. This, among other things, is why we have started calling him "Barack Obamination" or "Barack Go-Bomb-a-Nation." And then there's Hillary Clinton, who is also insisting that "we cannot allow Iran to have nuclear weapons." And there was recently a cover story in the *New York Times* Sunday Magazine[4]

4. "Islam, Terror and the Second Nuclear Age" by Noah Feldman, in the Oct. 29, 2006 issue of the *New York Times Magazine.*

which purported to discuss the question of Islamic views on violence but, after it wound around through all sorts of seeming theoretical expositions on this question—seeming theological discourse on Islamic views of justified and unjustified violence—ended by expressing the conclusion that one could guess was coming all along: "we" cannot allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon—this must be prevented, whether that can be done through negotiations or whether it will take war.

Now, this is not to say that war with Iran is, at this point, inevitable. We should avoid tendencies to be simplistic in our understanding of all this—we should not repeat the erroneous tendencies that have existed in the communist movement, including in our Party at times, to fall into mechanistic and determinist thinking, as if the fact that there are dynamics and tendencies in a certain direction and toward certain developments means that those developments are bound to take place. We have made mistakes of that kind before, and it is very important not to repeat them.[5] There are a lot of contradictions at play, and nothing is set in stone. But there is a certain logic and a certain driving dynamic that is pushing things toward this position of spreading the war and going after Iran.

Now, once again we can't be simplistic in our own understanding and we shouldn't oversimplify things for people. There is a difference between boiling things down to their essence and oversimplifying them. It *would* cause problems for the U.S. imperialists if Iran were to get one or two nuclear weapons. It would *not* be the case that Iran would thereby be able to somehow bomb New York City or Chicago or whatever. But it would change some of the equation in the Middle East—or it could—in a way that would work against the interests of U.S. imperialism. As one key aspect of this, even though Israel itself has hundreds of nuclear weapons, if Iran produced just a couple of nuclear weapons itself, even though Iran would still be far from on a par with Israel in this regard, Iran might then be able to offset some of the ways in which Israel threatens the other states and peoples in the region, and this itself could mean a significant change in the "power equation" in the region, in a way that would be unacceptable not only to Israel but also to the imperialist power behind Israel, the U.S. Again, it is not that, with one or a few nuclear weapons, Iran would pose a threat to Israel (or the U.S.) which the latter could not counter—the balance of power, and the "balance of annihilation threat," so to speak, would still be greatly in favor of Israel (and the U.S.)—but this might give Iran more "leverage" and perhaps enable it to be more of a force in that crucial region. And *that* is unacceptable not only to Israel but, more decisively, to the U.S. imperialist ruling class as a whole.[6]

This is another illustration of the reality that, from the point of view of these imperialists, there is real necessity impinging on them; and we should not present to people, or think in our own minds, that all this has some sort of easy resolution. Again, we should learn from our former methodological errors and not fall into simplistic and linear analyses; but we can say that all this is not going to get resolved in some kind of simple and easy way.

More on the "Two Historically Outmodeds"

This leads me to the question of World War 3. A number of pundits and "analysts"—including once again right-wing squawking heads like Glenn Beck—have continued to insist: "This is World War 3, we are already in World War 3." This specter of World War 3 involves, in a real sense, both considerable distortion of reality and actual reality. And this does get to the "two historically outmodeds" and how in fact they do reinforce each other even while opposing each other. As I have formulated this:

"What we see in contention here with Jihad on the one hand and McWorld/McCrusade on the other hand, are historically outmoded strata among colonized and oppressed humanity up against historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system. These two reactionary poles reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. If you side with either of these 'outmodeds,' you end up strengthening both."

While this is a very important formulation and

5. Here, along with—and as an illustration of—the basic methodological point he is emphasizing, Bob Avakian is referring to the analysis put forward by the RCP during the 1980s, and particularly in the early part of that decade, that the intensifying contradictions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union would erupt into all-out warfare between them (and their respective blocs and allies) unless this war were prevented by revolution in large and/or strategic enough parts of the world. For a discussion of this by the RCP, including a criticism of the methodological errors involved, see *Notes on Political Economy* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2000), available online at revcom.us/a/special_postings/poleco_e.htm.

6. For further discussion of these questions—Iran, Israel, and the U.S. and the role of nuclear weapons—see recent articles in *Revolution* newspaper (revcom.us). For example, "Bald-Faced Lies and Bogus Pretexts: Bush Threatens War Against Iran" in issue #79; "Hidden U.S. Plans for War on Iran: Imminent Danger… And Strategic Stakes," #59; "Bush Regime in the Middle East: Global Ambitions, Murderous Logic & the Danger of Regional War," #56.

is crucial to understanding much of the dynamics driving things in the world in this period, at the same time we do have to be clear about which of these "historically outmodeds" has done the greater damage and poses the greater threat to humanity: It is the "historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system," and in particular the U.S. imperialists.

Now, it's not that these other forces—the "historically outmoded strata among colonized and oppressed humanity," and more specifically the Jihadist forces of Islamic fundamentalism—it is not as if they don't pose threats to the ordinary people in many countries, and it's not as if they don't do real harm to the interests of the masses of people throughout the world. Even such things as that *New York Times* Sunday Magazine article I referred to, and more generally the arguments of these ruling class representatives about Iran and nuclear weapons—it's not as if there is no aspect of reality that they are speaking to, even while they are grossly distorting much of reality. It is a fact that at least many of these Islamic fundamentalists have hit upon a certain strategy which is really reactionary and extremely wrong, and does involve completely unjustified actions against civilians—this is their answer to what are greatly unequal (or, as the imperialist say, "asymmetrical") power relations, particularly as this is concentrated in the military sphere: the overwhelming superiority of the imperialists, in conventional military terms, in relation to the nations and people they dominate, oppress, and exploit. And the idea that Iran or even North Korea could get a nuclear weapon and slip it to some other people—and that it wouldn't be traceable to the state that produced the weapon—this is not simply and entirely imperialist propaganda. It's not completely far-fetched.

Recently Ted Koppel wrote a whole article about this, explicitly invoking the "Godfather"—the movie *Godfather I*. You see, some of these artistic works have a certain universality, although different classes view them differently. And, speaking from the standpoint of the U.S. imperialist ruling class, Koppel invoked the scene in *Godfather I* after Mafia Godfather Don Vito Corleone's oldest son, Sonny, has been killed, in the context of war between different Mafia families. Finally, after this has gone on for awhile, these Mafia families have a "sit-down," to try to negotiate an end to this warfare. And Don Vito Corleone (played by Marlon Brando) has real largeness of mind, in terms of the relations and interests among these Mafia families. He says:

"For the sake of our larger interests and peace among us, I will forgive the death of my older son. But what I will not forgive is if anything happens to my son Michael. If a car accident should happen to him…"—he goes on to list a bunch of different things that are apparent accidents, and he says: "If any of those things happen to my son Michael, I'm going to blame some people in this room, and that I will not forgive."

Invoking this scene, Ted Koppel says we should learn from this and apply it in our dealings with Iran—we should say to Iran:

"Okay, go ahead and have your bomb, but if any such bomb ever goes off anywhere around our interests, you're on the hit list right away. We won't even argue about it, we won't even investigate, we won't even think about who did it—we'll just blame you and act accordingly. Now, if you want to get a bomb, go ahead."

Koppel's argument here is not just large-scale gangster logic on behalf of U.S. imperialism—it is that, but it is not just that. It is not just a matter of imperialist manipulation and demagoguery. There is a reality that Koppel is speaking to—from the point of view of U.S. imperialism. We should understand the complexities in all this. I have pointed out before that, sooner or later if things keep going the way they are—and in particular if these "two historically outmodeds" continue to drive much of the dynamics of things and reinforce each other even while opposing each other—then things could get to the point where some of these Islamic fundamentalist forces will get some real weapons of mass destruction, maybe even nuclear ones, and then the shit's going to really fly on a whole other level. And, to refer back to the point I made earlier in discussing Vietnam and the "domino theory," these Islamic fundamentalists are not guided by the same kind of thinking and approach that the Vietnamese were, even with their shortcomings from a communist standpoint. These Islamic fundamentalists are not communists! They are not revolutionary or progressive forces. They do not look at the world the same way. They are reactionary, they are historically outmoded. They look at the world from that standpoint—from the standpoint of their reactionary philosophical, or theological, worldview—and what they do flows from this.

In this, they are not unique. This is, in an essential sense, common to all religious fundamentalists, including those who have positions of significant power and influence within the ruling class of the U.S. at this time (and this is why I have referred to Jihad on the one hand and "McWorld/*McCrusade*" on the other hand). This same basic worldview can be seen in the com-

ments of one of these colonels or generals in the U.S. military about Pat Tillman's family.[7] This U.S. officer said: The reason the Tillman family is making such a big fuss about how Pat Tillman got killed is that they're atheists and they think he's just going to become worm food. He was saying that if the family were Christians and believed that Pat Tillman were going to "a better place," they wouldn't be so upset. Well, that's the mentality of religious fundamentalists.

And that is the mentality, in the general ideological sense, that characterizes Islamic fundamentalists too. They look at the world very differently than people who approach it in a rational and scientific way. They "live in a different world"—a different world than the real one—in terms of how they perceive reality and the driving and defining forces of reality. All this is part of the complexity of things, and we are not going to get anywhere if we don't engage and grapple with this complexity in a very deep and all-sided way, utilizing the best of our materialism and dialectics, and keep on working at it.

Now, having said that, it is important to return to the question of which of these "two historically outmodeds" has done the greater damage and poses the greater threat to humanity. Some people, including some who claim not only to be anti-imperialist but even to be "Marxist," have criticized or denounced this "two historically outmodeds" formulation as being pro-imperialist because, they claim, this statement fails to distinguish between imperialism and the countries and peoples oppressed by imperialism. Well, if you are supposedly a "Marxist," you might be able to look at the wording of this formulation and notice that it says: "historically outmoded strata *among oppressed and colonized humanity* up against historically outmoded *ruling strata of the imperialist system*." If you were even close to being a Marxist in reality, you would know that some distinction was in fact being made there, an important distinction, even while what is said about their both being historically outmoded and how they reinforce each other, even while opposing each other, is also real, and "operative." But it is important to be clear about which has done and continues to do the greater damage, which has posed and does pose the greater threat to humanity. Clearly, and by far, it is the "ruling strata of the imperialist system."

It is interesting, I recently heard about a comment that someone made relating to this, which I do think is correct and getting at something important. In relation to these "two historically outmodeds," they made the point: "You could say that the Islamic fundamentalist forces in the world would be largely dormant if it weren't for what the U.S. and its allies have done and are doing in the world—but you cannot say the opposite." There is profound truth captured in that statement.

As a matter of general principle, and specifically sitting in this imperialist country, we have a particular responsibility to oppose U.S. imperialism, our "own" ruling class, and what it is doing in the world. But, at the same time, that doesn't make these Islamic fundamentalist forces not historically outmoded and not reactionary. It doesn't change the character of their opposition to imperialism and what it leads to and the dynamic that it's part of—the fact that these two "historically outmodeds" *do* reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. And it is very important to understand, and to struggle for others to understand, that if you end up supporting either one of these two "historically outmodeds," you contribute to strengthening both. It is crucial to break out of that dynamic—to bring forward another way.

Rejecting—and Breaking Out of—the Framework of the "War on Terror"

For people living in the U.S., there is a particularity that needs to be continually gone back to, in relation to the "war on terror." I have made the point that this is not entirely fabrication on the part of the Bush regime (and the imperialist ruling class generally). There are real aspects to this—or, better said, there is a reality to which these imperialists are speaking, even while they fundamentally distort reality. But, in essential terms, this "war on terror" is an imperialist program which, among other things, is aimed at blotting out and turning the attention of people, even people who should know better, away from reckoning with *the profound inequalities and oppressive relations that exist within different societies but especially on a world scale*, under the domination of the imperialist system and in

7. Pat Tillman was a professional football player who, after September 11, left the Arizona Cardinals to join the U.S. military. His brother was also in the U.S. military. Pat Tillman was killed in Afghanistan—by "friendly fire" from U.S. forces, as it turned out—yet U.S. military and government officials kept trying to cover this up and deceive people, including Tillman's family, about what actually happened. Tillman was played up as a big national war hero, but as his family continued to dig for the real story of what happened to him, they became more and more alienated and angry because of the lies and deception they kept running into. And they have become increasingly critical not only of how the military dealt with Pat Tillman and his death but of the military and the government more generally, and of the Iraq war specifically.

particular U.S. imperialism, which boasts of being "the world's only superpower" and is determined to maintain all this. If you accept the terms of "war on terror"—and especially if, as part of this, you do not look more deeply at the more fundamental relations in the world, the effects and consequences of *that* and the ways in which it is at the root of developments in the world now—you will get increasingly caught within the logic that what is most important is that "we" (meaning the people in the U.S.—and "I" above all!) "have to be protected." You get caught up thinking and arguing about what should be "the real war on terror." This has happened even to a lot of progressive people—including those who frame their opposition to the Iraq war in terms of considering it a "diversion from the war on terror"—they become trapped within the wrong logic. If you are carried along by this logic, you can end up in a very bad place.

You cannot get to a correct understanding of things, and you cannot move toward the only possible resolution of all this that is in the interests of humanity, by proceeding from within the terms of the "war on terror." Even while "the war on terror" is not entirely a fabrication, even while there are important aspects of reality that it is reflecting—from the point of view of the imperialists—it *is* a fabrication in the form in which it is presented to people. That contradiction is important to understand: There are important aspects of reality that this formulation of "war on terror" (or "war against terrorism") is reflecting; but, as it is presented, it is a fabrication. Its *essence* is not "a war on terror." It is essentially a war *for empire*. And the confrontation with Islamic fundamentalist, and other, forces (even those which actually do employ tactics and methods which can legitimately be called "terrorist") *takes place within, and is essentially framed by, that context and that content of war for empire*.

"Living in the House of Tony Soprano"

Here I want to bring up a formulation that I love, because it captures so much that is essential. Soon after September 11 someone said, or wrote somewhere, that living in the U.S. is a little bit like living in the house of Tony Soprano. You know, or you have a sense, that all the goodies that you've gotten have something to do with what the master of the house is doing out there in the world. Yet you don't want to look too deeply or too far at what that might be, because it might upset everything—not only what you have, all your possessions, but all the assumptions on which you base your life.

This is really capturing something very powerful, not only in a general sense but also more specifically in terms of what is pulling on a lot of people who should be in motion very vigorously and with real determination against the outrages that are being perpetrated in their name and by their government—by this ruling class, and by the core that's at the center of power now in the U.S.

When this analogy, or metaphor, of "living in the house of Tony Soprano" was first brought forward (or when I first heard of it, at least), in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, it was very timely and relevant. But September 11th was a rude announcement that there's a price to be paid for living in Tony Soprano's house, for continuing to go along with these profoundly unequal relations in the world and the way that your government, and this system fundamentally, bludgeons people in the world into conditions of almost unspeakable suffering in order to keep this whole thing going and in order, yes, for some "goodies" to be handed out to sections of the population in the "house"—not only "goodies" in an economic sense but also in the form of a certain amount of stability, and a certain functioning of democracy (bourgeois democracy) within the U.S. itself. All that is being shaken up now. Now, you don't just get the goodies for "living in Tony Soprano's house"—you get the "strangers" out in the backyard at night. "They're out there somewhere." It's a different world. It isn't the same equation as it was, even a decade or so ago—it's not the same now "living in Tony Soprano's house."

It is not that everything was all smooth and nice for everybody in this house—for many people in the U.S. that has been far from the case—and it is not that nobody was aware of things going on in the world, of what "Tony Soprano" was doing to people out there all over the world. In fact, one of the ironies is that a lot of people have been somewhat aware of this, but when the terms get sharpened up, some people want to pull back from what they themselves know. And so we have to get into real and sometimes sharp struggle with people.

This is a point I believe I made in one of those recent 7 Talks—and, in any case, it is a very important point to emphasize: *There is a place where epistemology and morality meet.*

There is a place where you have to stand and say: **It is not acceptable to refuse to look at something—or to refuse to believe some-**

thing—because it makes you uncomfortable.

And: **It is not acceptable to believe something just because it makes you feel comfortable.**

Ultimately, especially in today's world, to do that is a form of complicity, and we should struggle with people about that.

And it also won't work to apply that kind of approach. You'll just end up in a very bad place, reinforcing both of the "historically outmodeds" and being on the wrong side of what needs to happen in the world, if you follow that approach out to its logical conclusion.

We need a different world than one where there are a few houses of Tony Soprano, surrounded by a seemingly endless sea of suffering and oppressed humanity, living in terrible squalor and under undisguised tyranny; where the power, wealth and privilege of the relative few depends on, and is grounded in, the exploitation and misery of the many (and where, even within "Tony Soprano's house" itself, there are many who are treated as little better than second-class members of the family, or as despised servants). This is a world that cannot, and should not, go on as it is.

Even before people are won to the communist standpoint and program, to fully deal with this, there is a struggle to be waged and they can be won to the broad position that we need a different world. We can struggle about what that world should be, and how it should be brought into being; but this dynamic we're on is going to lead to a disaster for humanity, including all of those who are trying to hide from it, in one form or another, or are thinking that if they remain passive, somehow it will pass them by.

An Unequaled Barbarity

In a speech on September 11 this year (2006), the fifth anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Bush said—now listen to this: "Five years ago, 19 men attacked us with a barbarity unequaled in our history." Think about that statement for a second and what they're trying to put over on people with that.

Really, "a barbarity unequaled in our history"? How about little things like *slavery*? How about little things like genocide of the Native Americans? How about lynching? How about wars like the war against the Philippines at the end of the 19th century, and all the atrocities committed by U.S. forces against the people of the Philippines? Or Vietnam? Or Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Note that Bush didn't say "on our territory." He said "unequaled in our history." That is not only a profound lie but a profound exposure of the monstrosity of the mentality of someone who could say something like that.

Recently in our newspaper, *Revolution*, we had pictures and headlines from the time of the dropping of the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War 2. There's all this talk these days about how "we" can't let others have nuclear weapons. And you have to keep reminding people in this country—or informing people, probably the majority in this country, who don't know it—about which country is the only one that has ever actually *used* nuclear weapons. I hate to say it—I don't want to be Jay Leno on the *Tonight* show, out on the street with his microphone, asking people basic questions about things and getting wrong answers, showing how all the "rubes" are really as stupid as you might think they are. But the fact is that this is a systematically uneducated and *mis*-educated population. Something a professor at one university said to us is actually very important. He said about the youth that he teaches now: "You should understand that they don't know anywhere near what you think they know."

The widespread ignorance that does exist, even among the relatively educated population in the U.S., is generally accompanied by an attitude that we're the "good guys" in the world, so what we do that brings suffering to other people doesn't count in the same way as if the same thing were done by others. Partly out of an attitude like that, and partly out of just plain ignorance, it is very likely that a majority of people in the U.S. do not know—or have been unable, or unwilling, to "process the information"—that the U.S. has actually used nuclear weapons, that it has dropped atomic bombs on civilian populations. Or somehow it's like the Bob Dylan lines I referred to in the Memoir (*From Ike to Mao and Beyond, My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist, a Memoir by Bob Avakian*): When the character in a Dylan song tries to get into a fallout shelter, he is refused and threatened by the owner of this bomb shelter, and then there is the following exchange between the two of them: "I said, 'You know, they refused Jesus too'; he said, '*you're not him*.'" This is the same kind of logic that many people in this country use—and a logic that is systematically used by the rulers and apologists of this system—when just some of the "unequaled barbarity" they have committed comes to light: "That's us—that doesn't count…you're not us."

In one of the recent 7 Talks (if I recall correctly,

it was the one on religion[8]) I got into the question of logical syllogisms, and I want to return to this here.

This is related to the question of "common sense." A lot of people talk about "common sense," and this is something that is frequently invoked by right-wing politicos, talk-show hosts, etc., especially when they want to appeal to a certain philistinism in the service of their reactionary objectives. They will often say, "let's just talk common sense here." Well, it is very important, in terms of epistemology—in terms of struggling with people over how to really understand what is going on in the world, and why—it is very important to grasp the fact that "common sense" means one (or both) of two things: It means either elementary logic and/or thinking proceeding from assumptions that are so deeply embedded in the prevailing culture that people don't question them, or even are unaware of them.

You see this all the time. People proceed from certain assumptions, like "we're the good guys in the world." They don't even necessarily *say* "we're the good guys" every time; they just proceed from that assumption and then make arguments about what "the bad guys" (the ones who are opposed to "us" or who are "getting in our way") are doing in the world.

Well, as I have pointed out, with any of these syllogisms, or any kind of logical reasoning, there is the question of whether you are in fact reasoning logically—which is a problem for a lot of these hard-core defenders of the system and apologists for its crimes, especially the religious fundamentalist ones—they do not proceed logically much of the time. But even if you are proceeding logically, there is the question of whether your assumptions are valid to begin with, whether they actually are true. And, in addition to critically examining the logic (or lack of it) that characterizes people's thinking, there is a real importance to bringing to light the unstated, unchallenged—and often even unrealized—assumptions that go into a lot of what many people say, and think.

If you think back to the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, whenever anybody would bring up anything about what was wrong with invading Iraq, those who supported the invasion—and who, at the same time, were unwilling, or unable, to think at all critically about all this—came back with a constant refrain: "But we were attacked." This has the virtue of highlighting both bad logic and faulty assumptions. Bad logic: "We" (the U.S. and its citizens) were *not* attacked by *Iraq*, so how does the argument that "we were attacked" justify an invasion of Iraq? And faulty assumptions, which do not conform to reality: the assumptions that "we" have been completely innocent, doing no harm in the world, and then "we" were suddenly attacked out of nowhere, with no relation to anything "we" were doing in the world. Well, in reality, who are "we," what have "we" actually been doing in the world, and where did this attack come from—and why? What set of social relations are "we" out in the world enforcing? What is our Tony Soprano doing out there?

So there are epistemological points that have to be gone into as part of this—most fundamentally in terms of how we understand reality, but also how we struggle with people about all this. I mean, imagine making the statement Bush did: "Nineteen men attacked us with a barbarity unequaled in our history."

And, in speaking to the American Legion on August 29 of this year (2006), referring to the U.S. airplane, the Enola Gay, that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and feeling the need to combat what he and others like him labeled the "blame America first" position, Donald Rumsfeld said:

"Not so long ago, an exhibit, *Enola Gay*, at the Smithsonian Museum in the 1990s seemed to try to rewrite the history of World War 2 by portraying the United States as somewhat of an aggressor. Fortunately, [Rumsfeld continued] the American Legion was there to lead the effort to set the record straight."

What is Rumsfeld doing here but, once again, justifying the unleashing of atomic bombs on Japanese cities, killing and horribly maiming hundreds of thousands of civilians? As pointed out in our newspaper, there has never yet been a prominent spokesman of U.S. imperialism who has said it was wrong to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Think about that: 60 years later, not a one. And you won't find any among the politicians who are now running, or considering running, for prominent office. You won't find any prominent representative of the government who will say this was wrong. They may not jump up and down and celebrate this nuclear slaughter the way they did at the time—and yes they did. But unleashing these atomic bombs on innocent civilians was well worth it, they continue to insist—it saved lives.

Here is another example of faulty, and often unstated, assumption, combined with bad logic.

8. The title of this talk is "Communism and Religion: Getting Up and Getting Free—Making Revolution to Change the Real World, Not Relying on 'Things Unseen'"; this talk and others of the 7 Talks are available online at bobavakian.net and revcom.us/avakian.

First of all, "saving lives" was *not* the essential reason these atomic bombs were used to devastate two Japanese cities. This was done to make a statement on the world stage, particularly to the Soviet Union, to the Chinese revolutionaries and to others, about who is the big dog running the world now—"it's us, the U.S. imperialists"—and what price will have to be paid for going up against that. But even if those bombs had been used "to save lives," the question is: *whose* lives? There's a big assumption "smuggled in" there. It's *American* lives that are being talked about. Sometimes they do try to make convoluted arguments about how they actually saved Japanese lives by using these atomic bombs. But this is like the argument of an American military officer, commenting on a Vietnamese village that was leveled by U.S. bombing—"we saved the village by destroying it." This is what was done, on a much more massive and horrific level, with the use of atomic bombs on Japanese cities. But mainly, let's face it, it's *American* lives these people are talking about.

They will say: "Our soldiers would have had to invade Japan otherwise, it would have been a massive invasion, the Japanese would have resisted, we might have lost a million soldiers." These are distorted and exaggerated claims to begin with. But something essential is smuggled into this. Often they don't spell this all out, they don't state explicitly the basic "equation"—which is: "American lives are more important than other people's lives; it would have saved American lives; therefore it is justified." Whether or not this is spelled out, that is the reasoning. That's the "common sense" reasoning going on with this kind of syllogism. We have to "pull out" the often unstated assumptions in all this, and make people confront what's actually being said.

American Lives Are *Not* More Important Than Other People's Lives

One of the positive things on the political terrain these days—and we have to struggle for this to be brought forward a lot more fully—is a fairly widespread sentiment and consciousness, within the U.S. itself, that American lives are *not* worth more than other people's lives. This view is even more widespread than during the Vietnam War, I believe, although it did find expression then as a pretty mass phenomenon. Those who haven't been around as long perhaps aren't fully aware of this, but it's a relatively new thing for there to be a mass phenomenon where people in the U.S. itself are arguing that American lives are not worth more than other people's lives. This is a very important and relatively new positive thing on the political terrain. In the history of this country, there has always been the assumption—this has been promoted by the ruling class, but it's held much broader sway—that American lives are, of course, more important and worth more than other people's lives. The difference is that now there is actually a significant section of society who, when it's presented that way, will vehemently disagree. That's an important thing. And we have to win many more people to this viewpoint that American lives are *not* more important.

All this—and the whole experience that is captured with the metaphor of living in the house of Tony Soprano—does come back around to the question of complicity. Now, in this connection I want to say a few things about the mobilization on October 5 (2006) that was called by World Can't Wait, and the fact that, frankly, in terms of numbers and accordingly in terms of impact, this fell far short of what was needed. Now, as Maoists, we're not supposed to blame the masses when things don't go well. But goddamnit—I want to blame the masses a little bit! Not strategically. Ultimately it is our responsibility—it is the responsibility of those who do understand the urgent need for massive opposition and political resistance to this whole course that the Bush regime is driving things on. But in line with, and as a part of, that responsibility, terms have to be presented sharply to people.

Someone made the point that we should say to those people who knew about October 5, and who said they agreed with its basic stance and aims but did not come out that day: "Shame on you if you sat on your ass on October 5! If you knew about it or had a basis to know about it and you did not make use of this vehicle and help make this vehicle as powerful as possible—shame on you!" Now, if that's all we say, it won't get very far—and it wouldn't be fundamentally correct. But there is an element where this has to be joined with people. It is a truth, which people do have to be confronted with, that if in the name of avoiding upheaval and chaos, and in the name of trying to stay safe—even in the sense of staying within a political process and political confines that you are more familiar and comfortable with, yet this process leads to terrible things, one after another—if on that basis you don't join in the kind of massive outpouring of resistance that is called for, and if you don't contribute to that—then yes, you are complicit. The ad that World Can't Wait put in the *New York Times* on October 4 was very

right in its basic stance, as expressed in the headline of that ad: "Silence + Torture = Complicity." People have to be confronted with this.

Epistemology and Morality… Crimes and Complicity

This has to do with the point about "where epistemology meets morality." I thought the quote from Josh Wolf that was in an article in our paper recently was very much to the point. He is a video journalist who wouldn't turn over to the police and a grand jury his videotapes of an anti-globalization demonstration in the Bay Area. And they are going after him because he won't be complicit with them in this way. He said, very strongly: "People out there, quit hitting the snooze button. Wake up and hope it's not too late." And then he said very explicitly: "Quit saying you can't make a difference. That's just another form of cowardice." It is definitely another form of complicity. And as part of wrangling with people and doing what needs to be done to bring forward meaningful political action on a mass scale, this issue of complicity has to be joined with people.

It does seem that one of the big problems with World Can't Wait, and specifically in terms of its October 5th mobilization, is that far too many people still didn't know about it. But then there are others who could have helped more people know about it, and more than a few of them didn't do what they should have and could have done. Now, we shouldn't shriek at people, we shouldn't actually get strident and shrill, but we also shouldn't be liberal and avoid struggle with people, even sharp struggle where necessary, so long as it is on a lofty and principled basis. We and others who are involved in World Can't Wait are not doing this because this is "our thing." We are doing this because of what's going on in the world and the stakes that are intensifying all the time.

Of course, there have been important positive things brought forward by World Can't Wait and in connection with its efforts—and it is important to build on the positive things. But there needs to be a challenge carried out, and we shouldn't shy away from it or shrink from it. We should join this struggle—in a good way. If you just go out and try to jack people up with no substance, that's no good. But we have to get into the substance of this with people. These two "historically outmodeds" are reinforcing each other; this dynamic is very bad and will lead to far worse disaster—if we don't lead people to break out of this. World Can't Wait was, and is, a vehicle for people to do that. What mainly needs to be done, on a whole larger scale still, is to show people, in a living way, why what is represented, and called for, by World Can't Wait is necessary, and how it can make a crucial difference. But we also have to join the issue of complicity with them. There was that slogan back in the '60s, which was not fully scientific, but it was more good than bad and more correct than incorrect: "You're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem." That kind of orientation was not wrong. If you drew the lines irrevocably and you didn't try to win people over when they were on the wrong side (or were trying to sit on the sidelines), well then, yes, that would be wrong. And if you didn't make any kind of materialist analysis of what are the actual driving forces underlying things, and what are actually the ruling and decision-making forces in society—then, yes, that would be wrong. But it is not wrong, and in fact it is very necessary, to pose the challenge to people: Look, there's a great earthquake here, and neither side of the way the earth is separating is going to lead to anything but disaster; we've got to forge another way, you've got to be part of that—and you've got to get out of your "comfort zone" to do it.

Current Conflicts and Analogies to World War 2

To step back a bit, what is going on in the world as a whole is more complex than Jihad vs. McWorld/McCrusade. There is China, there is India—there is a whole large area of Asia, and other parts of the world, which don't figure neatly into this. And we shouldn't go around trying to cram reality into neat little boxes. It's more complex than that. The world and what is driving things in the world cannot be fully described by this contradiction of Jihad vs. McWorld/McCrusade. But this is a big part of the dynamics driving things right now, even if not the only factor. And we can certainly say that there is no part of the world that is, or will be, unaffected by this conflict—and most fundamentally and essentially by the actual dynamics and motive forces underlying this conflict and in particular the actual aims, necessities, and actions of the U.S. imperialists. This conflict, understood in this way, will increasingly exert a major influence on events in the world, even while they will not all be reducible to it and we should not try to reduce them all to it.

With this in mind, I want to talk about the analogies to World War 2, and the whole frame of reference of that war, which is frequently invoked in support of the "war on terror" today. Again

there are both things that are real and things that are instrumentalist, and outright deceitful, in this analogy to World War 2 and that frame of reference. If you look at recent speeches by representatives of the Bush regime, for example (some of which I've cited earlier in this talk), or if you read the book *Fiasco*, you will see that for people like Wolfowitz and many others, even though they were very young at the time of World War 2, this is an operative frame of reference for them. Of course, this is seen through a certain lens and through the prism of the interests of U.S. imperialism in the current world situation. And it is both demagoguery and their actual way of thinking when they continually cite these analogies to World War 2, to Hitler, to appeasement of Hitler, and so on and so forth. People like Wolfowitz and others actually do see much of reality through this prism. But, at the same time, they fundamentally distort this reality: They have a fundamentally distorted view of, and perpetuate and propagate a distorted view of, the nature and course of World War 2 itself and of things bound up with it.

The Real Nature of World War 2—and the Role of Different Forces in that War

If you go back and read *Revolution* magazine[9] from the late '70s and early '80s, you'll see that our Party went through a process of reexamining our understanding of World War 2 and forging a more correct understanding of the character and course of that war. At the time of the founding of the Party in 1975 (and in the Revolutionary Union, which was the forerunner of the RCP), we had basically gone along with the "received wisdom" of the international communist movement, which said that, particularly after the Soviet Union was attacked by Nazi Germany in 1941 and entered the war, World War 2 was a different kind of war, and different in particular from the previous world war. Even though we always recognized that a lot of the things that U.S. imperialism was doing in World War 2 were in pursuit of its imperialist interests, we accepted the "received wisdom" which treated that war as principally an "anti-fascist war" with the Soviet Union aligned with other governments that were opposed to the axis of Germany and Japan (and, for a while, Italy). But then, at the end of the 1970s and into the early '80s, we carried out a lot of study and a lot of struggle which led us to a different, more correct analysis of this. We came to the understanding that this war was, from the beginning and in its main and essential aspect, a war fought among imperialists for imperialist aims, even while, much more so than during World War 1, there were just and revolutionary aspects to World War 2, including the Chinese people's war against Japanese occupation and the wars of liberation waged by other peoples in Southeast Asia against Japan, for example. And the role of the Soviet Union, which was then a socialist country, was different than the role of the imperialist states and bourgeois forces with which the Soviet Union was aligned (including the U.S. as well as Britain), even though it was not nearly as different as it should have been. That's a whole discussion I don't want to back into here. The decisive point here is that World War 2 was essentially not a "great anti-fascist war," even though a lot of people in the world were motivated by opposition to fascism and the ravages carried out by the "fascist Axis," and even though there were liberatory aspects of great significance in that war. So it was a more complex war than World War 1, which was basically and almost entirely inter-imperialist. But World War 2 was also, essentially and in its main and defining aspect, a war among imperialists to determine which would be the dominant power(s) controlling the largest part of the world, including in the vast areas of (what is now generally referred to as) the Third World.

It remains very important to have a correct understanding of this war, because it still casts its shadow in significant ways, both materially and ideologically—both the outcome of that war and also the way in which a certain interpretation of that war is used to shape the thinking of people, including the way in which many people are still influenced by this more or less unconsciously. Even people who were not around at the time, and people who know little if anything about the actual causes and the actual course of World War 2, are still influenced by the "long shadow" cast by that war—by the outcome of the war, what it gave rise to, and what has gone on as a result of that, over the whole period up to the present (though this has been a complex and contradictory process, and has not developed in some linear, uniform, and straight-line way). So it was very important for us to come to the understanding that World War 2 was principally a war fought among imperialists for redivision of the world, as World War 1 had been in a much fuller way, even while in World War 2, on the part of the

9. For example, the articles "Outline of Views on the Historical Experience of the International Communist Movement and the Lessons for Today" and "Some Notes on the Military and Diplomatic History of WW2" in *Revolution* Issue 49, June 1981 (out of print).

Soviet Union, on the part of the Chinese war of resistance and other wars of resistance and liberation against occupation by Japan and other "fascist axis" countries, there was definitely a positive and progressive aspect, a liberatory aspect, that should have been supported.

Once you understand the actual nature of that war, then you understand more about the actual history of U.S. imperialism. If you go back and read *America in Decline*,[10] some of the history recounted and analyzed there, including with regard to World War 2, is very important and highly relevant today. And you see that what the U.S. was fighting for—what the ruling class in the U.S. was quite consciously fighting for—was pursuit of its own imperialist interests. That is why they dropped the atomic bomb on two Japanese cities at the end of that war, but it's also why they fought the war as a whole the way they did—and didn't fight it the way they didn't—that is, why, for several years, they largely held back from getting involved in the major theaters of the war in Europe in particular, and let the Soviet Union do the bulk of the fighting on that front and take the overwhelming brunt of the destruction and casualties.

Stalin, Hitler, and Churchill—Communism, Fascism and Imperialism—and World War 2

And that gets to another very important point: the character of how World War 2 is presented to people in the "West," in the so-called "Free World," is just a fundamental and grotesque distortion. For example, there is this movie out now, *Flag of Our Fathers*, about Iwo Jima. Now, in that movie, you can see how a lot of people got chewed up in that one battle (for the island of Iwo Jima). A lot more American lives were lost in World War 2 than in wars since then. But that was in the hundreds of thousands. In the Soviet Union, 20 million people's lives were lost in the course of that war—*20 million*. And that is a reflection of something very basic. Never mind about Iwo Jima, or Operation Overlord and the Normandy Landing, and all that stuff—that is not what defeated the Nazis, that is not what broke the back of the German army. It was the Soviet Union and the tremendous sacrifice of its people that was the main factor in the defeat of Nazi Germany. But I would like to have an essay contest to see how many college graduates in the U.S. would get this history right—a very small percentage, I would bet.

Even if you take someone like Keith Olbermann, who is coming forward on MSNBC as a sort of liberal opponent of what Bush is doing, his frame of reference is seriously flawed. For example, he attacked this speech by Rumsfeld where Rumsfeld basically said that people who were opposing the Iraq War were appeasers—that's just one small step short of calling them traitors (and they do have the shrieking voices out there, explicitly talking treason, calling people traitors—check out Ann Coulter and David Horowitz, for example). But it was very interesting that in Olbermann's response to this, a lot of it was in the terms of who is the real Winston Churchill here—who is the real statesman that we should all respect? Well, what about Winston Churchill—what did he actually represent, what was he really all about? If, for example, you read the book *All the Shah's Men*,[11] about the U.S.-led coup in Iran in 1953, you can see what Churchill was saying and doing in regard to that part of the world, coming out of World War 2—how he was defending and championing, in blunt and grotesque terms, the interests of British imperialism. Or go back and study the actual history of Churchill even before that: He was never anything but a crude grasping imperialist who is responsible for great crimes against people colonized and oppressed by British imperialism. But he is a hero, an icon, "in the West," in the "Free World," not only because of his role in leading Britain in World War 2; and not only because of his general stand as a champion and leader of imperialism; but also, more particularly, because of his hatred for revolutions against imperialism, and especially his hatred for communism, and the way he "stood up to Stalin," denouncing the "Iron Curtain" after World War 2, and so on.

Now I don't have time here to offer any kind of overall and all-sided analysis and evaluation of Stalin and his role in different periods. But I do want to point out that almost universally those who denounce Stalin and dismiss him as a terrible tyrant—who make him the very representation of tyrannical, totalitarian rule—know very little about Stalin and have done very little study of what Stalin actually thought and said, what he actually did and why, and in particular what necessity Stalin was responding to in various cir-

10. Raymond Lotta with Frank Shannon, *America in Decline* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1984). 11. Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

11. Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

cumstances. For these people—from outright reactionaries to many self-described "progressive" people—Stalin has essentially been reduced to a swear word. As far as I know, there are 13 published volumes of Stalin's works. I don't know how many of these people who are always denouncing Stalin have read any of this. At one point, I read all 13 of these volumes, and I have a lot of criticisms of Stalin, including some very serious criticisms, based on seriously studying not only what Stalin himself said and wrote but also many different analyses of "the Stalin period." I'm not saying you have to read all this—or anything like all of it—before you could have any opinions or any right to speak about Stalin; but Stalin is a major historical figure, the period of Stalin's leadership in the Soviet Union (and in the international communist movement) involves major historical events and turning points, and you should at least make a serious attempt to be informed, in a basic way, about something like that before you become part of the chorus denouncing (or praising) it. The reality is, however, that overwhelmingly and with few exceptions, the people who denounce Stalin, often and generally in visceral terms, really know very little, if anything, about Stalin, what he was actually dealing with, and what he did, and why, in those circumstances.

This brings me back to the question of World War 2 and the role that was actually played by different forces in World War 2, including the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership. Now, it is a fact that, during that war, Churchill even acknowledged that, after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, roughly three-quarters of the German army was occupied fighting the Soviets, fighting on the Eastern Front. And it is a fact that it was the Battle of Stalingrad that broke the back of the German war machine and turned around the whole course of the war, as Mao pointed out at the time. But you can't find—I don't know what this figure would be, maybe something like one in 10,000 Americans, who even knows that (whatever the figure is, it's astronomical).

So the whole character of World War 2 is distorted even from that standpoint. What was represented by and what was the role played by different forces, and who actually did what—even on the basic level of who actually did what in fighting the war—all this is grossly distorted. You would never know from this litany you always get, lumping Stalin with Hitler—"Hitler and Stalin…Hitler and Stalin…Hitler and Stalin" (and often Mao gets thrown in these days, and sometimes Lenin too)—you would never know that Hitler and Stalin, and the countries they headed, were on opposite sides of this gigantic cataclysmic encounter called World War 2.

I remember a comrade telling me a number of years ago that she had an argument with one of her reactionary relatives during the Vietnam War—almost everybody who was around during the Vietnam War had those arguments with some of their relatives—and her relative, who was actually from "the World War 2 generation," was insisting: "We've got to fight the communists—we had to fight them in World War 2, and we have to fight them now." And the comrade answered: "No, no—we were on the same side as the Soviet Union in World War 2!" But her relative insisted again: "No, we weren't!" This is the kind of thinking, and the rewriting of history, that goes on, that is widely fostered and promoted.

And this makes it easier to bring in these grotesquely erroneous theories of people like Hannah Arendt about totalitarianism. As a matter of fact, Arendt's theory of "totalitarianism" never measured up to the real world—it was not an accurate and scientific analysis even as applied to the Nazis and other fascists—it was not an accurate description of what the actual dynamics and what the actual forces at play were. And this is all the more true when it comes to the communists. It is striking in reading Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (which I did in connection with writing the book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*[12]) that with Arendt there is a lack of any real understanding—and in fact there is a gross distortion—of basic questions, including why it was that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany ended up on opposite sides in World War 2 and engaged in a several year, all-out confrontation in which the fate of millions of lives and the continued existence, or extinction, of the respective governments was determined. Did all this come about and unfold simply as a result of a fit of "pique" on the part of Stalin or something—or some personality conflicts, or "the clash of totalitarian urges and wills"?

Arendt's analysis is just totally non-materialist and completely off the mark in terms of the real nature and real causes of things, including momentous events in human history. But people are broadly influenced by these ill-founded and erroneous analyses like Arendt's. The fact that Nazism and fascism, on the one hand, and com-

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

munism on the other hand, are *radically and fundamentally different*; and the fact that in World War 2 communists and fascists were on opposite sides, bitterly fighting against each other—all this is nowhere in the "popular consciousness." And if you asked people to summarize what are the aims and objectives and outlooks of the fascists, on the one hand, and the communists, on the other, overwhelmingly they couldn't do it. Very, very few people could do it with any accuracy.

And when we hear these analogies invoked about "appeasement" (referring to British policy toward Hitler before the outbreak of World War 2 and comparing it to events today), one of the main things that is generally left out is that the whole point—or certainly one of the main points—of this "appeasement" was to push Hitler and Nazi Germany to the East, to attack the Soviet Union. It wasn't like: "Oh, Hitler's a good guy and we can get him to act reasonably and cease being a threat to us." Glenn Beck is always fond of referring to a senator (from Idaho I believe) who at the time of World War 2 was probably one of those pro-Nazi American politicians. This senator supposedly said something like: "If I could just talk to Hitler, I know we could somehow work this all out." In his role of utilizing right-wing comic book terms and scenarios to whip up support not only for the war in Iraq but the extension of war to Iran, Beck likes to use statements like this to ridicule the idea that "we" can deal reasonably with what he presents as the modern-day equivalents of Hitler—meaning anyone now getting in the way of U.S. objectives of unchallenged domination not just in the Middle East but throughout the world. But, once again, the real deal is that this "appeasement" before World War 2 was largely aimed at pushing Germany to the East.

In his book *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, Arno Mayer makes an analysis, in a serious and basically materialist way, of the real difference between how Hitler viewed and acted toward the East—and in particular the Soviet Union—as opposed to how Hitler dealt with the West. This book by Mayer also sheds important light on the overall actions and motivations of the Nazis in particular, including the mass genocide of Jewish people and how that fit into the larger context of Hitler's views, aims, and objectives. It is for very good reasons that we are constantly bringing forward these days the statement by Pastor Martin Niemöller about his experiences in failing to join with others in resisting the Nazis in Germany—until it became too late to effectively resist. How many people, even among those who are aware of this statement by Niemöller, are familiar with, and understand the meaning of, the first sentence in that statement? Put this on a test: fill in the blank—Pastor Niemöller said, "First they came for the____." How many people could fill it in correctly? How many people would know that it says: "First they came for the *communists*"? How many people know that Hitler and the Nazis had to break the back of the very large and influential Communist Party of Germany at that time in order to implement the Nazi program? (It is true that the German Communist Party was riddled with many erroneous tendencies—tendencies which ultimately and objectively amounted to a reformist, rather than a revolutionary, stance and program—but that does not change the basic fact that crushing the German Communist Party was essential for Hitler and the Nazis in order to carry out their objectives, in Germany itself as well as on an international scale.) How many people know that? I'm not talking about people who have been prevented from knowing much about the world at all—I'm talking about people who are literate, educated, and think they know a lot about the world, but have been systematically miseducated and misled, and to some degree have fallen into believing these things because, once again, it is (or it seems to be) comfortable to believe them—it conforms to certain prejudices, predilections and predetermined ideas that have to do with the way people's lives are organized under this system, especially living in the "number one imperialist power in the world" ("the world's only superpower").

To the Bourgeoisie, Fascism—and Slavery—Are "A Matter of Taste"

How often do you hear it discussed that, for several years in the mid-1930s, the Soviet Union was attempting to build united fronts with Britain and France around things like what Germany was doing in Czechoslovakia, and that the Soviets were repeatedly rebuffed, essentially (even while there were some half-assed agreements to oppose Nazi aggression, they were basically not acted on by the imperialists who entered into these agreements)? Now, from our standpoint, and with our historical analysis of World War 2, and what led up to it, we have some serious criticisms of the policy of the Soviet Union in seeking these alliances with imperialist

states. But the important point here—in analyzing questions like what "appeasement" was really all about, and what necessity the Soviet Union was facing in the build-up to World War 2—is that, in their attempts to build a united front against Nazi Germany and its initial military moves, the Soviets were essentially, and repeatedly, rebuffed by the imperialists. And it was in response to that, that the Soviets then turned around and signed an agreement with Nazi Germany (the "Hitler-Stalin Pact"), in order to gain some time, and yes some territory, to prepare for the very real possibility—which became a reality within two years—of a massive attack by Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union.

To go just a little bit afield here (I believe I have recounted this story before but it bears repeating here), Molotov, who was one of the top officials in the Soviet party and government at the time, was actually the one who signed the agreement with Nazi Germany in 1939—with Ribbentrop signing for Germany, if I remember correctly. When Molotov was asked at the time, "How can you sign an agreement with Nazi Germany?" Molotov replied, somewhat flippantly: "Well, we have agreements with all kinds of bourgeois states." And this brought the reply: "Yes, but these are *fascists*." To which Molotov is reported to have answered: "To the bourgeoisie, fascism is a matter of taste."

Now, again, that was too flippant and facile an answer, but I do have to say that there is some essential truth to this. When you look at the history of the U.S. bourgeoisie, for example, things like slavery are "a matter of taste." It was nearly a hundred years after the War of Independence from England before slavery was ended. During that whole period, slavery was an integral part of the U.S. economy and social system, and slave owners were an integral and powerful part of the governing system in the country as a whole. Slave owners, and defenders and champions of the interests of slave owners, such as Thomas Jefferson, are still upheld and celebrated as founders of the country and architects of liberty, serving as models for all mankind. So it reflects an important aspect of reality to say that slavery, like fascism, is—for the bourgeoisie—a "matter of taste."

To return to the dynamics at the time of World War 2 (and in the period immediately preceding and leading into that war), this was a situation where the Soviet Union was faced with the growing danger of attack by Nazi Germany and was repeatedly rebuffed in its efforts to build meaningful and effective united fronts to put a stop to what Germany was doing in that period. Again, we can have and do have substantive and important criticisms of all that. But first of all, it is necessary to assess this, and to make criticism that should be made, on the basis of understanding the actual dynamics and the actual necessity faced by the Soviet Union and its leadership. And, second of all, the criticism that we do need to make should be done from the point of view of trying to determine what *should* have been done in the face of those dynamics and that necessity. As communists, we have to evaluate all this, and sum up what was done, and what should have been done, from the point of view of how to advance through all the difficulty and complexity that will have to be confronted in moving to abolish and surpass the era of the bourgeoisie and imperialism and advance to the radically new era of communism. But all this talk about "appeasement," as it is commonly put forward, is just more distortion and "mis-direction"—just as the imperialists, and their media and mouthpieces, cover up which country it was that actually did the main fighting against Nazi Germany in World War 2, while the U.S. basically sat back for several years—yes, they sent some "lend-lease" equipment to the Soviet Union, but essentially they sat back and let the Soviet Union and its people do the bulk of the fighting and dying, even as the Soviet Union kept saying to them: "Open a second front in Europe, will you please!" But the U.S. imperialists' response was, in essence: "Nope, not in our interests. Keep it up boys! You're doing a good job fighting and dying there."

This history is hidden from people, so when World War 2 analogies are invoked and in particular when "appeasement" is invoked, it's all through a distorted prism and with a tremendous amount of misinformation, and dis-information, being deliberately purveyed, on top of the widespread state of ignorance that is fostered in the U.S., particularly about world affairs and world history. This relates to Lenin's statement that *it takes ten pages of truth to answer one sentence of opportunism*.

Now, there are real problems with postmodernism and deconstructionism, and related philosophical relativism, as we know—very serious problems. But you do have to, in a sense, deconstruct some of this stuff, this distortion of history, and we have to do this in a systematically and consistently scientific way, from the standpoint and with the method of dialectical materialism, in order to get the underlying assumptions that are built into and largely hidden in this. I know this has been the experience

with the Setting the Record Straight project[13] (and other efforts of ours): Every time you venture out in the world to talk and struggle with people about the way the world is, why and how it got to be that way, and, by contrast, the way it could be and the way it needs to be—you run into a whole set of assumptions, spoken or unspoken, conscious or unconscious, that you have to get to before you can enable people to begin seeing the world the way it actually is, and could be.

So, in order to speak to people about all this, in a way that leads to a real understanding of things, and is convincing and compelling, we have to get into some of the underlying assumptions and sort out what is true from what is not true, in regard to major historical events as well as present-day reality. Not that every time we sit down for a cup of coffee with someone, we have to get into the whole history of World War 2. [*laughs*] But in the course of the work we do, we have to struggle with people over an understanding of important parts of reality and history that are still casting long shadows and are still being invoked in a distorted way (even while it's true that the imperialists, and those who follow in their wake and adopt their outlook, actually do, to a significant degree, perceive reality the way they're portraying it, at the same time as they employ a lot of instrumentalism and demagoguery in their distortion of reality).

"Spreading Democracy" and the "War on Terror"—Distortions of History, Distortions of Reality

All this distortion serves the purpose now of putting the current "war on terror" in the context of—or portraying it as a part of—a continuum of "the great battles of the 20th century against totalitarianism." It is very important to the U.S. imperialists to do this, as part of continuing to propagate their cardboard and comic book version of history where "We've always been the good guys fighting the great battle for democracy—we've had to take on various totalitarianisms, and now we have a new one to deal with." Now, the rather obvious instrumentalism and demagoguery comes in, for example, when they portrayed someone like Saddam Hussein as a Hitler: "Okay, Saddam Hussein doesn't really fit neatly into this framework—but never mind, he can be Hitler for a day. And then we can go on to something and someone else." So, now it's the turn of Islamic fundamentalist Jihadists to be the equivalent of Hitler—to be labeled "Islamic extremists" or "Islamo-fascists." Once again, we see that there is both hypocrisy and self-deception. It's both reality and instrumentalism. It's both somewhat what they believe and in any case what they want other people to believe.

This also applies to the whole thing of "spreading democracy": There is both reality and instrumentalism, there is both hypocrisy and *self*-deception. And it is important to understand what they mean when they talk about democracy and "spreading democracy." Again, one of my main themes here is that we have to really be thoroughly scientific and actually enable people to understand the world in its essence. And here the point I have made before about simplicity and complexity—about how there is both the basic essence of things and the complexity bound up with them—has important application. We have to enable people to get the basic, and in a sense simple, terms of something—the essence of it, in other words—but also to increasingly grapple with and grasp the complexity. And this applies to the talk, by Bush and his regime, about democracy and "spreading democracy." One of the main reasons I am emphasizing the need to not only get to the basic essence but also to really go into the complexity of things, is that it won't do to repeat mantras, like: "You have to understand—democracy is nothing but bourgeois democracy, which means it's actually a bourgeois dictatorship carried out over the masses of people by a handful of ruling class exploiters and oppressors." All true, but not very compelling to those who are not already convinced of it. We have to be able to actually make this come alive and be compelling for people. But there is not only that general truth, there are also particularities of how this is being shaped and thrust out into the world today.

Bourgeois Democracy... and Fascism

It is often the case that other people, who are coming from other points of view, can have

13. The Set the Record Straight project is aimed at combating the widespread lies and slanders about the experience of socialism in the Soviet Union and China and at critically examining that experience from a scientific standpoint—to help draw important lessons from both the mainly positive aspect of that experience but also the very real shortcomings and errors, and to popularize this among as broad an audience as possible, including through forums and debates with people putting forward different and opposing viewpoints. An important speech by Raymond Lotta—"Socialism Is Much Better Than Capitalism, and Communism Will Be a Far Better World"—and other material from the Set the Record Straight project are available at the project's website, thisiscommunism.org. The project can be contacted at SettheRecordStraight@hotmail.com.

insights that we should learn from and recast with a dialectical materialist, a thoroughly scientific understanding. For example, I was reading some observations by one of our comrades, drawing from some insights in statements by Arundhati Roy. What I want to focus on here is the observation: "There's a crisis of democracy—it looks like Iraq, and in the 'democratic countries' it's being '1984-ed.'" There is something important there which captures important aspects of what is going on with the Bush regime's crusade to "spread democracy," while at the same time they are moving to change U.S. society in a fascist direction and for generations to come (to borrow from the Call of World Can't Wait).

What does this "spreading of democracy" mean? What are they actually doing? When Bush and others say things like "People in Iraq (or Afghanistan) came out and voted and there were elections, this is a great step forward"—is this all just tricks and lies? No, these are trappings of bourgeois democracy that they are talking about, but this is part of the kind of society they want to construct in Iraq, and in that region more generally.

Now, what's the other part? Well, let's go back to "Elementary Logic 101": If you have an election under the military occupation of a foreign power it is *not a free election*, okay? Whatever that term "free election" means, whatever meaning there is to that, *that's* not it.

But this occupation is also part of the democracy they mean to impose. It comes with, and through, bludgeoning—things will be hammered into place according to certain definite aims and interests of U.S. imperialism. And things will be structured and ordered in that way. And then, according to their vision and plans, you will have the development of "free markets," the growth of a middle class, more stability, a Western-oriented society—like Lebanon.

Recently, Israel—and the U.S. through the vehicle of Israel—went and did what they did in Lebanon, massively pounding and devastating the country and its people; but Lebanon has been a model of what they are trying to do in the region. I remember seeing Anderson Cooper on CNN, when things were going on in Lebanon, with the Israeli assault and the massive outrage among the people in Lebanon over this—with many, even secular forces, rallying around Hezbollah—and there was Anderson Cooper pulling out his hair: "What happened?! We were doing so well in Lebanon, you know? Jesus Christ, what's going wrong here? We got everybody mad at the Syrians and everybody loved us and everything was going so well—and now what's happening?!"

Well, some of the underlying and driving dynamics of imperialism are what's happening there, buddy. And this is all the more upsetting for them, because Lebanon was basically a model of how they want to remake the region—how they want to bludgeon the Middle East into being. And, once again, on their part there is both reality and instrumentalism in all this. The "democracy" they are "spreading" does look like Iraq: What they are aiming for in Iraq does include some of the forms and trappings of bourgeois democracy, and they actually do want to develop more of a "Westernized middle class" there—although it is a great irony that there was, to a significant degree and in significant ways, such a middle class under Saddam Hussein, and as a result of the U.S. invasion and occupation and all the devastation and madness that has been part of that, and has been unleashed by it, much of that middle class has moved to get out of Iraq. But the U.S. imperialists, and strategists in the Bush regime in particular, actually have theories about this, they actually believe that their "free market" stuff will—someday—benefit everybody. Maybe not in your lifetime or mine, or for several generations, but someday it will benefit everybody. That's how they see it. And in the meantime, they believe, it will create enough of a middle class and other strata that will be inclined toward the U.S. and not want to have upheaval—and that's good enough for now. That, again, is how they see it—even as reality is working out in a very different way.

So, if you understand that, you can understand how this involves the appearance, and in some ways the reality, of a very acute contradiction: On the one hand, they have this crusade to "spread democracy," and there is an aspect of reality as well as of instrumentalism and demagoguery to it, at the same time as it can legitimately be said—and needs to be said—that they are moving to change U.S. society in a fascist way and for generations to come. It is not necessarily the case that the trappings of democracy will be eliminated as they move to change U.S. society in a fascist way and for generations to come—nor will they necessarily or likely give up the banner of democracy while doing this. The meaning of the words can change. Remember that recent exchange between a right-wing radio guy and Dick Cheney: "Don't you think, Mr. Vice President, that dunking somebody in the water, if it would save some lives, is a no-brainer?" "It's a

no-brainer for me," replied Cheney. But then, in the same breath, they insist: "We don't torture!" Now, how can you put those two things together? This has to do with their insistence that, because they have tremendous power, they can define reality any way they want. Or, as a Bush administration official was quoted in that Ron Suskind article in the *New York Times* Sunday Magazine: We create our reality on the ground, and while you're studying that oh so judiciously, we will go on and create further reality.[14] If we say water-boarding is not torture, then it's not torture (and, oh yes, as Cheney "clarified," he wasn't talking about water-boarding but just a little dunking in the water to make somebody talk!). Water-boarding is not torture, because we do not torture—here is another of their self-serving tautologies (similar to: we're the "good guys" in the world, so whatever we do is… good).

They Lied to Us… and Deceived Themselves

One thing we should really understand—-and I believe this is a slogan, or formulation, that could and should be popularized: If you look at what they did in Iraq, the way they justified it and what's happened there, you can capture a lot of this in the formulation **They lied to us and deceived themselves.** This is a big part of what happened. They actually believed their own propaganda. The way they were seeing the world—they really thought that's the way the world is. They really thought they could do what that Bush administration functionary said to Ron Suskind—that they could just continue to create their own reality on the ground, as if no other factors, and no other people, have anything to do with what reality is and how it develops.

As I was listening to one of these imperialist spokespeople on the media recently, I couldn't help blurting out: "They don't understand how their own system works." This is important to grasp. They don't understand what the actual nature of U.S. society is and what it rests on fundamentally. They actually believe all this stuff about "free markets." Or, to a large degree, they believe this, because once again there is also a lot instrumentalism. But they do believe a lot of it, and they don't understand what their system and its operation around the world actually leads to and what it actually calls forth. They understand some of it—it would be wrong and way oversimplified to say that they don't understand any of it—but, in essential and fundamental terms, they don't understand how it actually functions, what the underlying dynamics are, and what it calls forth in different ways. So they believe they can go in and do this kind of thing in Iraq, and everybody's going to welcome it—you know, the flowers and all that kind of stuff. They believed that to a significant degree. And then sometimes they don't know what they believe and what they want *you* to believe. The two get very closely bound together and even become identical in their thinking. But, to a significant degree, they do believe their own propaganda: they actually deceive themselves, and they don't understand how their own system works.

They don't understand the lopsidedness in the world—the great disparity and acute polarization in the world, where tremendous wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a small number of people, and in a handful of countries, while in most parts of the world, and in the world as a whole, the great majority struggle, often unsuccessfully, even to secure the basic necessities of life while being subjected to life-stealing exploitation and murderous oppression. Yes, the imperialists know this lopsidedness is there, and they make calculations based on it, yet they lack the intention, and the ability, to put an end to this lopsidedness. Along with that, they don't really understand what it flows from, what are the foundations of that lopsidedness, and why it is continually recreated, often in even more extreme terms.

Democracy—Concentrating Some Essential Understanding

Here I want to return to two brief statements regarding democracy that are run regularly in *Revolution* newspaper. These statements—one of two sentences, and one of three sentences—are an attempt on my part to capture some essential aspects of reality, and to concentrate much of the complexity bound up with this reality in a scientific way. Especially in light of what is going on in the world today, and the rationalizations that are being propagated to justify what the Bush regime (and U.S. imperialism in general) is doing in the world today, it is worthwhile digging further into these statements.

14. The article by Ron Suskind, titled "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," appeared in the Oct. 17, 2004 issue of the *New York Times* Sunday Magazine. Suskind quotes a senior Bush aide who tells him, "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

To take "the two sentences" first, this begins (the first part of the first sentence is): "The essence of what exists in the U.S. is not democracy but capitalism-imperialism…" Now, you could get into a whole bunch of arguments about that statement if you didn't correctly understand it, and particularly if you approached it in a dogmatic way. [*In a sarcastic voice:*] "Well, I thought you said that democracy in the U.S. *does* exist but it's *bourgeois* democracy." Yes, but note that what's being said here refers to the essence of what exists. It is emphasizing that, if you want to understand the essential and driving forces in society, don't look to the superstructure of politics and ideology, and don't look to superficialities—look to the economic base first of all.

This is what is brought out in the first of these sentences, taken as a whole: "The essence of what exists in the U.S. is not democracy but capitalism-imperialism and political structures to enforce that capitalism-imperialism." Those political structures could be democratic (that is, bourgeois-democratic) or they could be fascistic (or they could be one in the name of the other). But what is their *essence*? And what is fundamental?

And then this statement goes on (the second sentence is): "What the U.S. spreads around the world is not democracy, but imperialism and political structures to enforce that imperialism." This, again, is the essence of what they spread around the world. The structures to enforce that imperialism may be the Saudi Arabian royalty—or it may be sweeping aside the Saudi Arabian royalty and instituting a more bourgeois-democratic form of government there. But what's the *essence*? What are the driving forces? It is imperialism—the capitalist system in the stage of imperialism—a worldwide system of exploitation under the overall rule of capital and driven by the laws of capitalist accumulation, as conditioned by the dominance of monopolies, international investment/export of capital, the division of the world among the imperialists as well as the great division between a few imperialist countries and a vast number of colonized and oppressed nations.

In the three-sentence statement on democracy, essential points are emphasized which closely interconnect with the two sentences I have just discussed. Now, I have said a number of times that if I were teaching a course on this subject (on the nature of democracy and its relation to the fundamental character of society, rooted in its economic system), I would read these three sentences, and the rest of the semester would consist of: *explain*. Because there is a tremendous amount concentrated in these sentences that is very important to understand—and is very widely misunderstood. How many people actually have engaged the substance of this? And how many people need to? So let's look at these three sentences.

The first is: "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." How much further ahead would we be if there were a large section of people who understood the essence of that! I've often joked that, with the success of the socialist revolution, one of the first acts of the new revolutionary state—the dictatorship of the proletariat—should be to ban the word "democracy" for ten years, because it has been the source of so much misunderstanding and confusion. But that is, after all, a joke—we can't actually do that, and shouldn't try to do that, for a lot of reasons—just to be clear. But there is a tremendous amount of misunderstanding and confusion about this question of democracy, and people just keep falling, over and over again, into the same kinds of illusions about this. If there were a leap to where a significant section of people understood just this one sentence, think how much further ahead we'd be.

And then this statement goes on (the second and third sentences are): "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."

Once more, if we could actually get people to begin grappling with and understanding this, we would be so much further ahead. This is not just important as theoretical abstraction—which it is. It is theoretical abstraction, and it is extremely important as theoretical abstraction for people to be wrangling with. But it also has everything to do with what's going on in the world and major struggles that have to be waged in the world today. Whether you understand this—whether you grasp the essence of what is being captured and concentrated here—or whether you are full of the illusions that are promoted in opposition to that, is of tremendous importance and moment, literally in terms of what direction the world will be heading in. Because the fact is that not only do the imperialists not understand their own sys-

tem. But, without negating positive things they do and contributions they make, the fact is that neither is all this understood by the many reformers, populists, and democrats on the political terrain.

To further illustrate the essential points here, I wanted to bring in another great shopkeeper quote from Marx (and in this case, Engels as well). As you know, Marx made a very profound observation about the relation between the democratic intellectuals and the shopkeepers—how, even though in their everyday approach to life, they may be as far apart as heaven and earth, they share an essential unity in that, in their thinking the democratic intellectuals do not get further than the shopkeepers get in their practical dealings; that the one, in the realm of theory, as much as the other in the exchange of commodities, does not get beyond what Marx termed "the narrow horizon of bourgeois right."[15] The other quote I am referring to here is from *The German Ideology*:

"Every shopkeeper is very well able to distinguish what somebody professes to be, and what he really is, [but] our historians have not yet won even this trivial insight. They take every epoch at its word and believe that everything it imagines about itself is true."[16]

This really captures something very profound. How many people do you know who take every epoch, and in particular this epoch, at its word, and believe that everything it imagines about itself is actually true? How many people do we encounter in the course of our work who, as I put it in the polemic against K. Venu,[17] take bourgeois democracy more seriously than the bourgeoisie does—and keep trying various ways in their minds and in their practice to try to perfect this bourgeois democracy into something other than what it is and what it is capable of being?

This goes back to the two sentences and the three sentences I spoke to above. There are so many people who take this epoch in particular, the bourgeois epoch, at its word, and who don't go beyond the appearance of things to get to the essence—to the underlying relations and dynamics that are driving things and that establish the foundation for, and ultimately determine the nature of, the political system and institutions, as well as the dominant culture and ideology, in any society, in any epoch. How many people ignore, or are simply ignorant of, the fundamental reality that, in any society in any epoch, political structures, institutions, and processes must be understood precisely in relation to the underlying economic base and to dynamics that are rooted in that economic base—in the relations and driving contradictions that characterize that economic base? How many people still need to be won to approach the world in that way?

Understanding the World In Order to Change It

All this stresses the profound importance of communism as a scientific worldview and approach to reality, of materialism and dialectics. It stresses the importance of theory and methodology. We're not going to get where we need to go—and certainly the complexity of what we're up against now should drive this lesson home to us—if we don't grapple in the realm of theory and methodology and then apply that to changing the world. Marx was right, pro-

15. The point from Marx, summarized here, about shopkeepers and democratic intellectuals is found in Marx's essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.* The fuller statement by Marx is: "…one must not form the narrow-minded notion that the petite bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general* conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petite bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent…." (Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, pp. 40-41, emphasis in original)

16. This passage from *The German Ideology* was cited in the article "On Empire—Revolutionary Communism or 'Communism' Without Revolution?" in *A World to Win* magazine, issue #32, 2006. This article provides important analysis of and polemics against the basic worldview and political positions found in the books *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000) and *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

17. K. Venu was an erstwhile "Maoist" in India who, at a certain point, with changes in the Soviet Union beginning with Gorbachev and with the Tiananmen Square events in China in the late 1980s, began to view as essentially negative the historical experience of socialism in the 20th century, not only in the Soviet Union but in China as well. Venu retreated into a position which, in the final analysis, amounted to upholding bourgeois democracy as the highest objective to be striven for—obscuring the fact that this bourgeois democracy is in fact a form of bourgeois *dictatorship* and that the socialist state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, makes possible not only a much broader and deeper democracy for the masses of people, but even more fundamentally that this state is essential for, and provides the vehicles for, the advance of communism, worldwide, with the abolition of the division of society into classes, and thereby the elimination of the need for a state of any kind.

The polemic against K. Venu, titled "Democracy: More Than Ever We Can and Must Do Better Than That," is included in Bob Avakian's book *Phony Communism Is Dead…Long Live Real Communism!* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2004) and originally appeared in *A World to Win* magazine #17, 1992. The polemic is available online at revcom.us/bob_avakian/democracy/.

foundly so, when he said in the "Theses on Feuerbach" that the philosophers have only tried to understand the world, the point however is to change it. But we should not and must not do a "two into one" on that—wrongly combining, conflating, and "mashing together" theory and practice. That, frankly, is what has characterized a lot of movements, including revolutionary and communist movements. There has been a lot of positivism. A lot of thinking that theory comes immediately out of (or is essentially reducible to) immediate practical experience. This goes along with the tendency to negate the need for a leap from practice to a higher, more abstract, conceptual level of knowledge, and with the notion that theory is related one to one with a particular kind of practice and that theory can only advance in more or less direct relation to such practice, negating the fact that, while in the final analysis all theory has its origin and point of verification in practical experience, this must be seen in broad and not narrow terms and theory can, in important aspects, run ahead of and anticipate practice.

Theory and (political and ideological) line are abstractions from reality which, the more correct they are, the more they can guide us in changing the world in accordance with its actual nature and its actual motion. If you are going to wield theory and line as an instrument to change the world, you have to take it up and wrangle with it in its own right—abstracted from the reality out of which it comes, of which it is a concentration—and to which, yes, as Marx emphasized and we must emphasize, it must be returned in order to change the world. But if you leave out the step of grappling, on the level of abstraction, with theory, you are bound to go astray and land in a pit.

And everybody can deal in abstractions, by the way. It's not only a handful of people who can do this. Revolutionary theory, communist theory, has to be made accessible to masses of people, but they actually engage in abstraction all the time, with different world outlooks. I've never met any basic person, or any person from any stratum, who doesn't have all kinds of theories about all kinds of things—most of them drawn from the bourgeoisie and ultimately reflecting its outlook—although some of them do this only indirectly and appear to be, and to some degree are, ideas and theories that people have "cooked up" on their own, more or less unconsciously reflecting the dominant bourgeois outlook in society. Of course, to make theoretical abstractions that most correctly, deeply and fully reflect reality, in its motion and development, requires taking up the communist world outlook and methodology and increasingly learning to apply this consistently and systematically. And, as Lenin emphasized (in *What Is To Be Done?* and elsewhere), this communist outlook and methodology will not just "come to" the masses of people on their own and spontaneously, but must be brought to them from outside the realm of their direct and immediate experience. But the fact remains that everyone engages in theoretical abstraction of one kind or another—everybody is capable of this—and, fundamentally, it is a question of *how* are you doing this, *with what world outlook and methodology*?

This is an analogy that I have found helpful: Reality is like a fire, like a burning object, and if you want to pick up that burning object and move it, you have to have an instrument with which to do it. If you try to do it bare-handed, the result is not going to be good. That's another way of getting at the role of theory in relation to the larger world that needs to be transformed, in relation to practice, and in particular revolutionary practice, to change the world.

The point is not to remain at the level of abstraction. There are two leaps that must be made. One is to the level of abstraction. The other is back to practice to change the world—in a broad sense, and not a narrow, positivist, pragmatist way, which can only serve reformism and perhaps "revengism" but not radical and revolutionary objectives, not the transformation of the world to bring about the emancipation of all humanity.

This is why I have stressed the point that theory is the dynamic factor in terms of ideology—it's a dynamic factor in changing people's world outlook. It is not that we don't need to struggle with people over things like morality and people's moral responsibilities. In this talk, and in general in my talks and writings, I have emphasized the need to do precisely that because, in fact, this is extremely important. But people's morality, their sense of right and wrong, flows from their understanding of the world. How do you know what is "right" and "wrong"? That flows from a certain understanding of the world—one way or another.

So we need both those leaps. We need to engage on the level of abstraction from reality, concentration of reality, which is what theory and line are. We need to wrangle over things continuously on that level—we need to repeatedly wrangle with what is actually a correct understanding of reality, because reality is not only complex in a

general sense but it is constantly moving and changing, and we are always racing to catch up with it. Even though at times you are able to anticipate things—and in that sense be, in your conception of things, "ahead of" the development of reality—most of the time, or in an overall sense, you are racing to catch up with reality. And that's the way it's going to be. If we don't engage in the realm of abstraction, of theory, we're dead. Simple as that. But if we leave it there, and don't return it back to practice, to change reality—not just in a narrow sense but in the broadest, world-historical sense—then what is the point? In either sense—if we fail to make either leap (from reality to theoretical abstraction and conception, and from that back to practice, to change reality)—then what are we doing?

The Necessity That Is Being Confronted

Now, having spoken to some questions of basic analysis and of outlook and methodology, and with that as a foundation, I want to return again to the situation, to the necessity, that has to be confronted now. From what has been discussed so far, it is possible to see that the necessity facing the U.S. imperialists and in particular the core at the center of power now in the U.S.—and what they have done and are doing in the world in responding to that necessity, as well as how they are moving in relation to the freedom they have perceived that they have in the current situation, particularly since the "end of the Cold War" and the demise of the Soviet Union and its bloc—all this is in turn imposing necessity on all different strata and groups throughout the world, including within the U.S. itself.

Again, to just touch on these points quickly—but as bases and focuses for further reflection and wrangling—for the class of U.S. imperialists themselves, this situation is now impinging on them, and this necessity is making itself felt, in increasingly acute ways. They can't roll back the clock and go back to the situation before they invaded Iraq this time (in 2003) and ousted Saddam Hussein. Some of them might actually *wish* now that they could do that—but they can't. Some of these right-wing commentators were, for awhile, making joking remarks like: "Here's what we should do. We should get Saddam Hussein out of jail, apologize to him, put him back in power, tell him to whip this shit in shape while we ignore what he has to do to get this done." Now, clearly they can't do that. But these jokes themselves are a reflection of "the fine mess they have gotten themselves into," and the fact that, as a result, the necessity that is confronting them is greatly heightened.

And one of the ways this finds expression—and in fact this is another manifestation of, or dimension to, the point about "the pyramid of power"[18] in the U.S. now—is this: Especially in these acute circumstances, as well as in an all-around and basic sense, to really take on and answer the right-wing section of the ruling class and its program and where it is driving things, it would be necessary to get down to, and to hit strongly at, the underlying assumptions and foundations upon which this rests. And *that* the other representatives of the ruling class—including as this is embodied in the Democratic Party leadership—can never do—and do not want to do.

If, for example, you are going to really challenge the thrust of the Iraq War, and the "let's go after Iran" logic, and so on, you have to call into question the whole assumptions of the "war on terror" and you have to bring forth what all that is really all about and is based on. Or, if you are going to take on something like the attacks on affirmative action, you have to talk about the actual history of this country—and all the atrocities, including genocide, slavery, and other horrendous forms of oppression, down to today—that this has involved. And that you cannot do from a ruling class perspective. Or to defend the right to abortion in a truly powerful way, which can answer the many-sided attacks on this—practical, political, and ideological—you have to get into the role of women in this society and the whole historical oppression of women—how that is bound up with other fundamental social and class relations. That, again, is something you cannot do while remaining within the dominant and "acceptable" framework of bourgeois politics and ideology.

This is especially acutely posed in today's circumstances. Bourgeois politicians can't even do what the Church Senate Committee (named after Senator Frank Church) did back 30 years ago. Then, as a result of a whole mass upheaval and growing mass consciousness about the real nature of what the U.S. does around the world, this Senate Committee came out and exposed some of the things the U.S. had done, like in Chile

18. In a number of talks and writings, Bob Avakian analyzes the relations at the top of U.S. society—as well as the relations between various contending forces "at the top" and social bases at various levels of society—in terms of a "pyramid." This analysis can be found, for example, in the DVD of the talk *Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About* (Three Q Productions, available at threeqvideo.com). See also the articles "The Pyramid of Power and the Struggle to Turn This Whole Thing Upside Down" and "The Center—Can It Hold? The Pyramid as Two Ladders," available online at revcom.us.

and other countries where the U.S. pulled off coups and committed other crimes. Today, if you want to represent the ruling class, you cannot do even what the Church Committee did. It's nowhere on the agenda to talk about that stuff. The current situation—and not just the freedom but the necessity of the ruling class—doesn't allow for that kind of discourse, even in watered-down terms.

I was watching this guy Jeff Cohen on Amy Goodman. He was the founder of FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting). He's got this book out: Adventures in Cable News Media.[19] It's an interesting book. It provides exposure of how the mainstream media operate. This is coming from a certain standpoint, different from our own, but it's not without its insights.

Cohen makes an observation that objectively has to do with the "pyramid point." He recalled how, during a break when he was on one of these CNN *Crossfire* shows, he turned to the right-winger, Robert Novak, and said, "Do you really think Pat Buchanan is a liberal?" And, Cohen recounts, Novak went into a whole tirade about how Buchanan is an economic "New Dealer" and a populist and all that. And then Novak said: I was an Eisenhower Republican in the '50s, and everyday since then I've gone further to the right. In commenting on this, Cohen makes the very true and very telling point that you could not get somebody on TV, as a regular and mainstream commentator, who said: "I was a Kennedy Democrat in the '60s, and every day since then I've gone further to the left." No way such a person could ever have any place in the mainstream media—except as some sort of object of ridicule. I mean, Noam Chomsky has been declared to be "from the planet Saturn"—he's way beyond the pale of respectable and acceptable discourse in the mainstream media.

Cohen, who was a producer for the Phil Donahue show before it got kicked off of MSNBC, talks about how, if they wanted to have even a relatively mild left-winger on that show, they were told they had to have at least two or three right-wingers to "balance" that left-winger. And the Donahue show was supposed to be the liberal answer to the right-wing talk shows. But when it got to the question of someone like Chomsky, the "joke"—or, really, more-than-half-serious point—was that if they were going to have Chomsky on, they'd have to have 38 right-wingers for "balance." [*laughs*]

Again, this is not just owing to the organized strength of right-wingers, nor is it merely a matter of corporate dominance in the mainstream media. More essentially, it is a reflection of the necessity that the U.S. ruling class faces–-not just the freedom they are seeking to seize on, but also the necessity and the way in which how they have responded to that necessity has created further necessity impinging, yes, even on them.

But this is also impinging on and confronting all different strata throughout the world—other imperialists in other countries, other ruling classes, for example, like in China and India, or Pakistan. Remember, there was that whole thing about Richard Armitage, the friend of Colin Powell and assistant secretary of state in the first Bush administration—how, right after September 11th, Armitage went to the head of state of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, and basically gave him the "offer he couldn't refuse" routine—insisting that he allow Pakistan to be used as a base for the attack on Afghanistan, and for the "war on terror" more generally. Recently, when Armitage was asked about this, he said—continuing the Godfather routine, or at least his role as the henchman of the big Don—"I never make a threat I'm not in a position to carry out, and I couldn't personally carry that out." Well, *that* was never the point. [*laughs*] The threat was coming from U.S. imperialism—you were just the one delivering the threat.

But, beyond the particularities (and peculiarities) of that, in one way or another what the U.S. is doing impinges on all kinds of ruling elites, and other forces—and not just through direct Mafia-type threats. Every ruling class—in India, China, Russia, France, Germany, and so on—and even lesser ruling classes in various parts of the world, which are fundamentally dependent on and beholden to imperialism—all of them are forced to respond to this. They are all being confronted with this necessity.

And so are all the "popular strata" throughout the world. All the non-ruling class strata, all the different groupings among the people in the U.S. and in countries all over the world, are being confronted with necessity which is stemming mainly at this point from what the U.S. ruling class, and its core at the center of power now, is doing. On a deeper, more fundamental level, all this is stemming from the underlying dynamics of the imperialist system, but in more immediate and proximate terms—in terms of what's directly affecting people right now—it is proceeding to a significant degree out of how the core at the center of power of U.S. imperialism now is perceiving

19. Jeff Cohen, *Cable News Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media* (Sausalito, CA: PoliPoint Press, 2006)

things, including its necessity as well as its freedom, and how it is acting in relation to that. But, again, it is very important to stress that this is not a matter of "all freedom" for them—as powerful as they are, it is far from the case that they can just "do whatever they want." And what they are doing not only involves necessity as well as freedom for *them*; it presents necessity but also—at least potential—freedom for those forces, of various kinds, who are opposed to them. Here, once again, I am using "freedom" not in a more "conventional" sense, but in the sense of confronting and transforming necessity—material reality—in ways that are favorable, are in line with one's objectives.

So there is not a single group in society—and, for that matter, ultimately not a single individual, but in any case not a single stratum or group in society anywhere in the world, from ruling classes down to the most basic masses—which is not being impinged upon and being confronted by these dynamics. Of course, most people are unaware of this, or only vaguely conscious of it—or, even if aware of it in varying degrees, they do not yet have a scientific understanding of it and therefore are not able yet to consciously act to change all this in their own interests, and most fundamentally in the interests of humanity. So the challenge this poses for us, as communists—as those who have the responsibility of acting as the vanguard of the proletarian revolution and moving humanity to a whole new stage and a whole new world—this challenge once again revolves around Mao's "amendment" to Engels: that freedom does not lie just in the *recognition* of necessity, but in the *transformation* of necessity, through struggle. And, especially in these acute circumstances, the orientation, the perspective, and the approach has to be one of wrenching freedom out of all this.

This is being more and more acutely posed. It is true, as I pointed out not long ago: If there are a few more major changes in the world—particularly in this dynamic where Jihad and McWorld/McCrusade mutually reinforce each other while opposing each other—it is going to be qualitatively harder to break out of this dynamic. And this is one of the things we have to join more fully, and struggle over more deeply, with people. You know, sitting on top of a rumbling volcano might somehow seem more comfortable than trying to move, but it's actually not a very good position to be in. [*laughs*] This is what we have to get people to understand.

Attacks on Foundational Things in the History of the U.S.

Along with the whole international dimension of what these imperialists, headed now by the Bush regime, are doing, there is an attack on foundational things in the history of the U.S., with regard to the rule of law and the secular nature of law and government. And it is important to note that the attacks on, and undermining of, these foundational things is causing restlessness and, yes, some movement among people, but this is in *contradictory directions*. Here we see once again the profound truth of that statement—one of the most important points in the Call of World Can't Wait: "That which you do not resist and mobilize to stop, you will learn—or be forced—to accept."

Mao observed that where there is oppression there will be resistance; but this should not be understood in some sort of linear sense. People can capitulate. People can learn or be forced to accept that which they do not resist and mobilize to stop. And you already see this happening. A number of people have commented along these lines:

"I thought that when they showed the pictures of torture at Abu Ghraib, that would be enough—that there would be a mass outpouring of outrage. I thought that when they had the exposure about Fallujah and how the U.S. military basically destroyed that city; I thought when, even after Abu Ghraib, they started openly talking about torture again and legitimizing it; I thought when they began openly talking not only about outlawing abortion, but birth control as well—I thought there would be a mass outpouring."

Well, it isn't going to happen spontaneously. There will be spontaneous outpourings, but the level and the character of massive outpouring of political resistance that is needed—here I'm talking about something short of revolution—this is not going to happen spontaneously. Because that dynamic is at play, where far too many people are learning to accept all this. And an important dimension of this—an important aspect of the problem—is that, when foundational things are brought under attack, this cuts the ground out from under people in terms of resisting. These foundational elements, even as illusory as they are—even with all the illusory elements that they involve—these are the things, or important parts of the things, that people have felt they could stand on, as solid ground from which to engage the world politically, so to speak. And when the ground moves underneath you like that, it's very hard if you're not moving with it—or you're not moving to counter it—it's very hard to find firm

ground to stand on. What you could stand on yesterday, you can no longer stand on tomorrow.

As I touched on a minute ago, there are two foundational things about the history of the U.S., and the exercise of bourgeois rule in the form of bourgeois democracy in this country, which are being brought under frontal attack increasingly. One is the undermining of the rule of law. We see this in a very sharp and concentrated way with the torture law, the so-called "Military Commissions Act," not only in its codification of torture, but also in its gutting of habeas corpus and in the powers that it grants to the executive. This is an attack on the historical basis of the bourgeois Constitution and the rule of law in U.S. society. We've gone into this elsewhere and we should continue to go into it more deeply. Here I'm just going to call attention to it.[20]

This goes along with and interpenetrates, in a very negative "synergy," with the whole Christian fascist attack on the secular foundations of the Constitution and government of the U.S.

Someone said—I think it might have been in the movie *Jesus Camp*—I haven't seen that movie yet, but I believe someone who has seen it recounted this, where one of these fundamentalist preachers said: India is the most religious country in the world, and Sweden is the most secular country; and we're a nation of Indians being ruled by Swedes. Now, as a matter of fact, one of the things about India is that it probably also has the most Maoists in the world, by the way. [*laughs*] It is definitely true that there's too much religiosity there, but describing India as the most "religious" country in the world is not really an accurate and hardly an all-sided characterization. But this statement (about India and Sweden) gets at something nonetheless. And, of course, the significance of this is that these right-wing religious fundamentalists—these Christian fascists, as we very accurately refer to them—want to change the situation so that there is in fact religious rule: law and government based on a literalist reading of the Bible, as interpreted and enforced by religious authorities.

An important thing to keep in mind in regard to this is that, while the U.S. is a very religious country, in the sense that the great majority of people profess some religion, it is *not* true that this is a religious country in the sense these fundamentalist Christian fascists mean it. They mean, and they insist, that not just the people, in their large majority, are religious but that, from its founding, the government and the laws were based on religion, and in particular on Biblical principles (and, of course, their literalist interpretation of those principles). This is not true. It is—yet another—falsification of history. The United States, in its Constitution, and in the basis for its laws, was and has been all along explicitly *secular*. That is, the notion of basing the Constitution and laws on religious, and specifically Christian, precepts was expressly and explicitly *rejected* in the founding of the country. So, again, what is involved here is an attack on another foundational thing about bourgeois society and bourgeois constitutional government in the U.S.—an attack which is being openly and aggressively carried out by the fundamentalist Christian fascist movement. And it is important to keep in mind that this is not just a grouping of isolated fanatics but a powerful force which has connections and influence at the highest levels of the U.S. government.

And then there is the whole way in which the fundamentalist Christian fascist outlook and program interconnects with and serves the grand scale imperial designs of the Bush regime and provides a certain additional element of rationalization for it. I spoke to this in the recent 7 Talks, including "Why We're in the Situation We're in Today…and What to Do About It: A Thoroughly Rotten System and the Need for Revolution" as well as the talk on religion itself ("Communism and Religion: Getting Up and Getting Free—Making Revolution to Change the Real World, Not Relying on 'Things Unseen'"). I am not going to get into this point further here, but I did want to mention a couple of relatively new books that are interesting in this regard: One is *The Theocons—Secular America Under Siege* by Damon Linker, who used to be involved with the Catholic Christian fascists whom he calls theocons. The other one, interestingly enough—I finally broke down and got this book—is *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* by Michelle Goldberg. (Yes, *that* Michelle Goldberg—the one who attacked us in such an unprincipled way in connection with the original "Not In Our Name" statement[21] and the development of a

20. See *Revolution* articles on the Military Commissions Act, online at revcom.us: "The Torture Bill: Compromising Your Way to Fascism" (issue #63); "Facts About the Military Commissions Act (Torture Law)" (#64); "Interview with Bill Goodman, Center for Constitutional Rights—The New Military Commissions Act: 'It is a dangerous moment for all of us'" (#65)

21. The "Not In Our Name" Statement of Conscience, signed by a large number of prominent people in various fields, as well as thousands of others, was originally published as a paid ad in the *New York Times* on September 19, 2002. This statement, and the new Statement of Conscience opposing the Bush government's domestic and international agenda, is available online at nion.us.

movement of opposition to the juggernaut of the Bush regime in the aftermath of September 11—but there are some insights in this book and it is worth reading.)

These frontal attacks on foundational things about constitutional bourgeois democracy in the U.S., interconnecting with the whole international drive to which I've spoken throughout this talk, are raising a lot of profound questions and unsettling people in a lot of ways. But, again, the effect of this is very contradictory—acutely so. This underscores once more the need to break out of linear thinking—the notion that the more that things people really cherish are brought under attack, the more they will resist. No—it's much more contradictory than that. There is an aspect of truth to that, and that is an aspect of the situation, but there are things pushing in the other direction, which I was speaking to earlier in terms of ground to stand on, and that ground being cut away. And the synthesis people need is not going to come from inside the logic with which they've been proceeding with their beliefs and illusions about these foundational things.

This relates to an important point in the *Democracy* book (*Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*), where it speaks to the contradiction between the profession of the imperialists about democracy, on the one hand, and what this amounts to in reality, and how—this is very, very important—at one and the same time this is a *continual source of exposure* of the system *and* a *constant source of regenerating illusions* about the "perfectibility" of this democracy and this system which goes by the name of democracy. So we're going to have to learn even better how to handle correctly that contradiction in a way that moves things and moves people in a positive direction off of that contradiction—in a fundamental sense towards revolution but also, in more immediate terms, towards the kind of massive outpouring of resistance that is urgently needed, involving large and growing numbers of people with a diversity of political and ideological views.

Now, clearly, these attacks on foundational things, which I've been pointing to, are not attacks on the dictatorship of the proletariat—since, unfortunately, that does not exist, anywhere in the world, at this time. No, they are attacks on the form in which historically the dictatorship of the *bourgeoisie* has been exercised in the U.S., in the form of bourgeois democracy. And if we can't correctly understand and handle the contradictions involved in all this, then we're not going to get where we need to go. And it's going to require a lot of work and a lot of struggle, including some acute struggle with people, in order to, at one and the same time, enable increasing numbers of people to shed their illusions while, at any given time, we will be—and will need to be—uniting with large numbers of people who are acting out of motivations that to a significant degree stem from their illusions. This is a contradiction that it is extremely important to handle well.

What was said on the website of World Can't Wait, right after its October 5th (2006) mobilization, is quite correct and has application in terms of the objectives of that organization as well as in an overall sense: There is still time, but there's not a lot of time. There is still time, but not a lot of time, to race to catch up to where we need to be before the dynamic is one that's very hard to reverse, or to transform into something more favorable. Speaking for our Party (and I am sure that, coming from their own perspective, this is also the stand of many other people, including in World Can't Wait), we are never going to quit, we're never going to give up, as long as we're able to do anything. But the question of where are we going to be fighting from—from what position, with what political and social forces, with what popular consciousness gaining initiative, and so on—that's very acutely posed now. All this will have ramifications and implications in terms of everything, down to the most fundamental things concerning the direction of society and the world; the impact is going to be felt for decades—what's going on right now, and what the outcome of this is.

There are all kinds of things—including the prospect of legitimacy crisis and, yes, even the possibility of revolutionary crisis—that could possibly emerge out of all this, without putting a specific time frame or attempting to identify particular dynamics that could lead to this. And, in sort of a back-handed way, you can actually see the question of legitimacy crisis looming in more profound terms than just talk about elections being rigged and stolen, and so on. From what I have heard, there is actually some talk going on in liberal and progressive circles about how maybe a military coup wouldn't be so bad after all! You know, look to the Wesley Clarks, even the Colin Powells—somebody up there who's got some power, within the power structure itself. Partly, this is because some people are becoming convinced—somewhat through work we, and others, have done but more fundamentally reality is working to convince some

people—that these Democrats aren't going to do anything, nothing essential to change the whole direction of things. But if you're still stuck within—if your thinking is still confined within and you haven't yet broken out of—the established and dominant political framework, where do you go next? Revolution? No. At least not immediately. Some of these people think, "Well, then, how about a military coup?!"

Particularly in the middle strata, but not only there, people are looking for some resolution of all this that's going to restore their illusions—and restore what their illusions are based on—without everything getting completely out of hand. And a lot of people in the middle strata—look, let's be honest and confront reality as it is—they fear the Bush regime, they fear upheaval, and they fear the basic masses. Okay, we're being scientists, not emotional people or people who are out for revenge. We have to work our way through those contradictions.

This is the whole point about *emancipators of humanity*—bringing forward a section of the proletariat, and others taking up the proletarian standpoint, who are not coming at it from a petty standpoint. Yes, it's insulting and maddening, what goes on all the time—including the outlook of a lot of people in the middle strata and what is often their attitude toward the basic masses—but, in a fundamental sense, this is the workings of the system. All this stuff is the workings of this system, and that's what we have to enable people to understand. For that matter, the things the masses are pushed into doing, in which they fuck each other up; the way in which these middle strata look at that, the way they look at the basic masses in general—all that is fundamentally the workings of the system. And we have to get to where we're bringing forward a section of people which is aiming to get totally through and *beyond this whole stage of history*, to bring about the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist-imperialist rule, by millions and millions of the masses, leading broader sections of the people, to actually sweep this system aside and bring something better into being in a profound sense.

But to really work toward and contribute to that, we have to understand the terrain, the political terrain. We have to understand—this is Lenin's point in *What Is To Be Done?*—we have to understand the characteristics of different classes and strata while not looking at this in static, undialectical, linear terms but grasping the contradictory ways in which they respond to things. Without being vulgar materialists, determinists, and pragmatists, and while recognizing that this is not some kind of uniform phenomenon, we can say that the proletarians and other basic masses respond to major social and world events in ways that are significantly different from how, in general, people within the middle strata respond to such events. And, of course, within the middle strata, broadly speaking, there are different kinds of responses. The intellectuals and educated strata generally do tend to react to events differently than the shopkeepers, for example, even though Marx is right about the fundamental unity between them, when he speaks about how the democratic intellectuals do not get further in their thinking than the shopkeepers get in their everyday practical dealings—both remain within what Marx called "the narrow horizon of bourgeois right."

We have to understand all this complexity, if we're going to lead this all where it needs to go. And big things are "up." When you hear about people buzzing, or whispering, about military coups, this is a reflection of the fact that questions of legitimacy crisis are "brewing." Once again, all this will not develop in, and must not be approached in, a linear way. It's going to be much more complex and contradictory, and we have to work and struggle our way through this, dealing with all these different contradictions, and all the different levels of expression of these contradictions, while keeping it all going toward where it needs to go.

This is once again an expression of the "drawn and quartered" point.[22] If you think you're just going to go out here and raise a banner and march forward and overcome one obstacle after another with more and more and more people, well then you're going to be in for a big demoralization and disorientation—if you haven't already encountered that many times over. So, to repeat a metaphor I have used before, you have to have a lofty and sweeping vision and big arms to encompass all this—and, through all the acutely contradictory back and forth, twists and turns, and ebbs and flows of it, keep going where it needs to go,

22. In a number of works, including the book *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Insight Press, 2005), Bob Avakian speaks to this concept of being—or going to the brink of being—"drawn and quartered," in developing and leading a revolutionary movement and the new socialist society that will be brought into being through revolution. This is linked to the concept of "solid core, with a lot of elasticity," which Bob Avakian puts forward as a basic guiding principle for the revolutionary struggle and for socialist society, and for those who lead in this process. See, for example, in the *Observations* book, "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World," pp. 43-64, especially p. 64; and "Intoxicated with the Truth," pp. 68-73, including footnote 2 on p. 68.

and get to where there is ultimately a revolutionary situation, at whatever point that comes. This whole process will perhaps involve situations where legitimacy crises arise that don't develop all the way to a revolutionary situation but get resolved short of that, in one way or another, and then you have to struggle for the best resolution of that in line with your fundamental, overall, and ultimate revolutionary objectives.

These are basic points of methodology, and they are extremely important in terms of everything we engage and everything we wrangle with.

The "Two Maximizings" in the Development of the Revolutionary Movement—Among the Basic Masses, Among the Middle Strata

Moving ahead then from that foundation, I want to talk a little bit about the "two maximizings" and the decisive role overall of the first. To very quickly paraphrase here, this ("two maximizings") refers to developing a politicized atmosphere and a revolutionary current—and in particular a growing pole of people partisan to communism and to the Party—among the proletariat and basic masses; and developing essentially the same thing among the middle strata. And then there is the need to develop the "positive synergy" between these "two maximizings"; or, to put it another way (in more "classical communist terms"), the dialectical relation—the mutual interaction and reinforcement—between the two, in a positive way.

You are not going to bring forward a revolutionary force and a communist movement among the basic masses, on anything like the scale that is necessary, and potentially realizable, without there being the development of political ferment and political resistance broadly—and, yes, the development of a revolutionary and communist current—among the middle strata. In the absence of that, the basic masses are going to say to you—and they're going to have a point—that "we'll never get anywhere, we're going to be surrounded, everybody's going to oppose us, and we're just going to be viciously crushed once again." On the other hand, you can't hinge the development of a revolutionary force and a communist movement among the basic masses, and in society in general, on developments among even the progressive section of the middle strata or among the middle strata more broadly. That's not mainly where it's going to come out of. So we have to get the dialectics of this correctly.

We saw some of the positive development (and "synergy") that I'm talking about in the 1960s, for example. Why did the '60s become "the '60s"? It's because, in addition to all the ferment that was largely centered among the middle strata—the youth counter-culture and the anti-Vietnam War movement, and so on—there were masses of people, Black people and others, at the base of society who were expressing in very powerful ways: we refuse to live this way anymore. And, largely as a result of this powerful impulse, things developed beyond the confines in which various reformists and bourgeois forces were trying to contain them; things quite broadly found a revolutionary expression, in a general sense. And this, overall and in a political and ideological sense, lit a fire under all the other different strata in society. In terms of what was going on in U.S. society itself—and in the context of the whole world situation, including the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people to U.S. aggression as well as the Cultural Revolution in China—it was that upsurge "from the base," more than any other factor in American society, which gave the defining character to what "the '60s" became in the U.S. Not the distorted character that is attributed to it now, especially by the ruling class and mainstream media, etc., but its *actual*, extremely positive, radical, and revolutionary character.

I remember seeing a Peter Sellers movie in the early '70s, *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* (if I remember correctly, Alice B. Toklas was credited with coming up with a recipe for "grass" brownies). The movie was about this character, played by Peter Sellers, who was a typical middle class guy, a lawyer who kept getting to the altar to get married and then running away and dropping out. He had a younger brother who was a hippie who had already dropped out, and (to make a long story short) at one point this younger brother takes the Peter Sellers character to a "head shop"—they're looking around, and the hippie younger brother finds a copy of Mao's *Little Red Book* and says: "Oh, you've gotta have one of these. Everybody's gotta have one of these." That scene did actually characterize the times. It was not the way they portray it now. After a certain point—this was very positive, and we must not allow it to be summed up as negative—the revolutionary forces and, in a general sense, a revolutionary culture, had the initiative among very broad sections of society. And there are important lessons in that, in terms of developing the "two maximizings," and their "positive synergy" today.

Emancipators of Humanity

Essential in this—the principal aspect of this, in an overall sense—is bringing forward increasing numbers of the proletariat and basic masses, bringing forward growing waves of people from among the proletariat and basic masses as *emancipators of humanity* who are viewing things from *that* perspective. Revolutionary masses who are taking up the communist outlook and method and are learning to view the reactions and responses and the characteristics of different classes and strata from the point of view of "how do we get to a whole different world?"—and not from the point of view of "how does that affect me, or how does that make me feel?" That's what it means to rise to the level of being emancipators of humanity. It means you see beyond the shortcomings and limitations of these different strata—speaking of the middle strata in particular—and you see the necessity and the challenge of winning them, through a whole complex process, to be on the side of, or at least to a stance of friendly neutrality toward, revolution, preparing the ground politically for, and helping to hasten the time when a revolutionary situation comes into being.

If we don't bring forward a section of the proletariat and basic masses—or growing sections, wave after wave of people—who are consciously motivated as emancipators of humanity, we have no chance for anything good to come out of all this. This definitely does not mean that it's unimportant to work among the middle strata, even with all their limitations. Believe me, the proletariat and basic masses have all kinds of problems and limitations too. The point is that they occupy a different position in society and are propelled toward different things. But here, again, there is the essential question of where they are going to be led, what they are going to be led to do—because, on their own and even with a certain gravitation toward radical solutions, this will not take the fully positive expression it needs, it will not go where it needs to go, without leadership—communist leadership.

And this responsibility falls to us—to those of us, drawn from many different strata in society, who at any given time have taken up the standpoint that corresponds to the fundamental interests of the proletariat, as a class—the outlook and method, and the cause and program, of revolutionary communism. It falls to us to in fact be the vanguard of the proletariat in that sense. If we don't do that, if we shirk or shrink from the responsibility to do that, how are the masses going to understand their own role as the emancipators of humanity? How are they going to be able to see beyond all the difficulties and the tremendous weight on them and the ways in which they're pulled down and pulled toward other things, which do not correspond to their own fundamental interests and the larger interests of humanity? How are they going to be able to realize their potential as the emancipators of humanity if we aren't very clear and firm about this (while also, on the basis of firmness, having flexibility, on the basis of solid core having elasticity)?

The Only Hope the Masses Have—and the Responsibility We Have

This is the only chance the masses have. They don't have any other chance. Mobile Shaw[23] was right: we are collectively the only hope the masses of people have. Of course, there are other communists throughout the world. But collectively we are the only hope the masses of people have and the only hope the world has—hope that all this craziness and destruction and sacrifice that's coming anyway is going to turn toward something much better. We must not shrink from that role. And we must never forget that this is our role, through everything we're doing. Even when we're sitting down and having a cup of coffee with people—and overall in working our way through a lot of things that are short of revolution—we can't ever forget that this is what it's all got to be aimed for. We've got to have those broad arms and that sweeping vision; and, as I've said before, we've got to be willing to go right to the brink of being "drawn and quartered," without allowing that to actually happen, in order to move all this forward.

This is our responsibility. If there's going to be a united front from a strategic standpoint—and if it's going to be a united front under the leadership of the proletariat—in both aspects, and in the essence of this, it requires our leadership. It requires lots of people, from many different strata, taking a lot of initiative and doing a lot of creative things and being unleashed in ways that are unexpected and surprising to us—positively, not only negatively!—but it requires our leadership in overall and fundamental terms.

23. Willie "Mobile" Shaw was a member of the RCP. He grew up in and lived his whole life in the Nickerson Gardens Housing Projects in Watts, Los Angeles; after working with the revolutionaries there for a period of time, he joined the Party. The hardship of his life conditions led to his having a serious illness, and he died on November 24, 2005, due to complications following surgery. See the pamphlet *Statement by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, on the Occasion of the Death of Willie "Mobile" Shaw,* available online at revcom.us.

As I've spoken to a number of times, there are plenty of contradictions, including acute ones, within the proletariat itself, broadly speaking. To point to a very glaring and acutely posed one now, take the contradictions between Black masses, on the one hand, and Latino masses and immigrants, on the other hand. I was talking about this with some comrades not long ago and we were observing (with perhaps slight but unfortunately not great exaggeration) that 90% of the Black masses have a bad line on the immigrants and 90% of the immigrants have a bad line on the Black masses! That's the reality we're dealing with. And how is that going to change? Where are the understanding and the programmatic policies going to come from to lead and mobilize people in a radically different direction and to achieve a synthesis that unites them on the basis of their fundamental interests? Nowhere else than from the standpoint of communism and through our playing our role as a communist vanguard. These are the realities. I don't believe that statement is hyperbole. And if these realities don't show you the need for a communist vanguard, then I don't know what will.

We've got to work and struggle our way through this—through all these contradictions, including those that are fostered between different sections of the basic masses. Where do the fundamental interests of the masses—all these masses—lie? And even the white proletarians—who are not just a few, around and about, but who number in the millions and millions—what are their fundamental interests? And how do those interests get expressed? Or the middle strata in society, including the huge numbers who are straining against the hold of their prejudices and illusions—how are they going to get moved in a way that's going to lead toward a positive resolution out of all the turmoil and upheaval that has been and will increasingly be unleashed in the world—a resolution in the interests of humanity?

We have two things going for us, against all the very big things that we have to confront, the gigantic and momentous things we have to go up against, the very daunting things. One is our dialectical materialist outlook and method, our scientific approach to reality. And the other is reality itself and its motion and development, which that outlook and methodology reflect and encompass. Are the fundamental and essential interests of the masses of people going to be served by Black masses lining up with reactionaries against the immigrants, while the immigrants are mobilized around a line that all Black people are lazy and don't want to work? We know the answer to that—and we should never forget the answer to that. And we should go deeply into this with the masses of people, both in the ideological dimension and practically in terms of what we mobilize them to do and how we mobilize them to take the political stage.

So we have to be, at one and the same time, working among the middle strata and building a metaphorical—or political and ideological—fire under the middle strata, in a good way, by bringing forward increasing numbers of people, particularly from among the basic masses, as revolutionaries, as communists, as emancipators of humanity. And we have to recognize the need to not just engage with, but to struggle—yes, sometimes sharply, but in any case consistently, and at the same time in a principled way and from a lofty plane—to wage struggle with people while having an orientation of striving to win people over and of uniting the greatest number possible at any time, in order for people of all strata to be moved in the way they need to be moved. But we do need to light this political and ideological fire, and we really need to be taking the whole thing, this whole *communist thing*, very boldly out in every corner of society, particularly among the basic masses, but among every strata. If we don't do that, then the attempts, as important as they are, to work among various strata—and to build united fronts involving people of many different ideological and political viewpoints and perspectives, including major united front efforts like World Can't Wait—will not succeed, will not break through on the level and scale they need to.

Never Underestimate the Great Importance of Ideology

In the context of what I have been discussing here, and as a point of basic and overarching importance, I want to emphasize something we could capture with the phrase: "Never underestimate the great importance of ideology."

We have a very negative example of this with the Islamic fundamentalists. The way in which they are proceeding to do what they're doing has a very powerful ideological component to it.

How do people respond to the conditions that they find themselves in? What course or road do they take, and what do they respond to, in the face of those conditions? This is not predetermined. There is not just one way that people respond, automatically and regardless of influences on them. And even the level on which people sacrifice depends on their ideological orienta-

tion to a very significant degree.

Lenin pointed out, for example, in *What Is To Be Done?*, that, in the course of the Russian revolutionary movement, *Iskra*, the newspaper of the Bolsheviks, trained a whole generation in how to live and how to die. And that's what these Islamic fundamentalists are doing, from a very different and fundamentally reactionary standpoint. We can see the very negative effects of this. And, yes, in the short run they have certain things going for them because they can promote metaphysics and idealism, with the notion of another world and how you'll get your reward there. And, of course, it's too late, once you're dead, to find out there's nothing there—including you! But are there things worth living and dying for? This is a profound ideological question. Besides things like these Islamic fundamentalist movements, look at what many people are living and dying for these days, especially the youth, being drawn to crime and gangs, and so on. Where is that going to lead? And what is that going to contribute to and reinforce? But, with all this, it would be a very serious error to underestimate the great importance of ideology, of one kind or another, and how it leads people to act, and be willing to sacrifice—how it trains them, in short, to know how to live and how to die.

And from another angle—talking about the other "historically outmoded"—we shouldn't underestimate the degree to which Bush and company are also attaching great importance to ideology. Bush, in his recent speeches, and others, like Rumsfeld, have continually emphasized that the battle against what they call "Islamic extremist totalitarianism" is not only a major military battle but also the great ideological battle of our time. This is how they're presenting it. And, yes, we can make our jokes about "W," who doesn't know how to pronounce "nuke-u-lar," and so on and so forth, but there are people surrounding him and there is a core there that thinks, that is very deeply ideologically committed and understands the importance of the battle in the ideological realm. That's why they're bringing forward all these World War 2 analogies and all their talk about totalitarianism and extremism, and so on. In other words, they are bringing forward their solid core—with very little elasticity and a lot of absolutism, these days especially. And what can stand up to and really oppose that? In the final analysis, and in fundamental terms, only our solid core—*with* a lot of elasticity, on the correct basis of the necessary solid core.

The relativism and ideological flabbiness so common among the liberals—both those within the ruling class, but also more broadly in society, including the liberals and progressives among the middle strata—this is not capable of and is not going to stand up to the reactionary solid core in the ruling class—nor, for that matter, to the reactionary solid core of the Islamic fundamentalist phenomenon.

And here I want to return to Michelle Goldberg. Despite, or in some ways actually because of, her own worldview, including the influence of Hannah Arendt's notions of totalitarianism, the following from "our old friend" Michelle Goldberg provides a valuable window into the thinking of many liberals and progressives these days. She says: "Ideologies that answer deep existential needs are hugely powerful." That's a profoundly important point.[24] Then, after making this very crucial basic point—"Ideologies that answer deep existential needs are hugely powerful"—Goldberg goes on:

"The Christian nationalists [or what we would call Christian fascists—BA] have one. And their opponents largely do not. Today's liberalism has many ideas and policy prescriptions, but given the carnage born of utopian dreams in the 20th century, it is understandably distrustful of radical, all-encompassing political theories. It is cau-

24. ***[FOOTNOTE BY THE AUTHOR]*** In the context of this statement by Goldberg, as well as for more general and fundamental reasons, it is important to keep in mind that, contrary to the way in which it is often, even generally, presented in this society, ideology does not necessarily mean an instrumentalist approach to "organizing reality" in pursuit of desired ends, which bears little or no relation to how reality actually is. Communist ideology is definitely a worldview and set of principles to live by, on the one hand; and at the same time it is, in fundamental terms, in accordance with reality and its motion and development, and is a means for scientifically engaging reality. This is why we say that communist ideology is both *partisan*—it stands with and for a definite side among the contending social forces in the world, the side of proletarian revolution and the advance to communism—and it is *objective*: it seeks an objective, scientific understanding of reality, in order to transform it in accordance with the advance to communism, and since that advance is objectively possible and its possibility is expressed in the way the fundamental contradictions in human society are tending, on a world scale, there is no need for communists to distort reality, or contort it, to make it fit their aims and objectives—and, on the contrary, any such distortion and contortion will actually work *against* the advance to communism. Of course, it has not always been the case that communists have acted in accordance with this fundamental truth—there have been marked tendencies in the history of the communist movement to fall into adopting various forms of "political truths"—in other words, stating as truths things which are in reality *not* true but which seem convenient at the time (an approach Lenin identified philosophically and criticized as "Truth as an organizing principle" or "organizing experience"). But the fact remains that, as a matter of basic principle, communism as a worldview and method rejects such instrumentalist approaches and recognizes the fundamental epistemological principle that, as I have put it in another discussion: "Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism." (See "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology: On Knowing and Changing the World," in Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, Insight Press, 2005.)

tious and skeptical. Liberals don't want to remake the world; they just want to make it a little better." (Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*, pp. 191-92)

Well, there's a lot packed into that statement. This is why it's worth reading people like this, even after they've slandered us (which Goldberg did a few years ago, in connection with the original "Not In Our Name" statement and the political movement which that statement helped to inspire). Here is a classic example of someone who is highly disturbed by developments in U.S. society, in particular the growing influence of Christian fascism. From reading this book it is clear that she would like to keep things, including opposition to this fascist trend, within certain bounds, but she has a sense that this may not be possible. This is very profound in its implications, in a number of ways. So, in a certain sense, "there you have it" in those few sentences—a lot is actually captured there—including a window into the highly distorted way that people like Goldberg are viewing the experience of communist-led revolution and socialist society in the 20th century (a major part, if not the heart, of what she is referring to with the phrase: "the carnage born of utopian dreams in the 20th century"). And this is why, in a general and overall sense, it is worth it and necessary to investigate what people from all different strata are thinking, both when they systematize it like this and through broader investigation to find out about, and make a synthesis from, more scattered and unsystematic ideas and sentiments among people in different parts of society.

But, with all this, it is extremely important to keep in mind a profound point from Marx. To paraphrase (and somewhat expand upon) what he says: what matters fundamentally is not what anyone or any group of people might want subjectively, or might be thinking at any given point, but what the underlying and driving contradictions and dynamics will confront people with. Among other things, this underscores the great importance of our solid core, ideologically as well as politically—a solid core which is dialectically related to, and in an essential way encompasses, elasticity and which can lead the way to in fact radically remaking the world to bring into being something far better.

"Maintaining Our Strategic Nerve"

In the context of everything going on today, everything that has to be confronted and cries out to be radically transformed in a much better direction, I want to emphasize this basic point of orientation: In the face of the difficulties, in the face of even defeats along the way, in the face of falling on our face at times, it is very important, especially at crucial junctures, that—to use a certain phrase—we *not lose our strategic nerve*. It's very easy in the face of tremendous necessity and great difficulties, in the face of certain setbacks and of people flying in all directions, to lose your strategic nerve—to lose your grip on what actually is underlying and driving things and to be swept away in one form or another—either carried away with positive things or quite often carried away with disappointments—and to just openly go in the direction of throwing up your hands and capitulating, or to go off into an infantile direction, which is in fact the "mirror image" of capitulation and leads to the same ultimate result.

Now I want to say, just for the record, that at times I myself have been acutely disappointed by—and, yes, have cursed in graphic terms—the people in this society who are sitting by and doing nothing in the face of atrocities and horrors committed by their government and in their name—I would bet that I have done this at least as much as anyone else who has set out to mobilize people to do what needs to be done to change the present disastrous course of things and to radically transform society in a positive way. But what do we do then?

There is a tremendous gap between what is going on—and the rapid pace at which more and greater outrages and atrocities are being committed and being prepared by those in power in the U.S.—and, on the other hand, what people are doing, or not doing, in terms of political resistance to oppose this, in the massive and determined way that is required. This is a very acute contradiction. But what do we do in the face of that—what do we do, in order to transform that in a positive direction? Do we keep our fundamental and strategic orientation, and work and struggle through the contradictions—do we persevere, but with the necessary sense of urgency that the situation demands? Or are we going to search for gimmicks, or throw up our hands and give up? Are we going to, in one way or another, lose our strategic nerve? In speaking of "strategic nerve," I mean this in the sense of our basic and strategic orientation, not in some sense of "personal courage," in the absence of and divorced from that orientation. Another way to say this, another crucial expression of this, is that we can't lose our materialism and our dialectics.

The clock is ticking down. We are not operating in a vacuum here. U.S. society is in fact

being remade in a fascist direction, with implications for decades to come; the world is increasingly being subjected to the attempts of those in power in the U.S. to further bludgeon things into correspondence with their needs, aims and objectives; and there are the very real, negative effects of the continuing dynamic where McWorld/McCrusade and Jihad mutually reinforce each other even while opposing each other—with already terrible and potentially far more disastrous consequences. But, at the same time and largely as a result of all this, a lot of people are running up against what someone has described as sort of a "cusp" or "trough." They're running up against the fact that the ways they thought they could affect the political direction of U.S. society, and the role of the U.S. in the world—those ways don't work. Those doors are being increasingly slammed in their faces. But they haven't yet made the determination—haven't yet been won—to the fact that they have to make some radical ruptures in terms of their political views and actions, even short of the full rupture of going for revolution. And if we were to lose our strategic nerve—in other words, our strategic orientation and methodology and approach—that would be especially criminal in this context.

Instead, we have to be combining, in the correct way, perseverance and urgency—persevering, but not in an aimless, timeless way, persevering with the appropriate and necessary sense of urgency—learning, as we struggle, to break through on these contradictions and carrying forward that dialectical process of unity-struggle-unity with a broad and diverse range of people and political forces, not only in such major efforts as World Can't Wait but in other key arenas, too, and in an overall way. At the same time, we have to be much more vigorously and boldly taking our full revolutionary, communist line in a truly big way out to the masses—to basic masses, but to other strata as well. And, in line with the very great and urgent needs, as well as in terms of our fundamental orientation and objectives, we must make further, and increasingly greater, advances in building the Party as the revolutionary, communist vanguard the masses need—building and strengthening the Party both quantitatively and qualitatively—continually increasing its numerical strength and not only its organizational but, even more essentially and fundamentally, its ideological and political solid core, and the corresponding elasticity, initiative, and creativity grounded in and flowing from that solid core.

Strategic Repolarization—for Revolution

Now, having stressed the tremendous importance of ideology, I also want to emphasize the need to grasp the importance of political line and policy and of providing practical means for masses of people to mobilize to change the world. There's a need to apply the two "mouthful formulations." The first one, from "Strategic Questions,"[25] has to do with how, in the development of political movements and the political struggle overall, to continuously forge (and reforge under new conditions) unity as broadly as possible so that it is objectively in line with and furthering the aims of the proletarian revolution and so that, at any given time in that process, as many people as possible are being won and influenced in their subjective consciousness toward the communist position, without however overstepping and undermining the correct unity for the given circumstances, which will be on a level different from, and short of, support for the communist position and proletarian revolution. And the second "mouthful formulation," which has been drawn from *GO&GS* (*Great Objectives and Grand Strategy*),[26] has to do with identifying and moving around—bringing forward political resistance and mobilization on a mass scale in relation to—concentrations of major contradictions in society and the world, and how that in turn contributes to moving everything toward revolution.

The overall work of our Party is, in significant measure, an application of these "two mouthfuls." This is an application of the united front under the leadership of the proletariat, in terms of policy and program. And it is very important to see every aspect of our Party's work not as a thing unto itself but as part of an overall strategic approach. An overall strategic approach and a means for what? For revolution—for repolarizing in a way more favorable for revolution and to prepare the ground, politically, for the emergence of a revolutionary situation and, relatedly, the emergence of a revolutionary people in the millions and millions.

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

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

And, if we look at things in terms of repolarization for revolution, the following formulation is very relevant and important—not speaking to any particular immediate situation so much as with strategic and overall considerations in mind:

What's being argued for is, if we do work correctly, we can take advantage of the paralysis of significant sections of the bourgeoisie; isolate to the maximum degree possible this really hardcore section of the bourgeoisie; and, with the necessary qualitative change in the objective situation, go after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie as a whole.

Confronting Daunting Problems

Now, in moving closer to a conclusion (see, I'm dangling that prospect out there!), I want to speak to something I have formulated previously (I believe it was the "Reaching/Flying"[27] series that ran in our newspaper a few years ago), where I spoke about "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 not to project some phony posture of humility: "We're very modest—there are some things we know how to do, in fact there are really important things we don't know how to do. Isn't that great?" No, it's very bad, it's a very real problem, that we don't know how to do these things. The point is to call attention to the fact that we'd better work on these things—in the appropriate way and not in inappropriate ways.

Dealing with Heightening Repression

So, let's talk briefly about this. Resisting the heightening repression—this is a gigantic challenge. I mean, let's do keep in mind that bourgeois democracy is after all bourgeois *dictatorship* where democracy is ultimately and fundamentally only for the ruling class and those who serve its interests and dictatorship is exercised over the rest; but it's not good what's happening right now, the way they're moving with that bourgeois dictatorship, the way they are markedly and openly stepping up the repression and undercutting the ground from which to oppose and resist it. It's not good for the people of the world. It's not good for the people in this country, and it's not good for the organized forces of political resistance, and not good for us as the vanguard of the necessary revolutionary movement. It's very bad. The fact that, on the orders of the President and his functionaries, anybody can be yanked out and put in a deep freeze, locked up with no rights, subjected to torture and perhaps never heard from again—that is not a good thing in any sense! This is posing itself very acutely and urgently now, and again you find the problem that foundational things are being undermined so that people are losing their sense of even what to stand on to fight some of these things—which is a significant part of the purpose of undermining these foundational things.

And then there is the dynamic of "that which" (as the Call of World Can't Wait emphasizes: "That which you do not resist and mobilize to stop, you will learn—or be forced—to accept"). If you don't fight something, you don't forge the means for fighting it—for resisting it and building massive political opposition—and you are much further behind in being able to fight not only that outrage but the ones which are coming behind it and for which it is preparing the ground. And a major part of the dynamic these days is this: What was yesterday's outrage becomes today's institutionalized and codified reality. This dynamic is very, very bad and poses very serious problems on many different levels—on the level of the mass movement and mass resistance, and on the level of organized political forces, and yes, definitely, on the level of vanguard leadership. For anybody with progressive sentiments, and certainly anybody with a revolutionary orientation, if this is not giving you nightmares, there is something very wrong.

So we (and by "we" I mean not just our Party but the broader movement and broader forces of opposition) have to come from way behind on this, and very urgently—in a very telescoped way and on different levels and in different dimensions at one and the same time: We have to develop resistance to the repression while learning how to not just survive the repression that will come anyway (and, in some aspects, may even be heightened in response to resistance) but also to forge the means for advancing politically and in an overall sense in the face of this heightening repression and in the face of the shifting ground.

In terms of our Party and in the most fundamental terms, it is going to take the highest level of application of our scientific world outlook and methodology to be able to rise to this challenge. We are way behind on this, and there are no easy answers to it. And the dialectical relations are very difficult to handle correctly, particularly the

27. *Reaching for the Heights and Flying Without a Safety Net* is a talk given by Bob Avakian in 2002. Excerpts from the talk appeared in *Revolutionary Worker* #1195-1210 (April 20-August 17, 2003) and are available online at revcom.us/avakian/avakian-works.html.

dialectical relation between taking risks politically and practically in order to get into a position to better deal with the repression, vs. what you lose, or might lose, by taking such risks. This is an extremely intense contradiction—a very acute and very, very daunting challenge. And this has to be fought through on the level of forging policies and approaches for the mass movement and for the vanguard in different dimensions.

When they are gutting habeas corpus and codifying torture, when they actually now have brought legal charges of treason against someone—I am referring to someone who is an Islamic fundamentalist nutcase, but they're charging him with treason for making videotapes in support of Jihad against America—think of the implications of that. And they always do things like this, to the degree they can, with people they think will be—and in some cases may actually be—the least defensible, in order to scare everybody away and to turn everybody off from rising to oppose this. I hope everybody is taking note not just of the ongoing rantings of Ann Coulter and David Horowitz and that ilk about treason, but also of the comment by Gary Bauer who, after seeing the October 4th World Can't Wait ad in the *New York Times*, said: If that's not treason, I don't know what is.[28] Well, if an ad like that, opposing torture and other crimes against humanity of the Bush regime—if that is denounced as treason, think about the implications of that. And Gary Bauer is not a minor figure. He might not be right in the inner core of the ruling class, at this time, but if so he's at most only a couple of rungs away.

We have to take all this very seriously. If we don't yet know how to deal with all this, we'd better make leap after leap in developing the ability to do so, with the necessary sense of urgency and through the dialectical back and forth between practice and theory in this regard. We must not allow a situation to unfold that will just foster further demoralization among the masses, especially basic masses, who are already inclined, in large numbers, to say: "I told you, you can't do anything. Anytime you try to do anything, they'll just come and wipe out the organizations and the leaders." I don't want to see that again. And I don't want to see people have to conclude that you can't build mass resistance, let alone a revolutionary movement, because they'll just come and devastate this with repression. This is not just some subjective thing—"I don't want to see this"—this has to do with what we are all about, with the fundamental needs and highest interests of the masses of people and ultimately of humanity—as communists we cannot allow this to happen. And, to invoke again and give particular emphasis to that Dylan line: "Let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late."

As has been seen in the history of the communist movement on an international level, in the experience of socialist states in relation to the overall worldwide revolutionary struggle, and in the experience in particular countries: repeatedly there have been situations where heightened possibilities and potential openings for advance, perhaps for great qualitative advance, often, or even generally, go hand in hand with greatly heightened dangers and the prospect of profound losses and setbacks. This is what the Soviet Union faced in the context of World War 2 and in relation to the question of advancing, or not, the international communist movement and the international revolutionary struggle. It's what China faced at the juncture where, in the late 1960s and early '70s, the Soviet Union was seriously threatening China with attack, perhaps even with nuclear weapons.

What can get posed at such critical junctures is not just greatly heightened dangers in some abstract or general sense, but the risk of losing everything, at least for a certain period of time. Being able to—or developing in the midst of intensifying contradictions the ability to—forge, and to continue forging in new circumstances, the means to handle these contradictions correctly, and well, is of decisive, strategic, and at times even world-historic importance. And, without overstating things, this is one of those times.

Approaching Revolution, and Winning, in a Serious Way

The other thing that I have said we don't know how to do is, when the time comes, be able to win. We don't know how to get over the first hump of seizing power through a mass revolutionary upsurge. To put it bluntly and somewhat crudely, to emphasize the reality people face: Those who rule the U.S.—and much of the world—are some powerful nasty motherfuckers who have an ideological solid core that doesn't give a fuck about killing millions of people, is firmly convinced that it represents everything good in the world and that any opposition to it, especially of any essential or fundamental nature, represents a concentration of evil in the world and needs to be

28. For more on the treason indictment and Bauer's remark, see "The Federal Treason Indictment: Threatening Extreme Punishment for Public Speeches," *Revolution* #66 (Oct. 22, 2006), online at revcom.us.

stamped out. We should reflect on that very seriously.

Recently, Rumsfeld and others in and around the Bush regime have been making an analogy which, in immediate terms, they are applying to Islamic fundamentalists. They speak of how, a century ago, at the beginning of the 20th century, this guy Lenin wrote this pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*; and, they say, "If we had known everything this would lead to, through the course of that century, wouldn't we have moved to stamp that out right then and there?" Well, on the surface—and in the main aspect now—they are making an analogy to Islamic fundamentalists today (bin Laden and others), but they are also making a general point. And if we don't listen and take heed of the broader point they are making, well… Bush couldn't get that saying right, but we can render it a little differently: If they tell you once, and if you don't listen, shame on you. And if they tell you a bunch of times and you still don't listen, then you have no right to be calling yourself a vanguard or anything like that. You have no right to step out before people and say, follow us.

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 to crush any attempt to bring a new world into being. Not long ago a very important statement was published in *Revolution* newspaper, "Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation—in Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortions of Revolution." This was both a matter of necessity—it was necessary to clear up some confusion that had been created—and a matter of seizing freedom out of this necessity to put forward before people a serious and scientific presentation of what this revolution is about and how in fundamental terms it has to be gone about.

This statement is worth reading here, in its entirety.

"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.

"A bedrock, scientific understanding which must underlie the development of such a revolutionary movement is that [and here this statement quotes from the first of the Three Main Points that are run regularly in *Revolution*]:

"The whole system we now live under is based on exploitation—here and all over the world. It is completely worthless and no basic change for the better can come about until this system is overthrown.

"And that:

"In a country like the U.S., the revolutionary overthrow of this system can only be achieved once there is a major, qualitative change in the nature of the objective situation, such that 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. In this struggle for revolutionary change, the revolutionary people and those who lead them will be confronted by the violent repressive force of the machinery of the state which embodies and enforces the existing system of exploitation and oppression; and in order for the revolutionary struggle to succeed, it will need to meet and defeat that violent repressive force of the old, exploitative and oppressive order."

I am going to continue reading this statement, but people could very well benefit from studying this over many times to see how things are said and how they are not said, and the ways in which attention is paid to how fundamental principles are put forth while at the same time infantile posturing is avoided—and not only infantile posturing, but other ways in which the enemy can actually be aided, by stating things in a way that does not conform to what is actually intended and what will actually advance the struggle.

This statement goes on:

"Before the development of a revolutionary situation—and as the key to working toward the development of a revolutionary people, in a country like the U.S.—those who see the need for and wish to contribute to a revolution must focus their efforts on raising the political and ideological consciousness of masses of people and building massive political resistance to the main ways in which, at any given time, the exploitative and oppressive nature of this system is concentrated in the poli-

cies and actions of the ruling class and its institutions and agencies—striving through all this to enable growing numbers of people to grasp both the need and the possibility for revolution when the necessary conditions have been brought into being, as a result of the unfolding of the contradictions of the system itself as well as the political, and ideological, work of revolutionaries.

"In the absence of a revolutionary situation—and in opposition to the revolutionary orientation and revolutionary political and ideological work that is actually needed—the initiation of, or the advocacy of, isolated acts of violence, by individuals or small groups, divorced from masses of people and attempting to substitute for a revolutionary movement of masses of people, is very wrong and extremely harmful. Even—or especially—if this is done in the name of 'revolution,' it will work against, and in fact do serious damage to, the development of an actual revolutionary movement of masses of people, as well as to the building of political resistance against the outrages and injustices of this system even before there is a revolutionary situation. It will aid the extremely repressive forces of the existing system in their moves to isolate, attack and crush those, both revolutionary forces and broader forces of political opposition, who are working to build mass political resistance and to achieve significant, and even profound, social change through the politically-conscious activity and initiative of masses of people."

Again, I would seriously recommend that people study this over and over again to see how the contradictions were handled on all different kinds of levels.

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.

If either one of these tracks is ignored or not correctly dealt with, then the possibility for revolution will be thrown away even if the objective conditions for revolution should come into being. And it will not just be "oops, the chance was missed." It will be a terrible debacle and disaster for not just the organized forces of revolution but for millions of people and a betrayal of what communists are supposed to be about and work toward and contribute to, in terms of the transformation of the whole world.

Nobody can guarantee anybody the emergence of a revolutionary situation, correctly understood, at any given time. We're not fortune tellers, and we're not sellers of some sort of bromide that cures all diseases—we're not religious hucksters, charlatans, and opportunists. And no one can guarantee that, even if you get the most favorable situation possible under a given set of circumstances, you are going to win. But if all this is not approached with all the seriousness that has been emphasized, if it is taken up irresponsibly and without a clear sense of what should and should not be done, and what is correct and appropriate and what is highly incorrect and inappropriate, then the name of communists is not deserved, the name of vanguard is a bitter irony at best.

Conclusion

The essential challenge that we face, not just in a general and historical sense, but very urgently—the question that is posed, not only in an overall strategic sense but also immediately and acutely—is one of being the vanguard of the future, or at best the residue of the past. And the dimensions and the stakes of this are constantly increasing.

This applies to our Party. It involves the question of being, in a sense, real, concentrated expressions of the emancipators of humanity and leaders of the emancipators of humanity. And the same challenge applies on the international level to the communist movement and in terms of the internationalist responsibilities of communists.

Are we going to go down as a residue of the past and another disappointment and in fact another arrow in the back of the masses of people? Or, without any guarantees of victory in any particular set of circumstances but with strategic objectives and a sweeping view in mind, are we going to rise to the challenge of being, together with our comrades throughout the world, the vanguard of the future?

ABOUT BOB AVAKIAN

Bob Avakian is Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party USA. A veteran of the Free Speech Movement and the revolutionary upsurges of the 1960s and early 1970s, he worked closely with the Black Panther Party. By the mid-1970s, he emerged as the foremost Maoist revolutionary in the United States. He has guided the RCP since its formation in 1975 and is a major leader of the international communist movement. Over the last 25 years, Avakian has produced a highly significant body of work, and he approaches Marxism as a living, developing science that must be constantly interrogating itself.

Avakian has penned the most comprehensive account of Mao's theoretical contributions to Marxism. He has been undertaking an ongoing examination of the experience of proletarian revolution in the 20th century—its great achievements, in particular the profound lessons of the Cultural Revolution in China, as well as its setbacks, shortcomings, and mistakes. He has been addressing issues of revolutionary strategy, in the U.S. and for the international movement. He has analyzed why revolution is not only necessary but also possible within the U.S. itself.

Through these and other critical investigations, Avakian has been bringing forward a vision of socialism and communism that breaks vital new ground for Marxism and the communist project. He has been deepening and enlarging the understanding of the tasks and contradictions bound up with the exercise of revolutionary authority and how the masses can be unleashed to rule and transform society. In recent writings, he has been speaking to the indispensable role of dissent in socialist society—how it contributes to deeper knowledge of socialist society, the critical spirit that must permeate it, and the continuing struggle to transform socialist society towards communism. He has been drawing attention to the importance of the intellectual and cultural spheres under socialism and to the revolutionary process, and historic problems, in understanding and approach of the international communist movement. In works such as *Conquer the World?—The International Proletariat Must and Will* and *Getting Over the Two Great Humps: Further Thoughts on Conquering the World*, he has been conceptualizing the international dimensions of communist revolution in ways that have far-reaching implications for the world struggle.

Avakian's writings are marked by great breadth—from discussions about religion and atheism and morality, to the limits of classical democracy, to basketball. It is often alleged that a vanguard party is incompatible with a searching, critical, and creative intellectual enterprise. Avakian gives the lie to this claim.

From his life experience and revolutionary perspective comes a profound sense of the struggles and sentiments among the masses of people; and he keeps his fingers on the pulse of the movements of opposition in society more broadly. This is a revolutionary leader who has said about leadership: "if you don't have a poetic spirit—or at least a poetic side—it is very dangerous for you to lead a Marxist movement or be the leader of a socialist state."

Bob Avakian is the visionary leader of a Maoist vanguard party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, which has its sights on the revolutionary seizure of power and the radical transformation of society in the colossus that is late imperial America—all as part of a worldwide process of revolutionary struggle whose final aim is communism, a world without exploitative and oppressive relations and the corresponding political structures, institutions, and ideas and culture.