Reaching for the Heights and Flying Without a Safety Net

by *Bob Avakian*

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Editors' Note: The following is taken from the transcript of a tape-recorded talk by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP, toward the end of 2002. It was originally intended for distribution among Party members and others close to the Party, in particular revolutionaries of the newer generations, but we are happy to be able to share excerpts from this talk with our readers. They have been edited and footnotes have been added for publication here.

Part 1: Without Revolution There Can Be No Fundamental Change, Without State Power All Is Ultimately Illusion

To begin, I want to set a certain context and frame this in terms of the historic and strategic goals of our whole cause. The first thing I want to say very straightforwardly is that communists have to have an orientation that what is required to fundamentally transform society is seizing and then holding on firmly to state power, because everything we're talking about has no meaning ultimately if state power is not won. There is also the question of what we do with state power, *and* who the "we" is who has state power—whether it's power exercised, in a fundamental sense, by the masses of people, as opposed to just a small group—all of which I want to talk further about later. But we have to have a bedrock orientation that the aim is to seize and then hold on firmly to state power, or else there's no point ultimately to everything we're doing.

Now, that doesn't mean that it's not important to wage struggles around particular abuses and outrages, particular faultlines or concentrations of contradictions in society—it's very important to do that. And it's very important to actually strive to win these battles. It's not just a matter that we get into these struggles simply for the purpose of being together with masses in some sort of general abstract sense; nor is it a matter that we get involved simply in order to propagate our revolutionary vision and program—although we most definitely must do that, in a living way. But it's actually important not only to wage these battles but to actually seek to win them—to win real victories and to beat back real attacks. But, in the final analysis, without revolution, the fundamental conditions of the masses, not just in any particular country, but worldwide—their oppression and their tremendous and unnecessary suffering—are going to continue. So it's important that we have that understanding as kind of a guiding star for everything we're doing, or else what we're doing will ultimately not amount to anything. This is another way of expressing that phrase from Lenin: without state power all is illusion.

This is something that has been emphasized in the interview that I did with Carl Dix earlier this year.[1] One example that is given in that interview is the whole tremendous struggle around Vietnam. There was actually a 10-year-long struggle that went on from let's say 1964-'65 till the glorious scene of those American helicopters leaving Saigon in '75—a shameful moment for the imperialists and a moment of tremendous exhilaration for revolutionaries and for masses of people all over the world. That was a 10-year-long battle. It went through a lot of phases.

One of the points that is important to keep in mind, as stressed in that interview, is that it's not like sometimes it's presented in retrospect—like everybody, including most of the bourgeoisie (!), was always against the Vietnam War, and somehow it just continued—this was not the case at all. It was tremendous struggle, first of all and most essentially on the part of the Vietnamese people but also on the part of the people supporting them, including an important element played by the growing opposition to that war within the U.S. And there were real sacrifices made. You know about Kent State. You should know about Jackson State, where Black students were murdered by the state, and there were tremendous outpourings of opposition like the Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War that were brutally attacked (and a Chicano journalist was murdered by the police during that Moratorium). I personally recall many demonstrations in which I took part that were viciously attacked by the police, and even the

[1] Excerpts from the interview appeared in RW #1155-56, 1158-64, 1166-68, 1171, 1173-74 which appeared between June 16 and November 10, 2002. Audio available on CD from Revolution Books stores and outlets or RCP Publications.

National Guard, and in one of these demonstrations someone was shot and killed by the police.

A lot of sacrifices were made by a lot of people in the context of that whole period, around Vietnam and in other struggles. And towards the end of that war, even when the prevailing opinion among the powers-that-be came to be they had to accept defeat and get out of Vietnam, they didn't just say: "OK we lost, we give up" or "we lost, therefore you who opposed this war get to sum it up." That's not the way things work.

The Struggle for Summation

Even the summation of what happened is a part of the class struggle. That's true in any particular battle and it's definitely true of major battles. It's true, as we see now, in terms of summing up the experience of socialist countries. How do you sum that up? The summation of what happened there is a tremendous and intense battle, a key part of the class struggle. If you go, for example, to bookstores anywhere in the world you'll see just endless propaganda, directly put out or promoted by the bourgeoisie, which heaps slander on the experience of socialist countries, including all these anecdotal accounts by different people of how they were mistreated in the Cultural Revolution in China—and it's presented as if what happened to this or that individual or this or that village is the essence of the whole Cultural Revolution. This is a conscious attempt—at least on the part of the ruling classes who promote such things—to distort and even to obscure and cover up the actual essence of what went on, to confuse people and to keep them from even understanding what the actual situation was, what the profound and complex contradictions were that Mao and other revolutionary leaders were confronting, what their actual aims and objectives and principles and methods were, what were the actual terms of this momentous struggle, what were the programs and objectives of the contending forces, what would be the consequences for the masses if one side or the other won out—and what *have been* the horrible consequences, for the masses of people in China since, unfortunately, the revisionists (the people like Deng Xiaoping and the current rulers of China) ultimately won this battle and have taken China down the road back to capitalism (which is what actually exists now in that country). This is the way the class struggle goes—summing up particular battles, or world-historic questions like the experience of socialist countries, is always going to be part of the class struggle as long as there are classes and class struggle.

One of the things that, to a significant degree, was disorienting for a whole generation of people (essentially my generation, if you want to put it that way) was the experience around Vietnam and the tremendous struggle this involved. After a certain point, in the U.S. itself, as well as in many other countries throughout the world, there were legions of people out demonstrating who were shouting things like "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, The NLF is gonna win." [2] And they really wanted the NLF to win—they had really come to see who were the people they should be siding with in the world. They wanted their own government to go down to a righteous defeat, they wanted those people waging revolutionary struggle against U.S. imperialism to win.

But there wasn't a lot of understanding—there was only understanding among a small number of people at that time—that there was a growing

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[2] For many years, until his death in 1969, Ho Chi Minh was head of the Vietnamese Workers Party and the leader of the Vietnamese people's liberation struggle against colonial domination; after World War 2 he led liberation wars against: first, France (which was backed by the U.S.) and then the U.S. itself; and after his death, Ho Chi Minh remained the rallying symbol in the continuing and ultimately victorious war to drive out the U.S. The NLF (National Liberation Front) was a united front, led by the Vietnamese Workers Party, in the southern part of Vietnam. The U.S. moved in to occupy the southern part of Vietnam after the French were defeated and forced to leave Vietnam in 1954 and the U.S. ruled over the south, through a succession of puppet governments, until the U.S. in turn was defeated and forced out of Vietnam in the 1970s. The NLF was the political formation through which the liberation struggle was led in the south of Vietnam.

revisionist influence within the Vietnamese Workers Party, the leadership of that struggle. (This revisionist influence was expressed particularly in increased reliance on the Soviet Union, which by then had become a *social-imperialist* power—socialist in name but imperialist in deed and in essence—which was seeking to make use of the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people for its own ends, seeking to bend that struggle to make it serve Soviet imperialist objectives and contention with the U.S. for top-dog position in the world.) But, again, this was not widely understood or widely accepted at that time; and, in particular, within the ranks of those who supported the Vietnamese people in their war of liberation against U.S. domination, it was only those who took up the analysis Mao made of the social-imperialist nature of the Soviet Union, who were able to get a basic understanding of the realities and the complex and contradictory nature of all this.

So many people actually thought that, when the NLF won, great things were going to result from that. And that was one of the most disorienting and demoralizing things for people who were part of that generation, including many who were part of that decade-long struggle against the Vietnam War. When the NLF did "win," when the U.S. was driven out, when the government led by the Vietnamese Workers Party consolidated power over the whole country, the result was not good. It was not good for the people of Vietnam, because the influence of the Soviet Union and of revisionism increasingly exerted itself. That was a contradiction running all throughout that struggle—the contradiction between the just and heroic liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people, in which they made tremendous sacrifices in defeating the U.S., and on the other hand the growing revisionist influence that was running counter to and would eventually undermine that victory. This was a heroic struggle, a genuine struggle of liberation in which millions lost their lives—in the context of the overall international situation, the Vietnamese took on and defeated this monstrous power, U.S. imperialism. And yet the ultimate result was what we have seen unfolding in Vietnam over the last 25 years, where now they have Nike and everything else running in there, super-exploiting the people of Vietnam.

So this was very disorienting for many people: What was all that struggle for? And, when the NLF won, what happened—and why? How come it turned out to be as bad as it is? It gave tremendous grist to the propaganda mill of the imperialists. And I raise this not because we're going to go into all that now, but just as an example of the fact that here was a major struggle in the whole world, which was a defining struggle of the whole period, and it was successful, globally speaking ("globally" both in the sense of "on a world scale" and "globally" in the sense of "generally speaking," our side won). And yet the result was not good in the final analysis. You got another form of bourgeois rule and exploitation and oppression of the masses. Understandably, this can be very disorienting and demoralizing. And if people aren't grounded in a revolutionary understanding—and more than that a scientific MLM understanding—if that isn't in there as part of the mix increasingly influencing people, then, when there are twists and turns—and especially where there are major setbacks—people will become not only demoralized but very disoriented politically and ideologically, and the effects of the setback or defeat will be further magnified.

But this does not change the fact that, through the Vietnam War, the U.S. imperialists were handed a powerful defeat, and they actually were reeling from that defeat for a certain period of time. They were forced to regroup through the 1970s, and at the end of the '70s there was that whole debacle for them in Iran where yet another despot they had put in power, the Shah of Iran, was knocked from this throne, and there was a tremendous outpouring among the Iranian people against U.S. imperialism. This involved the seizure of the U.S. embassy and the taking of hostages there—hostages who included many CIA and other intelligence operatives, who were plotting to once again pull a coup in Iran (as the CIA had done in 1953, bringing the Shah to power). And then Carter sent in helicopters—I don't know how many people remember this or know about it—but he sent a helicopter squadron in to try to rescue the hostages,

and the helicopters crashed in the desert in Iran. It was another debacle for this arrogant imperialist power

But the problem is that the imperialists have remained in power, their system is still in effect, it still does what it does. It regroups, in some ways it restructures, it deals with the necessity it's confronting and keeps going. And that has an effect on people. It's not that most people in a broad mass movement are going to have a scientific MLM understanding at this stage of the struggle, even before imperialism has been overthrown and a new socialist society is being built, but to the degree that this element is not in there struggling and bringing forward its independent line as part of the overall resistance, then even where victories are won in the struggle, the basis can be strengthened for people to become demoralized and disoriented when there are the inevitable twists and turns and when the exploiters and oppressors regroup and come back with a vengeance, as they will. Of course, even if we do our work very well, there is going to be the dynamic that as long as they hold on to state power they're going to work at—and they're going to have success in—undoing victories we win and overcoming setbacks that they suffer. That's the nature of the class struggle, once again. The whole experience around Vietnam provides a profound illustration of that.

Underlying Forces

In *Preaching From a Pulpit of Bones,*[3] I give another example of this. In the part of that book where it's examining the limitations of and polemicizing against some of the views of Jim Wallis (an evangelical Christian who has sharply criticized some aspects of U.S. society and the role of the U.S. in the world) it takes this story which expresses Wallis's model of how things ought to be done to make changes, peacefully and by relying on good will, because he's a religious figure who believes you have to appeal to the righteousness in people. He tells a story about how there were these peasants in Brazil (this was some 20 to 30 years ago now) who were about to be evicted from their land. And the women in the peasant village went and appealed to the wives—there was a fair amount of patriarchal stuff mixed in with this story as Wallis recounts it, but they went and appealed to the wives of members of the Senate of Brazil. And the wives, in turn, put pressure on their husbands and so the Senate voted to prevent those peasants from being evicted from their land. Wallis cites this as a great example of how—without revolution, without violence, without overturning and uprooting of the whole basic system—you can achieve change for the benefit of the people.

Well, in working on *Preaching from Pulpit of Bones* I did some research into this, and (as I pointed out in the book) in the course of the same period of time that Wallis is talking about, something like 15 million peasants in Brazil were driven off their land. So, for one brief moment, you have this one instance where apparently the senators in Brazil vote not to evict these particular peasants from their land—and who knows what the final story of that village is, they've probably been driven off too by now. But, in any case, what's *the essence* of the matter here: This one little village *or* the larger picture of masses of peasants being driven off their

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[3] *PREACHING FROM A PULPIT OF BONES, We Need Morality, But Not Traditional Morality,* was published by Banner Press in 1999. It consists of a Prologue and two essays written by Bob Avakian: "The Reality Beneath William Bennett's Virtues," a critique of Bennett's *The Book of Virtues*, and "Putting An End to 'Sin' Or, We Need Morality But Not *Traditional* Morality. These essays expose the hypocrisy of bourgeois moralists like Bennett and the murderous oppression and atrocities they seek to cover up or justify, as well as discussing the shortcomings and limitations of even progressive religious viewpoints. "Preaching" critiques bourgeois morality in general and contrasts it with communist morality, which reflects and serves the cause of abolishing all exploitation and oppression; and it explains why atheism and a scientific viewpoint and method must be upheld and applied in opposition to religious fundamentalism and indeed all religious doctrines and outlooks, while also speaking to the need for an approach of unity-struggle-unity with progressive religious forces in opposition to oppression and injustice.

land, because of the underlying economic and social forces of the system, together with the operation of the superstructure—especially the political institutions of power and in particular the military—which serves the dominant economic interests and reinforces the dominant economic and social relations? What is the main trend and the essence here?

The same thing is happening now in Mexico with the whole struggle around the airport at Atenco where the government, headed by Vicente Fox, was attempting to force the peasants there off their land to make way for this airport. Now, in the face of truly heroic resistance by the people of Atenco and the support they were increasingly winning, the Fox government had to back off. But what do we think is going to happen there over any period of time? Can this victory—as real and important as it is—actually be spread throughout the country, can it become a model in the sense that village by village, or area by area, all the peasants are going to succeed in beating back the whole move of the imperialist system and its "local partners" in Mexico to drive millions more peasants off their land, not just in Mexico but throughout Central America (through things like the Plan Pueblo-Panama)? Or are the imperialists and their various institutions going to go ahead with these plans of theirs, even if they have to tactically maneuver on occasion or even back off, here or there and for a time? The hard reality is that, so long as the imperialists and exploiters and oppressors aligned with them are in power, and their system is in effect, they are going to continue plundering and rolling over the masses of peasants and the masses of people overall.

I don't say this to in any way underestimate or downplay the significance of the victory of the people of Atenco and their supporters and the fact that the government which was determined to build that airport there had to back off. That's not the point at all. It's not that we can't win partial victories or that they're unimportant. But, even where that happens, and while we're appreciating and celebrating such victories, we have to understand firmly and also bring out to the masses of people involved in these struggles and the masses more broadly what is the nature of the fundamental problem we're dealing with and what are the laws and dynamics operating? I'm not saying we should go out and talk to people using exactly those terms. We have to translate that into living terms for people. But that's what we have to bring to them in very living terms—what are the underlying forces at work here and what have they led to and what will they lead to until we deal with the fundamental problem here and overturn and transform the whole system and the whole society—and ultimately the whole world? And where we win victories, we should *build on* those victories, work to make them spans in the bridge toward strategic revolutionary objectives, toward the fundamental solution.

The Case of South Africa

Going back to *Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones*, and in particular its critique of Jim Wallis's views, there is another illustration of the basic point here. Wallis talks about what a great day it was when Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa and how this points to the way things can be radically changed for the masses of people. Well, let's look at this further and more deeply.

The fact that they had to release Mandela from prison, even in a certain sense the fact that apartheid was ended in South Africa and Mandela ended up being the president, is a result of a couple of important factors. First, changing international conditions and especially the demise of the Soviet Union. But also the struggle of the people in South Africa—which again was a heroic struggle, involving tremendous sacrifice—and support for that struggle around the world. But, more fundamentally and essentially, what did Mandela's coming to the presidency mean for the people, the masses of people in South Africa who waged that struggle—for that whole generation, the Soweto youth[4] and others who embodied and symbolized the mass uprising in South Africa?

[4] The township of Soweto in South Africa was a leading center and symbol of the revolutionary upsurge against the apartheid regime during the 1980s.

What have their conditions become? Have their conditions of oppression and exploitation been ended—or are they on the way to being ended—through the road represented by Mandela and his being elected President? The bitter truth is that the answer is clearly *no*.

In *Great Objectives and Grand Strategy* this question is discussed, and it refers to the movie *Dangerous Ground*, in which Ice Cube plays a South African who went to the U.S. as a youth and then returns to South Africa and is outraged because, as he sees it, the people there are wasting their victory over apartheid. At one point this character, played by Ice Cube, makes a speech about how in the United States we had the civil rights movement and we won our freedom and then we didn't make use of it the right way, so now we have all these problems, crime and everything, and the same thing is happening in South Africa. Well, that's a perversion—a bourgeois-democratic distortion—of reality. But there is a reality there that's very important for us to understand.

What is happening in South Africa? What are the conditions of the masses of people? Have they really been qualitatively improved by the changes that first brought Mandela to the presidency? No, in some ways they are even worse. And one of the ways in which they are worse is that people are disarmed and disoriented politically and ideologically: All this struggle that produced these changes, and there are Africans heading the government now, but the conditions are the same or worse—the conditions of the masses of landless and land-poor peasants in South Africa, the conditions of the people in the urban shantytowns, the conditions of the miners, are the same or worse.

And that could be very demoralizing and disorienting, if there is not a revolutionary line bringing out to people this point—that without state power all is illusion. Because, while some forms of oppression and exploitation have changed in South Africa and some forms of the government have changed, and those changes are not without any significance, the fundamental fact remains that the oppressed condition of the masses of people has not been changed, the system continues to exploit and oppress them, and the machinery of the state continues to forcibly maintain them in that oppressed and exploited condition. Once again, that doesn't mean that struggles aren't important, or that partial victories have no meaning or effect; but unless things advance to the point where the masses of people overthrow the old, oppressive order and bring into being a whole new, revolutionary political power, there can be no fundamental change in the system and in the conditions of oppression and suffering to which the masses of people are subjected.

In South Africa, we see many horrendous indications and expressions of what this means for the masses of people. There is the widespread and growing devastation of HIV/AIDS, which is directly related to the exploited and oppressed conditions of the masses of people. And there is the phenomenon which the Ice Cube movie (*Dangerous Ground*) was picking up on, even though it did not point to the underlying problem and the real solution—a phenomenon that is very familiar to basic masses in the U.S.—the fact that crime is on the rise, for example, in the shantytowns in South Africa, where youth who before would have been joining and building revolutionary organization are now forming gangs.s

The lesson here, of course, is not that the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa was unimportant, that the end of apartheid was not a good thing, or that somehow the masses of people were better off under apartheid! The point is that this struggle has not yet gone far enough, that it has not yet swept away the whole system, of which apartheid was one outrageous form, that it has not yet overthrown the basic oppressive relations in society and the political and armed power that enforces those relations and conditions. *And* the point is that to put forward the election of this or that person as the chief executive of this oppressive system, to say that this is the way to end oppression, is to fundamentally mislead the people and misdirect them away from where their struggle needs to go.

This is really a bedrock point. We always have to keep our eyes firmly on what is really happening with the masses of people broadly. We have to remain firmly grounded in our understanding that unless and until there is an overthrowing and transforming—an overthrowing of the oppressive state power and a transforming of the whole society—the masses of people will continue to suffer this horrendous oppression and exploitation and unnecessary horrors and outrages.

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Just think about it—just look at the amount of wealth there is in the world at this particular time in history and look at how many people are suffering horribly, denied basic human needs, how many children are dying from diseases that are easily curable. I think, for example, of the story about the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regulations in Peru about a decade ago. The IMF came in and they restructured the loans to the Peruvian government which is deeply in debt to various imperialist banks and institutions, and one of things the IMF did, as they generally do, is that they forced the government to undercut subsidies for basic necessities for the masses. So then you had a noticeable, documentable increase in the number of children, in particular, dying of cholera in Peru. Why? Because, owing to IMF restructuring and regulations and the undercutting of government subsidies, something as basic as the price of firewood went up, and so masses of people couldn't afford to heat water to get rid of the bacteria. So they had an increase in diarrhea and cholera and children dying at a higher level.

Now right there, concentrated in just that one example, are so many things about the horrors of this system. And even the fact that many people in the world today are having to do things like buy firewood in order to boil water to have sanitary water—or think of what's happening in Iraq because the war and the sanctions imposed by the U.S. (and its "allies") destroyed the infrastructure for water treatment—this is totally unnecessary. It is only because of the exploitative relations and the military power that backs them up. It's not like we're living in an era where there is no material basis to eliminate these things, and yet here we are living in a world where half of the world's people are struggling to survive on a couple of dollars a day and where a billion people are either starving or on the brink of starvation and several billion more have to struggle every day to try to have enough to eat and have shelter and other basic necessities of life, and often don't succeed. And yet here's this tremendous wealth and parasitism in this lop-sided world we have.

All this is not going to change unless and until we get state power through our revolutionary struggles around the world, until we overthrow and transform. That's the only way this is going to change—and short of that, it's just going to continue and get worse. I mean, why is it that the standard of living of the people in Latin America has gone down over the last three decades and in many ways is worse than it was 500 years ago? That's totally unnecessary. But there it is. And so this is not a matter of dogma when we say there needs to be a revolution. This is a matter of a living reality of billions of people around the world and what fate there's going to be for humanity—and that's not overstating the case. So it's important that we keep our eyes firmly fixed on that, our eyes on that prize: the need for revolution—and, yes, the need for state power, in order to make possible real and profound revolutionary change.

Part 2: We Want State Power—and We Should Want It

I have been talking about how, even in the face of truly mass and truly heroic struggles and even where partial victories are won and concessions are wrenched from the powers-that-be, they will work to undermine and reverse these things—and the fundamental nature of the system and the fundamental conditions of the masses of people will not be changed, at least not for the better. Let me give another example of this—one which involves the outlook of people on what has been a gigantic question in the U.S., throughout its history and down to today: the oppression of Black people, and their resistance to that oppression.

I recall that about 25 years ago (I believe it was in 1977) when, as part of the concessions coming off of the tremendous upsurge of the '60s which carried over into the early '70s, there was a whole TV series, *Roots*. It was up to that time, maybe still today, the most watched TV series in the history of television in the U.S.—it was watched by something like 100 million people, including a lot of white people.

Roots was the history of a Black family, but it was also much more than that—it touched on the history of Black people in America as a whole. The story went back to Africa and the enslavement of people there and their forced transport to America, and it came all the way up into a period not far from the present day. And I remember the stories that comrades would tell of people working in factories or other work places, the white people in particular, who would be going to Black people they worked with and saying, "I had no idea about this"—which says something about the educational system and what the bourgeoisie wants people to know and not know. "This" referred to even basic level things, like the fact that Black people's names go back to the names of the slavemasters who owned their ancestors, and what that actually represents in human terms. The fact that little kids would get sold to another slave owner, ripped away from their mothers and sold at 8, 9 years old. White people in particular would say, "You know, I had no idea" and they would be very moved by this. This was a very transformative thing, to use that phrase, in terms of the consciousness of millions of people in the U.S., including and in particular a lot of white people who had never understood this.

And yet today you've got these types who want to blot all that out. You know, Michael Moore wrote that book, *Stupid White Men*—you've got a lot of these stupid white people who write letters to editors in papers like the *USA Today* and say ignorant things like: "What is all this complaining about slavery—what about the Africans who owned slaves?" Or: "My parents came here from Europe and we never owned any slaves..." All this kind of nonsense that betrays, at a minimum, a woeful ignorance of the horror of slavery and white supremacy and oppression of Black people even after slavery and right down to today in the good ole USA.

Why is there such ignorance? It's not really because there was an epidemic of stupidity that washed over the country or something. It's that the bourgeoisie worked very hard to wipe out and reverse what many people learned through the upsurges of the '60s and in its aftermath. Beginning with Reagan in particular, when he became President in 1981, there was a massive ideological assault to undo what people had learned, to make them "stupid" and to promote another view, a reactionary viewpoint. Sometimes you forget these things—and the ruling class works, through its media and in other ways, to get people to forget important lessons they have learned and to reverse important verdicts that get passed in society broadly, such as the basic fact that the origins of the U.S. are rooted in slavery and genocide.

I remember that, back in the late '80s or the early '90s, Jesse Jackson made an outrageous statement, along these lines: "I hate to say this, but if I'm walking down the street somewhere at night and I hear people behind me and I look around and see it's white people I'm relieved, because I'm worried about what Black people might do to me." That's

what Jesse Jackson said. Now, this is probably not something he wants to trumpet around today, but at that time Jesse Jackson was repeating this whole bourgeois line about crime and gangs, blaming the masses of Black people for the conditions *the system* has *forced* them into and *forcibly kept them in*—where even conservative analysts have to say that crime is a "rational choice" for millions of these youth. What Jesse Jackson was running on this was a straight-up bourgeois line that went right along with the racist propaganda by the Reagans and the rest, which basically said that Black people are inferior and are criminal by nature. These reactionaries were even trying to revive "theories" about the genetic inferiority of non-white people and how they are just genetically predisposed to certain things and incapable of certain things.

This was a revival of shit that was disproved and discredited decades ago—theories of genetic differences between races which make some superior and others inferior, and all kinds of shit for which it has been clearly shown that there is absolutely zero scientific basis. That's been shown time and time again, and yet here it came again—with books like *The Bell Curve* that tried to give this racist garbage a "scientific" veneer. And the people who wrote *The Bell Curve*, they weren't treated as crackpots—they were treated as legitimate researchers, writers and intellectuals, respectable intellectuals. The bourgeois media, including the supposedly more "highbrow" *New York Times*, treated these authors with respect and treated their rehash of long-exposed racist rubbish as if it were serious science.

All this was systematic—there was a systematic effort and campaign on the part of the ruling class to blot out important truths that people had learned about the history and the present-day nature of American society and to attack these truths through the revival of worn-out reactionary garbage. So, when we witness a lot of this "stupidity" from more than a few white people in the U.S., this is not just something spontaneous—it is not just some kind of "personal prejudice" they developed all on their own—it stems from the underlying relations of white supremacy, which are built into the system in the U.S., *and* it has been consciously and systematically *promoted* by the ruling class whose system depends on and could not survive without this white supremacy and the corresponding racist ideas.

You know, I once wrote something speaking to the question of what's wrong with white people—and I concluded that there's a lot wrong with white people in the U.S., which is not surprising, given that they live in a white supremacist society, but it's nothing that a good proletarian revolution couldn't cure.[5] In fact, there is a lot wrong with people living in imperialist countries in general, especially people in the more privileged strata whose privilege stems in no small part from the way in which imperialism plunders the world and super-exploits millions and millions of people in the Third World in particular. But this is not something inherent in them—it's not "in their genes," it's not "something they're hard-wired for," and all the rest of that. Rather, it comes from their social experience, their social position, their place in the imperialist network of exploitation and oppression throughout the world. *And* it comes from the tremendous ideological bombardment and the systematic *mis*education perpetrated by the imperialist ruling class.

REVERSING RIGHT AND WRONG

And, once again, whenever and wherever that ruling class has to make concessions—including concessions to reality, concessions to the truthful accounting of the history of the U.S. and the history of capitalism, which, as Karl Marx pointed out, comes into the world dripping with blood from head to toe and which had slavery built into its foundation, along with other brutal forms of exploitation—whenever the ruling class is forced to make such concessions, they set out, in a systematic way, to undermine and reverse this.

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[5] This article, "What's Wrong with White People?" appears in *Reflections, Sketches & Provocations* by Bob Avakian (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1990).

Returning to the example of *Roots*, the ruling class allowed this on TV at that time (the late 1970s) because they really needed a whole "cooling out" period after the tremendous upheavals of the '60s, which carried over into the early 1970s, and which shook this system to its foundations. If you didn't live through that period, maybe it's a little bit hard to understand it from today's vantage point, but they really needed a process of regrouping and of "recouping"—a systematic effort to win back, or neutralize, millions and millions of people who had become thoroughly disgusted with and alienated from the ruling structures, institutions, and values. With Carter in the presidency, they declared an "amnesty" of sorts—they had thousands of veterans, for example, who had deserted and whose status was sort of in limbo, living in Europe, living in other places, in Canada, in the U.S. itself, living a kind of "semi-shadow" existence. They had to give a kind of pardon to those people and say: "OK—reconciliation—you can come back out of the shadows." In other words, they had to make all kinds of concessions to try to "cool things out" after the upsurges that rocked the country through the '60s and into the early '70s. And Carter was a good choice for them as the president to preside over this.

Of course, the ruling class never stopped brutally repressing people and groups who challenged it in any fundamental way, and the system never ceased brutally exploiting and oppressing masses of people, in the U.S. itself and all over the world. And, by the time Carter left office in 1980, he was putting forward a very different image and posture—he was threatening war with the Soviet Union if it challenged U.S. supremacy in the Persian Gulf area, and he came forward with a new war-fighting doctrine, including nuclear weapons—which Reagan then picked up on and carried further when he beat out Carter for the presidency. Among other things, and beyond what it exposes about Carter himself, this was yet another illustration of the truth that it is the operation of the system and the needs of the ruling class that fundamentally sets the terms of things—and not which politicians are in office, or the personality traits or personal inclinations of those politicians.

And so, after a period of some concessions and "cooling out," came an aggressive reactionary offensive from the ruling class. This was personified by Reagan but it had many manifestations—it was many-sided. It was felt in every sphere of U.S. society, as well as in the international arena, and of course it had a whole dimension of molding public opinion, including through the means of mass popular culture. One sharp example of this was the TV show *Hill Street Blues*. (This is also spoken to in *Reflections, Sketches & Provocations*.) This show had the explicit purpose of "repairing the image of the police" in the face of a situation where, through the whole upsurge of the '60s, millions of youth and others had come to see more clearly the real repressive and murderous role of the police, and it was widely popular to call them "pigs." Daniel J. Travanti, the lead actor in that show, openly talked about how it aimed to help repair the relations between the police and the people. Of course, he didn't mean that the show was somehow going to get the police to stop murdering people, particularly youth in the inner cities, time and time again; nor that it would somehow keep the police from attacking and seeking to suppress people protesting and rebelling against the system. No, the reality was that the show was aiming to repair the public relations image of the police. And, very interestingly, *Hill Street Blues* was kept on the air, even though its initial ratings were very poor. They kept it on until they built up an audience for it, because it was very important to them ideologically.

It's important that we understand these things and that we enable other people to understand them, because one of the things the ruling class really likes to do, and constantly seeks to do, is to blame the masses for everything. You know, "people get the leaders they deserve" or "we're just giving the people what they want," whether it's politics, or popular culture, or whatever. They do this with elections and in all kinds of other ways—they give people "choices" that are no real choice, that all fundamentally come down to the same thing, and then they say that "the people have chosen this"! So it is very important for us to understand and to enable other people to understand that this is the workings of the system, both the "unconscious

operation" of the accumulation process and dynamics of capitalism-imperialism, but also the conscious policy and actions of the ruling class through the superstructure—that is, through the political structures and institutions and the institutions of military power, as well as the mass media and the institutions and instruments of culture and (mis)education in general.

THE CONFUSION ABOUT ABORTION

Let's take another example of how the ruling class maneuvers and manipulates: the right to abortion. This was a major concession on the part of the ruling class. It's hard to imagine it, and I know a lot of young people, including a lot of young women, have a hard time imagining what it was like before this concession was made in the form of the Supreme Court *Roe vs. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Many people today, including unfortunately many young women, take this for granted and they get confused even about the "moral issues." Part of the reason for that is because of the ideological offensive of the ruling class to make abortion seem like, at best, a "necessary evil." But part of the reason, also, is that, for 30 years now, people, and women in particular, haven't been living in a situation where, if they decide they really want an abortion, they can't get it, legally. And that can be a life-determining decision—to have, or not to have, a baby at a particular time in your life. I don't mean that in the sense that the reactionaries say it: that you're going to regret it the rest of your life if you "kill your baby." I mean it in the sense that whether you're going to have a child at a given time, and all that is bound up with that, is obviously a big decision about the whole direction of your life, and it has a major impact on what your life's going to be like. The right *not to have this decision forced on you*—the right for a woman to be able to make this decision herself—was a major concession that was also wrenched out of the ruling class coming off the '60s and the whole emergence of the women's movement and everything related to that.

For its own reasons, the ruling class hasn't yet moved to take away this right wholesale, but they've been chipping away at it, practically—putting more and more restrictions on it, doing more and more things to define fetuses as people with rights, etc., etc., even when they aren't now trying to overturn Roe and outright abolish the right to abortion. And politically and ideologically, bourgeois politicians and spokespeople, including "defenders of the right to abortion" like Al Gore (and Bill Clinton), have been propagating this whole notion that abortion should be "legal but rare"—that, in essence, while it is a right, it is also a real tragedy. Again, they are presenting it as a necessary evil—instead of what it is: a key aspect of the struggle to emancipate women.

I would like to understand this more fully, but my definite sense is that there is a lot of confusion on this question, including among a lot of young women who "should know better"—not to blame them, but they're confused, they've been bombarded with this whole idea that your role is to be a breeder...or even if it's not that crude, that it's "selfish" of you to want to have your own life separate and apart from being a bearer of children. And this is another thing that powerful forces in the ruling class have been pushing—another way they're seeking to reverse right and wrong and turn things upside-down. And this goes so far as to attack people who stand up against oppression and have sacrificed in the struggle against oppression as "self-indulgent." Here we have the whole "'60s generation"—and, of course, I'm not talking about Dan Quayle or people like that, but the people who defined that generation. What was that generation defined by? It was Black college students and white college students and others who went to the South to join in the fight against open segregation and white supremacy, and who faced what that meant, lynching and all the rest of it. And then many of these youth came back and initiated or supported the Black liberation struggle, the movements among Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, the antiwar movement, the women's movement.

These were people making all kinds of personal sacrifices for larger social objectives and for the social good, in broad terms. And all of a sudden that's been redefined as a self-indulgent generation! Here is a generation that was the most self-sacrificing we've had so far—to be surpassed by the

new generations hopefully—it was young people motivated by and acting on the objective of fighting against injustice and uprooting oppression. And how do they slander it to make it seem "self-indulgent?" You know: "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." Well, loosening things up, breaking out of repressive constraints, bringing forward new and fresh things in the culture and in relations among people, was part of the rebellion of the '60s too.

It may be hard to imagine now the uptight and suffocating shit that was the norm, socially and culturally, at the time in the U.S., and it was righteous and necessary to rebel against that. Of course, the bourgeoisie does what they do with everything—you know, people come forward with opposition to all this uptight, socially and sexually repressive stuff, and what do the powers-that-be do? They promote pornography and all kinds of bourgeois shit as if that's the alternative. But that's not what people were rebelling for. Again, it's important to understand that many of those things that were like "personal life style" questions had to do with rebellion against the whole highly restrictive and repressive social and cultural rules and regulations and ethos of the time. They were part of a larger, overall rebellion against repressive and oppressive relations and values. And somehow that's all been redefined to be "self- indulgent"; and somehow now it's declared to be "self-indulgent" to want to have an abortion, to want to have a larger life, to take part more broadly in society and not be reduced to being a breeder.

One of the things that should be posed is this question: How many of these people who oppose the right to abortion also don't oppose birth control? Very few. So there you get right to the essence of the matter. It's not a matter of "killing babies"—they want women to play a certain social role, it's very important to them. The family, as a patriarchal institution, is very important to them, it's very important to the whole bourgeois structure, especially when there are a lot of strains and contradictory trends pulling at society and a lot of changes that are undermining a lot of the traditional, oppressive relations and values.

The point I'm trying to emphasize here is that there was a high tide when some of these things were very clear and there was a whole generation of women—and secondarily, but importantly, men—who were enlightened about the whole role of women in society and the struggle to break tradition's chains in this regard, and this became concentrated in one major way around the question of abortion. And yet, one of the things that frustrates some of even the more reformist-minded feminists today is that a lot of the younger women coming along don't understand this. It's not just that they don't understand everything, all the struggle, that went into winning the right to abortion; but, beyond that, it's how many younger people, including many young women, have been influenced in how they look at the question, "morally," ideologically and politically, how they're being influenced by this bourgeois rampage, really, and this concerted effort to "reverse verdicts," to reverse right and wrong, just as there has been around the question of national oppression and racism in this society.

Beginning in the 1980s, there has been a whole orchestrated and concentrated campaign to blot out the whole history of white supremacy in the U.S., right down to today, to pretend that the U.S. is a "color blind society," or one in which everyone not only should be but actually is judged simply according to their merit and achievements... *and therefore*, if you talk about the reality that there is not equality, that national oppression is still rampant and deeply rooted, that this remains a society in which white supremacy is widespread and deeply embedded, then *you* are somehow being "racist." In other words, according to this perverted logic, in order not to be "racist" you must accept white supremacy and inequality! This is a whole offensive that has been waged, for more than two decades now, to turn things around. And this is not just in the realm of ideas—it is not just affecting people's thinking about this decisive question—although that is very important; it is given practical application in things that are under attack—ethnic studies, affirmative action, bilingual education...all these things that were wrenched as concessions and have since been made into focuses of attack.

WHY WE NEED REVOLUTION

Once more, the point of all this is not that these struggles weren't worthwhile, or that winning even partial victories, wrenching some concessions from the ruling class—that all this is unimportant. None of that is the point. The fundamental point that I'm trying to drive home here, from these different angles and with these different examples, is that until we overthrow and transform, none of these victories can be anything but partial and they can't be permanent. And the oppression and exploitation of the masses of people, the totally unnecessary suffering and all the horrors that they're subjected to, will go on and intensify. So this understanding has got to be our fixed point, our north star, our guiding orientation; and we have to not only be firmly rooted in this ourselves, but we have to be consistently bringing this out, in a living way, in all the work we're doing with—and in our unity-struggle- unity with—other forces. Or else, ultimately, there is no point to what we're doing and there is no need for us.

You know, when I was a student, I thought about being a doctor or a lawyer in order to serve the people in that way. And there is a role for that, and people who try to do that are very precious and should be valued and supported, but that is not going to deal with the fundamental problem. I became aware that the good you might be able to do for people is going to be overwhelmed—you help one patient and 50 patients are going without health care or being mangled by the so-called health care system. This applies to any field you can think of. And, left at that, and left to themselves, many people who set out to do good in these fields become discouraged and can even become cynical. Because the problem is much bigger than what they can do, and the solution cannot be found within this system.

So this is the first point I want to make. We need revolution. We have to seize power—and, once we get it, we have to hold on firmly to state power, until the conditions have been created, throughout the world, where this kind of power, and where the state itself, even of the most revolutionary kind, is no longer necessary and must be replaced by a freely associating world community of people. And, at the same time, while there remains the need for the state, and while we must hold on firmly to state power, there is the profound question of who "we" is and how the "we" has to change, both quantitatively and qualitatively—has to continually expand, to take in ever broader ranks of the masses ruling society, and has to increasingly become radically different from any previous form of the state. But, with all that, we shouldn't be the least bit defensive about the objective of seizing and holding on firmly to state power. We should be very offensive, in a good sense, about this.

We want state power—we want it for the masses of people, but goddamn it, we want it! And when we finally get it, we're not going to give it up either. The basic truth is that capitalist society is ruled by an exploiting class, the bourgeoisie. Under this capitalist state, power can never be in the hands of the people, whether or not they are allowed to vote for which group of bourgeois politicians will be in office; while in socialist society, with the dictatorship of the formerly exploited class, the proletariat, state power can and must be exercised by the masses of people. (I have analyzed this in some depth in the book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* but it is very important to continue returning to and deepening people's understanding of this.)

So, if we take ourselves at all seriously, why would we not want this kind of state power, and why, once it has been won, would we give it up? Of course, when communism has been reached, this state power will no longer be necessary: getting to communism means bringing into being the conditions where the state can and must "wither away"—where institutions of repression and political power by one part of society (or the world) over another will no longer be necessary, or possible, and new institutions will be developed that reflect this and that serve the functioning of freely associating communities of people throughout the world, citizens of a true world community. But in order to get to communism, we need this radically new kind of state: the dictatorship of the proletariat.

I have made this point before, but I want to make it again: what it would mean to have a whole different kind of state, to have revolutionary political power ruling society, to have a whole different kind of system—think of everything we're trying to do, and think of everything that has to go into actually making a revolution. So then we have state power and somebody comes along and says: "Oh well, it's not really that important that we hold onto it, now. After all, we might turn into oppressors, or we might just solidify a hierarchal structure here that keeps the people down, and it might turn out that the new boss is just as bad as the old boss, so why don't we just hand power back over to the bourgeoisie? It's not that big a deal, is it?" Such a person would be insane, or very foolhardy, at best.

Or, what if we were to say that, having overthrown the old oppressive state power, the masses don't need to have state power, we can just do away with the state right now? In reality, this would amount to the same thing as simply turning power back over to the bourgeoisie, because they would take advantage of such a monumental misconception and misstep on our part to seize power and to crush and punish the masses of people in the most cruel ways. This is of profound importance, it makes a monumental difference, not just to us communists, by ourselves, but more fundamentally to the masses of people.

Now, it should be clear that this doesn't mean that we don't need democracy for the masses under socialism. We definitely do—and we need to find the ways to make a living reality of Lenin's statement that such democracy, under the rule of the proletariat, will be a million times more democratic for the masses than the democracy that exists under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, a democracy that in essence is for the capitalist ruling class and serves its interests. But we must also recognize that to realize what Lenin said, to achieve a democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat that is "a million times more democratic" *for the masses of people* is going to be a struggle. And, as important as this is, it is not an end in itself or the final objective. The final objective is to uproot and finally abolish all relations of exploitation and oppression, everywhere in the world, and to bring into being a new world community in which class distinctions, states and vanguard parties no longer exist, in which there will no longer be a basis or need for these things. All this is going to be, and can only be, achieved through the dialectical relation between the initiative of the masses and the role of the vanguard party, leading and at the core of this whole process. And in this process, while ultimately the goal is to eliminate states and political relations in the form of state power, until that objective is reached—and indeed in order to reach it—state power in the hands of the proletariat, led by its vanguard, is essential and indispensable, it is crucial for the masses of people and their complete liberation.

As is stressed in our Party's *Draft Programme*, on the one hand, without state power all is illusion, but when you actually have state power, all kinds of things that are illusions now can become reality then. All kinds of things that, as much as the masses of people want them, and as much as people of good will strive to do them, cannot really be brought into being under this system, will become possible once this system is overthrown and a new, revolutionary political power has been established. Providing health care for the masses of people, providing an education that actually enables people to learn about reality and to engage reality, to learn how to think critically, and to take up a scientific viewpoint and apply it in a creative way to all kinds of spheres—that's possible when you have revolutionary state power. Meeting other basic needs of the people, providing a culture that's lively and vibrant and revolutionary, but creative at the same time—becomes possible. All the shoots that get brought forward by the masses of people can be nurtured and allowed to flower—and, yes, led, but also given a lot of initiative. Feeding people, providing decent housing for people—getting rid of fucking rats, so people are not having their kids chewed by rats at two o'clock in the morning—becomes possible. There's no reason why these things can't be done—no reason other than capitalism. And actually enabling the people to exercise state power and to take up all these different spheres—from arts to sciences to medicine

to education to political decision- making and affairs of state—that becomes possible.

It isn't that you just wave a magic wand and it all happens, just like that—but it's possible. Revolution opens up these possibilities, it creates the basis on which, through continuing struggle, these things can happen, and must happen, if we're going to keep going forward. And just think about that. Think about the fact that every day we're going out working among people of various strata, from the basic masses to people in the middle strata who suffer under this system in different ways, who even to the degree they don't suffer so much personally are outraged by the fact that things exist that they can see are unjust and unnecessary and they are frustrated because these things keep going, and there doesn't seem to be anything that can be done about them—which fundamentally, there isn't *under this system*. But all those things can be changed, transformed. A whole bunch of things which are impossible under this system, but are essential for the masses of people, become possible with revolution and the establishment of a new, revolutionary state power.

So this is something we have to keep clearly in mind—both sides of this contradiction—that without state power all is illusion, but with state power a lot of things that are illusory become possible. And that's a very important contradiction, or unity of opposites, that we have to grasp firmly and bring out to masses of people. It's not like we're some religious nuts or something—we don't go out "glowing," talking about supernatural nonsense—this is based on material reality and the actual necessity of masses of people, and it conforms to the way the world is tending, even though the tendencies in the world and society are sharply contradictory.

Part 3: The Vanguard: The Profound Necessity, and the Profound Contradiction

The next point I want to focus on is something that's also spoken to in our Party's *Draft Programme*, particularly in the first appendix on the party—and that is the link between the need for revolution and the need for a vanguard party. In that first appendix on the party in the *Draft Programme* ("The Party and the Masses"), it basically lays out why you need a vanguard party, what the contradictions are in society that make that necessary, what the conditions of the masses of people are that prevent them from just all at once spontaneously coming to the understanding and acting on the understanding of the need for revolution. And then it concentrates that by saying: What kind of organization you see as necessary depends on what you're trying to do. If all you're trying to do is make a few reforms, if you're not trying to really confront and deal with this whole system, if you're not trying to make revolution and transform society and the world, then you don't need this kind of vanguard party, and you don't need this revolutionary ideology of MLM. But, once you've confronted what the reality actually is and the necessity is, then it becomes clear that you have to have a vanguard like this—a party that, yes, is highly organized, but above all is united around this most advanced ideology of MLM, this scientific approach to reality. This ideology is a living, ongoing thing—correctly understood and applied, it is the farthest thing from dry and dead dogma—but it does most correctly and comprehensively grasp reality and its contradictoriness and the potential and the tendency for revolutionary change.

If you look at what we actually have to do—if you look at the fact that without state power all is illusion, but with state power all these things become possible, that are impossible now—then you see the need for this kind of vanguard party. And seeing that, there's absolutely no reason to be defensive about it. Why should we be defensive about things that are most essential about reality? In other words, the fact that we understand some essential things about reality is supposed to make us defensive? That doesn't make sense.

Now, I understand that, especially in these times with the ongoing bourgeois propaganda offensive about the "death of communism," and with the spontaneous tendencies of many in the middle strata, there is a widespread notion that the concept of a vanguard party has been discredited, and this can make some people defensive about putting forward the need for such a vanguard leadership. But if we are really proceeding from reality and from the fundamental needs and interests of the masses of people, of the great majority of humanity, if we continually reground ourselves in what this is all about and whom this is all for, we will grasp very clearly why there is absolutely no reason to be defensive about this and in fact we should be very bold in putting this forward.

What is involved, from our point of view, is not some kind of competition between groups or any of that kind of thing. It's about bedrock questions of what is the reality we are confronting—the larger reality, the social reality, the reality of world history, the reality of the world situation, and where is all this tending and where does it need to go, how do you get there, and what are the contrary forces and tendencies? And how do you deal with these contradictions? This is why you need a vanguard—to deal with all these things. And having grasped that this is the case, then we should be boldly putting forward not only the need for a vanguard in

general but also the role of our Party as such a vanguard.

While we have to divide this into two, we need a little bit more of that spirit of the old Black Panther Party; you know, they used to go around and they would say, "relate to the vanguard." Now, there are ways in which we need *not* to do this—ways that would in fact be sectarian and dogmatic—but we need more of that basic spirit of: "yeah, you need a vanguard and here we are and this is the role we're playing." As I said in the interview with Carl Dix[6] this is a matter of the responsibility that you're willing and able to take. This is not a matter of proclaiming yourself better than other people or insisting that everybody follow you—certainly not blindly follow you, which would be absurd as well as wrong. But it is a matter of saying: "Yes, we're willing to take that responsibility. We see the necessity, we see the historical tendencies, and we're acting upon them. We're going to learn from everybody we can learn from, we're going to be open to the idea that we may be wrong about something, at the same time as we're going to stand firmly on what we believe to be right at any given time, and we're going to carry it out—we're going to continue that process, and we're going to carry it forward as part of a larger process of unity/struggle/unity with many people and as part of the fundamental process of making revolution and transforming the world."

There's absolutely no reason for us not to be putting this forward boldly—and even, in the right sense, putting it forward offensively. When I say offensively, we have to divide that into two also. There are different meanings of offensive: one is putting it forward boldly and in a living way and really struggling with people in a good way to understand what we understand; that is very different than being offensive in the sense of actually being sectarian, having small group or narrow interests in mind and just getting into petty squabbles and all that other bullshit that's way too characteristic of too many trends out there anyway.

So we don't want to be offensive in that sense, but we do want to be bold about what we understand. Not like these zombie Christian fundamentalists—who are always on a crusade to "take the truth to people" when there's no truth in what they represent—but in a scientific way, and with the correct style of work, which isn't just a matter of diplomacy, but is actually a matter of methodology and ideology, actually taking this out to masses of people and to people from all the various strata, in order to enable the people to engage with this: first of all to spread the influence of this, to raise this question in people's minds, to get them grappling with this question, and to win over particularly the advanced revolutionary- minded people to this understanding and unleash them and bring them closer to the Party and bring them into the Party. We should be, in the very best sense, on a mission about this.

CONTRADICTIONS OF THE VANGUARD PARTY

This brings me to the next point, which we could put this way—and in fact in the second appendix on the party in the *Draft Programme*("The Party Under Socialism, and the Transition to Communism") it does put it more or less this way and pose the contradiction in these terms: the leadership of the party is essential as long as there are classes and class struggle, but at the same time there is also the potential for the party to turn into its opposite, to become an institution misleading and even oppressing the masses of people instead of a force leading them forward toward their liberation. Obviously, that can happen even when you don't have state power—a lot of parties have become revisionist and made their peace with the system and have gone out to work to convince the masses of people to do the same, to reinforce the system and its hold over the people. But, when the party is the vanguard of the proletariat in power, the

[6] "Bob Avakian Speaks Out—Interviewed by Carl Dix: On War and Revolution, On Being a Revolutionary and Changing the World," RW #1155-56, 1158-64, 1166-68, 1171, 1173-74 between June 16 and November 10, 2002. Audio available on CD from Revolution Books stores and outlets or RCP Publications. Also available online at rwor.org.

potential for the party to turn into its opposite is magnified in those conditions, because for a certain period of time in the new socialist society, the party—and, in an even more concentrated way, the party leadership—does have its hands on the key levers of power and influence. This is a potentially very acute contradiction. There are a lot of acute contradictions we have to deal with in doing everything we're setting out to do, and this is one of the most acute. So what should we do?

As I referred to earlier, there is a whole line out there that this is a "failed project," that there is some fundamental flaw in what we're all about—and that the whole idea of a Leninist vanguard in particular is an error and has led to disaster. Well, what people who say this are doing, of course, is falling into line with and repeating a lot of bourgeois "analysis" (such as it is) and bourgeois propaganda about all this. But also there's a certain spontaneity that goes with that—it bolsters a certain spontaneity of petit bourgeois individualism, which is hardly a minor phenomenon in a society like the U.S. and which in fact exists among all strata, even the most basic proletarians. But, along with this, there's the spontaneous summation of what's happened, and the superficial appearance of what's happened, in the history of our movement, in the history of socialist countries, in the history of the exercise of proletarian rule and leadership by vanguards. There are things we do have to learn more deeply and sum up more fully about all this. Mao charted a tremendous course for us, but he only went so far with this, as he himself acknowledged—there's a lot more work to be done to dig into this more fully, in theory and in practice, and in the dialectical relation between the two, in order to correctly handle these contradictions that we can recognize are very complex and are often acutely posed. And, while the things we do now won't solve the problems we will confront later (that is, when we are actually in power), it's not as if there is no relation between what we do now and how we're going to be able to approach those contradictions when we do get to the point of having state power.

And we will get to the point, in (what is now) the U.S. as well as in other countries throughout the world—unless the world is blown up or otherwise destroyed by the imperialists, and that's something we'll struggle to prevent, too. There is the basis for us to make revolution—yes, right within the belly of the most powerful imperialist beast, as well as in the world overall. There are underlying factors and tendencies which are, through an intensely contradictory process, propelling the world in the direction of this revolution. There is a material basis for us to build on, in doing that. And we're going to maximize every effort we can to do that. And what we do now—the methods we use now, the way we work among the masses now, what our ideological understanding is, the way in which we provide leadership for others while also learning from others, the Party spirit and partisanship we build for our Party and its leadership while encouraging and developing the critical and creative spirit that is in fact such an essential part of our ideology and method—all those things have a lot to do with how we're going to handle these contradictions later, when there is the dictatorship of the proletariat and we are the vanguard of the masses in ruling and transforming society. Do we use bureaucratic methods? Do we act like the opportunists and try to be all things to all people? Our methods now have a lot to do with how we're going to be preparing ourselves and the masses, and new waves of advanced people who continually come forward, to deal with these contradictions in the future.

FLYING WITHOUT A SAFETY NET

You know, there's a line from a Bob Dylan song: "When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose." Well, what's the opposite of that? When you have something, you *do*have something to lose. And state power is certainly a big something to lose! Even having a party is something to lose.

I was thinking the other day about what it was like way back, several decades ago, before we had a party, and some of us were setting out to try to radically change the world. It's like Lenin said: we were like peasants going off to war, metaphorically speaking, grabbing whatever weapons were at hand, ideologically and politically. We understood some

things, but on another level we didn't know what the hell we were doing. And in terms of ideology at that time, it was a real "mixed bag"—some of this, and some of that. How do you come to an understanding of which one of these ideologies really corresponds to reality and really represents the solution to the problems? And how do you even know what the fundamental problems are? There were all kinds of different trends, including many different varieties of revisionism and opportunism—we had to sort through all that stuff. But we were carefree, in a certain way—because we didn't have anything to lose. There was no party. If we messed up, it didn't mess up a whole party. Maybe we'd cause some problems and add to the confusion, but we weren't going to screw up a whole party. It wasn't going to have significant consequences, including for the international movement, if we made mistakes. Of course, you always try not to make mistakes, even though you are never going to be completely free of mistakes; but the stakes were different then.

Now we have a mature party. It's not nearly as big and influential as it needs to be—which is something that can and must be changed—but it's not insignificant. It's a very significant thing for the masses of people in this country and for the international movement, right now, as well as potentially—that there is this Party, that it does have influence, and is building organized ties, among the proletarians and basic masses, and among many other strata, in the U.S. Well, if "when you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose," the other side of that is: when you got something, you got something to lose. Mistakes now could have a big effect on the Party and its ability to meet the challenges it faces, which we all know are greatly magnified with the new situation we are confronting and the whole juggernaut of war and repression the U.S. imperialists are unleashing. Wow—that's not a minor thing! So how do you take initiative in that kind of a situation? How do you take risks in that kind of a situation? How do you give people, including those who are inexperienced, initiative and let them go out and make mistakes? This is one of the big things we need to be wrestling with.

Going back to the earlier experience I was referring to, before there was an MLM party in the U.S., one of the reasons that those of us who were involved then did learn is because we did make mistakes. Now, I don't believe in a "recipe" that you have to make mistakes in order to learn, but you do make mistakes—that's part of the deal. And if you're good at learning from your mistakes, you can grow and you can learn a lot. But the question is: how do you let that process go on, of letting people take initiative and grow and actually develop and make leaps in their ability to lead things? You can't do that unless you're willing to let people make mistakes, maybe even some serious ones. And yet, think about the context we're in. To say the least, what we represent is not exactly high on the list of things favored by the ruling class right now. And that's as it should be, but it poses real challenges—not only for us, of course, but for anybody who sees the need to stand up against this imperialist juggernaut, although the challenges for us are magnified and concentrated, given our whole revolutionary perspective and program.

So, here we are, and we're confronted with the question of both in general bringing forward new forces into our Party—and, within the Party, bringing them forward to new levels of leadership—and also particularly bringing forward younger, newer generations of people to play those roles and to continue to advance and develop in that way. And, as I have been emphasizing, this is not without risks. If we don't deal with this correctly, if we don't find the way to carve out freedom in this situation and transform the necessity, if we don't find the ways to enable people to take initiative and even to make mistakes, we will fail to meet the challenges. And for those who are coming forward and will be taking increasing initiative, there is an aspect in which, metaphorically speaking, they will be "flying without a safety net." There is an element of that in terms of enabling people who are new to various tasks, or new to the revolution, or new to the Party, to take initiative and letting them make some mistakes, while at the same time the means must be developed to help minimize those mistakes and their negative consequences and to have this contribute, in an overall sense, to advances. Once

more, to repeat an obvious but important point, this is a very acute contradiction, and a lot of attention needs to be paid to this.

And this process—and these contradictions—find expression on all different levels. This isn't just a question of leadership of the Party and the relation of leadership and led within the Party. It also exists in any kind of mass initiative in which we're involved. You know, there's always a temptation to take things in our own hands and do them because "we know how to do them better"; but, in reality, it doesn't end up being better because it isn't achieving what we're trying to achieve. It's falling into the bourgeois bureaucratic mechanical approach of thinking that the key thing is just to get certain tasks done. And the truth is that we don't always know how to do things better than others, even though our world outlook and methodology does, in an overall and ultimate sense, enable us to engage, to understand and to transform reality in the most systematic and comprehensive way (this relates to the principle that "Marxism embraces, but does not replace" the different fields of human thought and endeavor—a point Mao stressed and which I spoke to in a recent talk, "Grasp Revolution, Promote Production" [7]).

But then the contradiction arises—there *are* certain things that have to get done. If it didn't matter whether things got done or when they got done, it would be a lot easier—but then it wouldn't mean anything, it wouldn't go anywhere. Things do have to get done. Here comes October and Not In Our Name is calling for a big initiative: does it matter if there are a few people or thousands and tens of thousands of people out there? Does it matter more generally whether resistance, of many different kinds, involving many diverse forces, is built against this imperialist juggernaut? Does that make a difference? It makes a big difference. It makes a huge difference. So we're confronted with necessity. It's not like we just have complete freedom to do anything any way we want. So, how do you forge the correct synthesis out of all that? That's a big question.

And in a concentrated way, this question poses itself in terms of leading the Party, and particularly in terms of being willing to risk certain things in order to bring forward new forces and enabling them to take increasing initiative. Years ago, back in the '70s, not long after the coup in China, in *Communists Are Rebels*[8] I emphasized this point that, if you're afraid to lose what you've got, then you're going to lose it anyway. That was the essence of the point. But that's one side of the contradiction. The other side of the contradiction is that it matters greatly whether you lose or advance—you don't say, "Oh yeah, that's right, we shouldn't be afraid to take risks, so let's just throw everything up for grabs" and risk everything in an irresponsible or foolish way. So how do we get the right synthesis there? That's a key question. It's going to be a key question for us now, even before we have state power, and it has implications, even now, for when we do have state power.

As I was speaking to a little earlier, there is a dialectical relation between what we do now and what we do when the stakes are even higher, before the seizure of state power and on an even more magnified level when we do have state power. There's a relation there in terms of what methods we learn and apply and how we lead people, in a living sense. What are we preparing ourselves and the masses for? That's another way to put it. And how are we going about that? We have to consciously take this up, because, as Mao pointed out, you are always applying a certain line, consciously or unconsciously, and if you do things unconsciously then you're going to use the wrong

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[7] "Grasp Revolution, Promote Production" appeared in *RW* Nos. 1175 (Nov. 17, 2002), 1179-82 (Dec. 15, 200-Jan. 12, 2003), 1184-89 (Jan. 26-Mar. 2, 2003). "Marxism Embraces, But Does Not Replace" appeared in *RW* No. 1180. These are also online at rwor.org.

[8] Bob Avakian, *Communists Are Rebels: A Letter from RCP Chairman Bob Avakian to His Parents on Philosophy, Religion, Morals, and Continuous Revolution*(Revolutionary Communist Youth, April 1980.)

methods ultimately. Even if you do things consciously, it's a struggle to use the correct methods and to keep on the correct course, but if you go by spontaneity you're bound to get off course and you're bound to use the wrong methods. So we're going to have to consciously confront and grapple with this, all the way through.

Part 4: State Power: Learning from Historical Experience

I started this talk by speaking about the crucial objective of seizing state power and holding onto it firmly, and then I talked about some of the contradictions in that. Here I want to get into this further, drawing from some decisive historical experience.

Once power has been seized and consolidated by the proletariat, then especially in the early stages of socialist society—which can last for a while, historically speaking—the leadership of the vanguard party of the proletariat is essential and, to put things openly and honestly, the party does have its hands on the key levers of state power and in particular the armed forces of the new proletarian state, which embody state power in a very concentrated way. This is a profound contradiction.

I touched on this in the interview with Carl Dix[9] and this is also discussed in the polemic against K. Venu.[10] The point is made that when Lenin wrote "State and Revolution," right before the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution, he was still conceiving of things in the way they had been understood up to that point, specifically the notion that you wouldn't need to have a big standing army once you had the dictatorship of the proletariat—the armed people would be the best and surest means of safeguarding the revolution. Well, historical experience—and not willful power-hungry grabs or desires on the part of communists—has shown that you *do* need to have an army, that simply armed militia of the people, organized in their workplaces, schools, and various other institutions, will not in fact be capable of standing up to the very real threats, and even outright attacks, from powerful imperialist and reactionary forces, so long as they remain in the world, and even within socialist society itself.

So it's not that we insist on the need for an army because that's the way the communist vanguard can exercise power over the people—it's because, without such an army, the revolution will be smashed and the masses of people suppressed and re-enslaved to capital in the most ruthless and murderous way. Of course, so long as there are class divisions and inequalities in society, including within socialist society, there will be some people who fall into seeking power out of personal ambition and for personal gain, and such people will repeatedly emerge within the vanguard party, including in its top ranks. But if that were the only problem, they wouldn't get very far. The deeper problem is that you've got imperialists out there and you've got counter-revolutionaries remaining and re-emerging within socialist society who seek each other out, make alliances with each other, find ways to hook up with other imperialists and reactionaries—all those kinds of things intermingle and pose a tremendous challenge. And, so long as this is the situation, you can't do without an army. Just think about what I was saying earlier—if we went through everything that's involved to have state power and then we said, "OK, that's it, that was fun while we did it, but now we're going to hand power back"—how ridiculous and outrageous that would be—outright insanity and at least objectively a profound betrayal of the masses of people. Well, that's what you'd be doing in essence if you said we're not going to have an army.

Just think about any experience we've had when the bourgeoisie sets out to reverse even a partial

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[9] See "Seizing Power and Exercising Power—The Relation Between the Vanguard and the Masses" in *RW*#1182 (January 12, 2003). The full interview, "Bob Avakian Speaks Out—Interviewed by Carl Dix: On War and Revolution, On Being a Revolutionary and Changing the World," appeared in *RW*#1155-56, 1158-64, 1166-68, 1171, 1173-74 between June 16 and November 10, 2002. Audio available on CD from Revolution Books stores and outlets or RCP Publications. Also available online at rwor.org.

[10] "Democracy: More Than Ever We Can and Must Do Better Than That," by Bob Avakian published in the international journal *A World To Win,* #17, 1992.

victory: they go on a rampage, they don't want anybody to think about waging this kind of struggle again, even in terms of a partial victory wrenched within the system. So it's not even just a matter that the old suffering will come back if you hand power back to the bourgeoisie—they'll go on a rampage. People will suffer tremendously and in an acute way in the immediate aftermath, as well as for generations, and they will be demoralized and disoriented, politically and ideologically. So if you don't want to have an army, you're just saying we don't want state power—come and take it back and do your worst. And we know what their worst is, OK? So we don't need to belabor that point any further here.

LESSONS OF THE COUP IN CHINA

But then, on the other side of the picture, if you do have an army, you have real contradictions. This came out very acutely in the last great battle and the revisionist triumph in China right after Mao's death. I remember listening to the radio—you know, they didn't have CNN in those days, but I was listening to radio accounts of what was going on in Shanghai right after the coup, in 1976, when the people's militias were fighting against the regular units of the PLA (People's Liberation Army) that were sent to suppress them and to enforce the revisionist coup. And it was heartbreaking, because the militias had no chance, frankly. They were just crushed. Part of the reason was that the political momentum was lost, because at the moment of the coup, the leadership in Shanghai, which was supposed to mobilize the masses in the event of something like this, lost their nerve and vacillated until it was too late. So, by the time anything happened—by the time popular resistance (including the mobilization of the people's militias) took place—it was too late. I remember listening to those radio reports—and I was saying "let's go people's militias"...but they couldn't go. You know, they went a little ways—they fought for a day or two—and then they were crushed by the PLA. So you can see not just the potential but the agonizing realization of the potential for the army to be turned against the masses of people.

Of course, relatively few people have heard about this uprising in Shanghai right after the coup and how it was crushed by the PLA, while on the other hand the bourgeois media, in the U.S. and other imperialist countries, widely covered and still at times make reference to the Tiananmen events in 1989, where the PLA massacred hundreds, perhaps thousands. That was another example of a bourgeois dictatorship—not a "communist dictatorship" but a revisionist-bourgeois dictatorship—using brute military force to suppress a popular uprising, but what happened in 1989 was very different than the events that immediately followed the coup in 1976, where it was a class-conscious, revolutionary-minded proletariat rising up to try to retain state power but unfortunately being defeated.

So, there you see laid out in very stark terms the contradictions involved, and it isn't as if the revolutionaries in China were unaware of these contradictions within the Chinese Communist Party at that time. The history of the PLA, particularly in socialist China, after liberation in 1949, is very interesting. I don't have time to go into all of it, but they actually carried out sort of a dress rehearsal for the Cultural Revolution, on sort of a modified scale, inside the PLA in the early '60s as part of a socialist education movement. They widely distributed what became the famous (and world best selling!) book of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* inside the PLA (except at that time the cover was not red—it was not yet the "Little Red Book"). They circulated it within the ranks of the army and they carried out a whole campaign, not with the same degree of upheaval, but a whole massive campaign of ideological education and struggle within the army. And that's one of the reasons why, when the Cultural Revolution broke out (in the mid-1960s) and Mao recognized that it was necessary to basically suspend the leading role of the Party, because it was riddled with revisionist cliques and revisionist influences from the top to the bottom, the army was able, for a certain period, to play that leading political role in place of the Party.

But that was very complicated and full of contradiction, because the army's not the Party—it's an armed body. It's one thing if a Party member

tells you that you should do something; it's another thing if a PLA member tells you that—it's not quite the same thing. But, much as it has been distorted, the main role the army was playing, particularly in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, was as a revolutionary political force. Yes, it was used to restore order in some places when things got totally out of hand; but the main thing Mao was trying to do was to use it as a political instrument, because the Party couldn't be used as a vanguard in that context. But then you had all these complications because Lin Biao was the Defense Minister and, in a day to day way, he was the acting head of the PLA. And at that time, when you would read the *Peking Review* (which came out weekly from China) it would talk repeatedly about "Comrade Lin Biao, Chairman Mao's closest comrade in arms and chosen successor." And then, after a certain period, with another twist in the complicated course of the Chinese revolution, profound differences developed between Mao and Lin Biao over a number of questions—including Mao's insistence that, through a process of "open-door" criticism and rectification involving the masses of people, the Party must again be reconstituted as the political vanguard and the army's political role in society must be reduced. This resulted in outright betrayal by Lin Biao and his death in 1971.

Now what do you do? There was a whole clique that had been grouped around Lin Biao in the army, which was very powerful, a bunch of generals and commanders and everything. So Mao had to try to carry out a campaign to clean that up inside the army—but, frankly, they had sort of a mess in the army. And, to make it even more complicated, while you're going up against all these Lin Biao forces in the army, at the same time you had other long-time leaders in the army who were supporting a more straight-up revisionist line—these were veterans of PLA who had gone on the famous Long March and had fought battle after battle, crossing deep marshes and snow-capped mountains—they had red stars on their caps but now they were following the capitalist road, taking their lead from Deng Xiaoping and getting support from Chou en-Lai, both powerful veteran leaders. And here again is the complexity of things and the acuteness of the contradictions: it was necessary, in the short run, to unite with forces like this, or at least some of them, in order to clean out the Lin Biao mess in the army—which, in immediate terms, posed the greatest danger to socialism and the continuation of the revolution. And the result was that these forces, grouped around Deng Xiaoping, became stronger. By the mid-1970s, it was clear that everything was coming to a head and that an all-out confrontation was shaping up, between these revisionist forces and the revolutionary camp led by Mao, who was in failing health and clearly going to die before long.

CHALLENGING CONTRADICTIONS

What are you going to do about this? If you are Mao and the revolutionary forces facing this very severe situation, how are you going to create the conditions, politically and ideologically, where the army's going to do the right thing? One of the things that was done was that Chang Chun-Chiao—one of the so-called "gang of four" and actually a leading person fighting for the revolutionary line, alongside Mao—was made basically the political commissar of the army, in charge of carrying out a new campaign of rectification and socialist education inside the army. But that didn't really go anywhere—it was effectively blocked by all these long-time revisionist leaders. They said: "Fuck that shit. You're not carrying out any kind of education and transformation ideologically in *this* army." I'm trying to describe it somewhat humorously, but it's tragic at the same time. It proved not to be possible to succeed with that rectification campaign, because the terms of the class struggle were not favorable right then, and Mao was failing and not able to play much of a direct role in this. Plus, you don't want to just always rely on Mao. If you can't bring forward new layers of leaders to do this, what's going to happen when Mao dies? And what *did* happen?

Now, the revolutionaries were trying—they were trying to deal with all these contradictions. It isn't like they didn't identify the contradictions and they didn't try to come up with methods to deal with them. They did—they were striving for ways to develop and unleash mass criticism and struggle against the revisionist lines and the forces behind them. But, in the end, they didn't succeed. The fact

that they didn't succeed, because of all the factors I've tried to very briefly characterize—and in all this we have to remember the larger context of the encirclement of China by reactionary and imperialist powers, including the social- imperialist Soviet Union, which was posing a very great and direct threat to socialist China—this gives you a sense of the real and profound contradictions you're dealing with: because of the imperialist and reactionary states and their continuing encirclement of the socialist country, because of the remaining classes and class struggle in socialist society, you have to have an army, but there is a potential for that army to become the instrument of capitalist-roaders within the party—to become a force suppressing the masses of people and their attempts to carry forward the transformation of society.

The line of the anarchists and others on this—which in essence says that an army is, by definition and by its very nature as an army, bound to become a force oppressing the people—that line is wrong and misleading, because it fails to recognize the fundamental difference between reactionary armies and revolutionary armies, in terms of not only doctrines and methods of fighting but also their relations with the masses of people and the whole purpose for which they exist and for which they fight. But there are very real and profound contradictions involved in all this (which the anarchist line also fails to correctly understand) and, so long as there are oppressors and exploiters in the world, so long as there are inequalities within socialist society itself, so long as the soil for all this has not yet been thoroughly dug up, and so long therefore as there is a need for armed forces to defend the socialist revolution, there will also be the danger that these armed forces can be turned into their opposite. This is a profound challenge we have to confront, and continue learning how to correctly handle.

Part 5: Revolution: Bourgeois and Communist Views

In the Chinese revolution there was the particularity of bourgeois democrats who turned into capitalist-roaders—veteran revolutionaries, leading people, who turned against the revolution as it advanced in the socialist stage. These are people, like Deng Xiaoping, whose vision never crossed beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right (as Marx once put it).

China before the revolution was a country dominated by imperialism and characterized by feudal, or semi-feudal, relations (particularly in the vast countryside, where the great majority of people lived); and, given the role of imperialism in the world and how that affected countries like China—including the ways it weakened and distorted the character of the Chinese bourgeoisie—it was not really possible to have a bourgeois-democratic revolution that was led by the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the first stage of the revolution was essentially a bourgeois-democratic revolution, aimed against imperialism and feudalism, even though it was led, and could only be led, by the proletariat and its communist vanguard. This is why Mao called this a *new* democratic revolution—one led by the proletariat, not the bourgeoisie, and opening the way for socialism more than for capitalism.

In these circumstances, a lot of people joined the Communist Party because it is the only force that can lead such a revolution—that can actually throw off imperialism and uproot feudalism and create the basis for a modern powerful China. So you had different views and different visions, right inside the same Communist Party. You had Mao and others who were ideologically communists, whose ultimate goal was a communist world, free of exploitation and oppression. And you had these other people whose goal was something far short of that—a powerful modern China exerting its rightful role in the world, as they saw it.

Up until a certain point, and particularly so long as the revolution did not go beyond objectives that largely corresponded to the bourgeois-democratic stage, many people whose vision did not really go beyond that stage could be within the Communist Party, and the fact that their outlook was essentially bourgeois would not really stand out in sharp contrast to the aims and objectives of the revolution. But once the (new) democratic stage of the revolution had been basically completed (which occurred with the countrywide triumph of the revolution in China in 1949), and the revolution entered the socialist stage—and especially as the socialist transformation of society was deepened—then the more acutely it stood out that some people had not really joined the revolution with a communist perspective.

SHARP TURNS

And there is a general tendency that, when there are sharp turns and new challenges in the revolutionary process, this confronts people with the need to make new leaps, and especially those whose outlook has not prepared them for this—who have become accustomed to and perhaps "comfortable with" the way things have been, who have been kind of "coasting along" or even have been sliding backward—encounter real difficulties in making the necessary leaps and ruptures and may instead entrench themselves in opposition to the necessary advance. To paraphrase what Lenin said about this: momentous world events and sharp turns in the situation break some people and cause them to retreat, while others are steeled and tempered and rise to the occasion. All these factors found concentrated expression through the Cultural Revolution in China and particularly in the "last great battle" in which, unfortunately, the revisionists, led by Deng Xiaoping, won out over and crushed the revolutionary camp that was following the line of Mao.

Although there were particularities to how this went down in China, this kind of contradiction will be a defining part of every revolution. Think about the U.S. Can you eliminate national oppression without a proletarian revolution? No. Well, for that very reason, in addition to the numbers of people from

the oppressed nationalities who already have and will increasingly become communists in the fullest sense, there are going to be people who are going to support the proletarian revolution, especially at the point when it really becomes a powerful material force—and there will even be people coming into the Party—whose essential concern is to end national oppression. They will join the Party because they come to see that ending national oppression can only be done through a revolution led by the Party. It's not that they're going to say, "I only want to uproot national oppression, and I don't want to eliminate all other kinds of oppression and exploitation." But there is going to be a contradiction in their motivation, and perhaps they won't have made the leap to being as concerned about the emancipation of *all* oppressed and exploited people. And you're going to have people with essentially a radical bourgeois- democratic viewpoint, especially although not only people from the middle strata, who gravitate to the Party. As the system gets more repressive and institutes more fascistic measures and tramples on even some long-cherished bourgeois-democratic principles, a lot of people from the middle strata are going to turn to the communists, because there won't be anybody else who in a consistent and thoroughgoing way stands up to this.

And there are other contradictions that will propel people toward revolution and even toward the ranks of the Party, while they may still be hanging onto some bourgeois-democratic notions and prejudices. Even though people make a leap when they get to the point of wanting to join the Party, they don't come in as "Perfect Communists" (and, of course, there is no such thing—and the very notion runs counter to our understanding of reality). You can go down the line with many different kinds of questions and contradictions—you don't get "perfect people" to be communists. At the same time, you have some people who really don't make certain leaps and ruptures but it doesn't come to a breaking point until you get to a certain key juncture, or maybe an unexpected turning point.

How we handle these contradictions will have important bearing on what we do later, even though we'll be presented with magnified and, in important ways, qualitatively different contradictions as the revolutionary struggle develops. As I have emphasized, there is an important relation between how we handle contradictions now and how we handle those magnified and much more complex contradictions as things develop and even as we seize and consolidate state power.

I have referred to the opportunist approach of trying to "be all things to all people." Well, there is a history of that in the movement in the U.S. The revisionist CPUSA and other opportunist groups, they would have a certain line, but if somebody whom they looked at as representing important "capital" in the movement came and said "I don't like that part of your line, and I think something else," these opportunists would say: "Well, that's Ok. There's room for you." They'd bend their line and say things like: "Actually, we're thinking about that too. A lot of people raise that. We're thinking about changing that. Yeah, come on in and you can help change that." In other words, rather than struggling out differences in a principled way, they would be like a chameleon—changing what they said to suit the circumstances and playing to people's inclinations, prejudices, and so on. This is a bourgeois method. It reflects a bourgeois outlook and serves bourgeois objectives: just trying to build your organization to have more capital in essence. It's another variation of the old bourgeois American pragmatism—whatever gets you over in the short run is true and good. You bend and twist and distort what you're supposed to be about in order to draw people in, in order to get over in any particular situation.

Well, obviously if you do that and then you come to any kind of real test, any real turning point in the road, you're not going to be able to stand up to it. All kinds of rot will be developing inside your organization. People are not united on the basis of principle, things are not based on the ideology that really correctly reflects reality and can lead in transforming reality.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NATIONAL LIAISON COMMITTEE

I was reflecting again recently on the whole experience we, in the Revolutionary Union (RU), had with the National Liaison Committee, with the Black Workers Congress (BWC) and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO), back in the pre-party days, in the early 1970s. (The National Liaison Committee, which was made up of representatives of the Black Workers Congress [BWC], the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization [PRRWO], and the Revolutionary Union [RU], was established to enable these three organizations to develop joint revolutionary work and to move together toward the formation of a single revolutionary communist party in the U.S. After the break- up of the National Liaison Committee, it was the RU that carried forward the struggle to forge this new vanguard party, which was successfully realized with the formation of the RCP in 1975.) It remains important to have a correct understanding of what essentially happened with that whole process.

Now, the RU at that time had its weaknesses, and I'm sure there are things, which, from the vantage point of almost 30 years of revolutionary experience and struggle since then, we would be able to understand and handle better now. But the simple fact is that what broke apart that Liaison Committee was that the BWC and the PRRWO refused to recognize that communist ideology represents a rupture with even the most radical forms of nationalist ideology, and they refused to make the leap to forming a party that would be based on and would unite its ranks around communist ideology, and no other.

I sat in the last meeting where the Liaison Committee broke up, and it was really painfully obvious that what was up there, what was essentially on the table, was this: Were we going to actually form a party based on adherence to a unified communist ideology, where everybody struggled on the basis of that ideology to apply it, to grasp reality and to transform it—and that's the way we evaluated things—or were we going to have some kind of supposed "safeguards" built in, along the lines of the same things you hear from some people nowadays—"we have to have a certain number of people of the oppressed nationalities in leadership, they have to be the majority in leadership, that's the only way we can guarantee that we won't get sold out," and so on.

Now, in reference to this problem of leaders "selling out," I made the point in the interview with Carl Dix that, unfortunately, if you want to sell out to the system they'll always provide you with a way to do it.[11] I don't care who you are, what nationality you are, what gender, and so on. That's one of the realities of what we're dealing with. There are no guarantees. You can't build in any kind of organizational thing that's going to provide such a "guarantee"—and trying to do this will only do harm—especially as it runs counter to our ideology. With that kind of approach, you're just undermining what you're setting out to do, even if you think you're "building in a safeguard."

Of course, this comes from real things in society. I was talking to some people about this the other day, talking about the particularity of the U.S.—how, if you're not white in the U.S., you have almost certainly had the painful experience, for example, where you know some white people you think are your friends, and they even have some good stands on issues, and then all of a sudden something happens and out they jump with "nigger, this" or "all immigrants are just fucked up." What the hell is that? It's just a really painful experience that poses the question for people: if you're not white, can you have friends who are white, or is there going to be some point when push comes to shove and out

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[11] "Bob Avakian Speaks Out—Interviewed by Carl Dix: On War and Revolution, On Being a Revolutionary and Changing the World, Part 11: Leadership—The Right, and the Wrong, Standards and Criteria" (*Revolutionary Worker*#1167, September 22, 2002). The full interview appears in *RW*#1155-56, 1158-64, 1166-68, 1171, 1173-74 between June 16 and November 10, 2002. Audio available on CD from Revolution Books stores and outlets or RCP Publications. Also available online at rwor.org.

comes this ugly shit out of somewhere? We know where it comes from—it comes out of this society, out of its prevailing relations and ideology. But this is a real question for people. It's a painful experience and almost everybody—Black, Chicano, Latino, Puerto Rican, Native American, Asian—has gone through something like this and had one of these burning experiences where all of sudden somebody you thought was your friend stabs you in the back and the same old shit comes out.

It's not like we're dealing in a vacuum here. It's not like when people from the BWC and PRRWO were raising this line they were raising it out of nowhere or just out of some sort of perverse individual oddity of theirs. But if we're going to make a leap to actually transforming all of this—overthrowing and transforming, as I've been talking about, we have to do it on the basis of a common ideology, uniting on the basis of communist ideology.

And this is a matter of class struggle, too—there's an intense class struggle in the ideological realm. There are lots of forms and expressions of bourgeois ideology, of the ideology of oppression and exploitation, that come out in many different ways, and they each have their particularities. But it's not like there's something magical, or mystical, mysterious or unfathomable about this—whether it's racism, or male chauvinism, or other forms of reactionary ideology. It's the influence of the social conditions and the dominant social relations and the ideology that reinforces all this—that's what gives expression to these particular forms of reactionary ideology. And there's no other way—no way other than uniting on the basis of MLM and struggling things out on that basis—to resolve these contradictions within a party and ultimately within society (and the world) as a whole.

This was very painful to see—that we came to the point where that was the rupture that was on the table and people who you'd worked with and become close with and had hopes and aspirations of forming a party with, drew the line and wouldn't make that rupture.

If we had gone along with what they wanted us to go along with, and if we had actually formed a party on that basis, we would have been just one of these groups that have fallen apart, or imploded, over the times. It might have looked good, on a superficial level, but it would have been built on a rotting foundation, just as some of these other groups managed to have a certain amount of "capital" in the movement, for a time, but they didn't have MLM and they couldn't sustain themselves through the twists and turns and the decisive turning points.

Now, there is the fact that we do have to continually bring forward increasing numbers of people from among the proletariat and from among the oppressed nationalities. We have to continue to develop them as leaders of the proletarian revolution and leaders of the Party. But we have to do that as part of the overall task of building our Party as the proletarian vanguard, leading the proletariat and masses of people to make revolution, based on MLM, and not on any other basis.

Again, a defining feature of the revolutionary process is that there will repeatedly be key junctures in which fundamental questions will be sharply posed and great challenges have to be met. And the question will be repeatedly posed: do you make the necessary ruptures and leaps, or do you go backward and perhaps go into the abyss? Really coming to grips with this is a decisive part of confronting reality as it actually is—in all of its complexity and in its motion and development—and transforming reality on that basis.

Part 6: Expanding and Transforming the "We" Who Holds State Power

At the same time as we remain absolutely firm in our orientation of seizing and holding on to state power, there is a task and a challenge of continually expanding and transforming the "we" that is holding and exercising state power. This is a point that was made in the speech at the Mao Memorial a number of years ago.[12] The question is posed in that speech: if you're in power, there are many things you have to do, to not only maintain power but to continue the revolution, but who is the "you"? That's another expression of the very profound and often acute contradictions involved in socialism as a *transition to* communism. We have to hold on to state power and we have to wield state power in order to accomplish all these things I was talking about earlier that are impossible under the system[13]; but if we don't transform the "we" then that's going to undermine what we're seeking to do. These are world-historic transformations we're talking about, and they can't be accomplished by just a small number of people, even if that small number is thousands or tens or even hundreds of thousands—a relatively small number of advanced people, concentrated and organized in the vanguard, cannot by themselves accomplish the transformations we're talking about.

We can sit here and say: "We could run society a lot better than the bourgeoisie." In fact, I say that all the time—and it's true. But if "we" are just a relatively small number, we can't do this. We'll end up in the same place and demoralize the masses in the process. So we have to expand the "we" all the time. We have to be expanding the "we" even before state power is won—and, again, in a more magnified and concentrated way, after revolutionary state power is established and consolidated.

We have to do this until there is no more state power, until there is no more need for a vanguard, until there is no division between leadership and led and the potential no longer exists for that to be transformed into an antagonistic, oppressive relationship. And this has to be accomplished on a world scale. Nothing less than that is the magnitude of the task that we're undertaking. After all, as important as the seizure of power truly is, it is not an end in itself and is not the final aim—the final aim is the establishment of communism, with the abolition of class antagonisms and class distinctions altogether, the end of all oppressive social relations and divisions, not just in this or that country but throughout the world, and the establishment of a world community of freely associating human beings who are, as Mao put it, consciously and voluntarily transforming themselves as well as the objective world.

Doing Away with Despots

Speaking of the transition to communism and the seizure of power as the first great leap in that, to put this somewhat provocatively, it could be said that the goal is to move from where the vanguard is "an enlightened despot" to where there is no despot and no need or basis for one. Now that is, again, a

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[12] See *The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung*. This was a speech given by Bob Avakian in September 1978, summing up the experience of the Cultural Revolution in China and in particular the "last great battle" led by Mao against the revisionists, headed by Deng Xiaoping, and the outcome of that battle—the revisionist coup, shortly after Mao's death, and the restoration of capitalism in China.

[13] See Part 2 of this series, "We Want State Power—and We *Should* Want It" in *RW* #1197 (May 4, 2003). Also available on line at rwor.org.

deliberately provocative and even consciously outrageous way to say it. What do I mean by being "enlightened despots"? Obviously, I don't mean that literally—our outlook and methods can't be like those of Louis the 14th or Frederick the Great.[14]

Still, the fact remains that, when we come to power, there will remain great inequalities and social divisions, and notions of "pure democracy" would only serve to bring the bourgeoisie back to power. Think, for example, of what's said about the new state power in our Party's Draft Programme (see the appendices "Consolidating the New Proletarian Power, Developing Radically New Institutions" and "Proletarian Dictatorship, Democracy and the Rights of the People.") It makes the point that things proceed in waves, and that, in order for revolution to be possible there will have to be a whole, huge mass upsurge, but then it will not be possible to continuously maintain things at that high level.

Imagine what would be necessary to make revolution in a country like the U.S. Millions and tens of millions of people and all their revolutionary upheaval will be organized into an organized fighting force, and people will go through tremendous changes in their relations with each other and in their view of the world, in their ideological outlook. But then that's not going to stay on that same high level—it won't be possible to maintain things at that level all the time. Things proceed in waves and through spirals. When that initial great revolutionary wave recedes that has made it possible to seize and consolidate state power, we're not going to hand power back to the bourgeoisie. We're not going to say: "Oh well, right now there aren't as many masses as actively involved as there were at the high point of the mass revolutionary upsurge, so we should hand power back to the bourgeoisie, because after all we don't want to be a hierarchal dictatorship." No—that would be a monumental betrayal of the masses and all the ways in which they heroically struggled and sacrificed to make revolution and seize power.

So that's one side of the contradiction—once state power has been won, with everything that will be involved in achieving that, we must hold on firmly to that state power. But the other side goes back to that question of who is the "we"—to the task of expanding and transforming the "we," increasingly involving broader ranks of the masses in exercising power and revolutionizing society—and if we don't find the means to do that, then this state power will, in fact, be turned into another form of oppressive rule, into another form of bourgeois dictatorship.

What I mean by being an "enlightened despot," again to be deliberately provocative, is that it will be unavoidable that, especially in the early stages of the proletarian dictatorship, the party—and, in a concentrated way, the party leadership—will have a disproportionate influence, shall we say, over society. It will have a disproportionate influence over what happens in society. Not because we're determined to run everything—but because that's the reality of it. Anybody can say what they want, but just think realistically. Somebody gets up and says something and then a party leader gets up and says something else: Who's going to get more of an audience in the short run? And, in an overall sense, it will not be wrong for people to have respect for and to give great weight to what is said by representatives of the vanguard that has led them out of the horrors of this society. But there is a real contradiction there, because in any given situation it may be that the person who is not a party leader is right, and the party leader is wrong; and there is the general principle that right and wrong, correct and incorrect, have to be determined on their own merits, so to speak—on the basis of determining what actually corresponds to objective reality and what points toward a fuller understanding of the question. So you're dealing with all kinds of very sharp contradictions here, but the fact is that, no matter how you resolve any particular aspect of this,

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[14] Louis the 14th, known as the "Roi Soleil" (the "Sun King") was the King of France during parts of the 17th and 18th centuries, and Frederick the Great was the King of Prussia in the 18th century; both were influenced by the Enlightenment that was centered in France during that period.

party members and in particular party leaders, and the party as a whole, are going to have a disproportionate influence for a while.

Everything's not going to be all equal, especially in the early stages of socialism—the whole point and objective of the socialist transition to communism is to eliminate social inequalities, but they will not and cannot be abolished all at once, or even in a very short period of time, even though it is crucial to continue in the direction of overcoming these inequalities to the greatest degree possible at every stage. But, for some time, it's not going to be all equal.

So, what do we do with that? Do we recognize that contradiction and then set out on the road of overcoming that step by step—and leap after leap—until we finally get to the point where these inequalities are overcome, and this contradiction between leadership and led is abolished? Or do we go off course in one direction or another: either giving full play to these divisions and inequalities, reinforcing and even heightening them; or, as the "mirror opposite" error, trying to just ignore these inequalities, or to abolish them all at a single stroke? *Both* of these wrong lines and approaches will lead, sooner or later, to the destruction of the socialist state and the restoration of capitalism, reversing the whole revolutionary process through which the masses can increasingly master and transform society toward the elimination of class divisions and social inequalities.

So, here again, we get into decisive questions that are taken up in the Draft Programme and are spoken to in *Great Objectives and Grand Strategy* and *Grasp Revolution, Promote Production* about the dialectical relationship between the need for leadership and centralism, on the one hand, and on the other hand, diversity, creativity and creative initiative, criticism and dissent. These things are all vital, just as holding onto state power and not handing it back to the bourgeoisie is absolutely vital.

The Value of Dissent

Dissent—do we really value dissent, as it says in the Draft Programme, or is that just something we say? It's easy to say (relatively easy, anyway) that we should value dissent and we should encourage dissent—including, and especially, when we are in power. But what does it mean in practice when everybody doesn't yet have adequate health care and somebody comes and says, "We want some funding to put out an alternative newspaper that says you're full of shit"? Well, these are hard contradictions. And if we don't have a correct line on this, if we don't really value diversity and dissent—not just as some sort of general or abstract orientation, but if we don't actually deeply understand what it means that dissent is important in socialist society—then, in fact, the means will not really be provided for this, for people like the Amy Goodmans in socialist society who are going to have their radio and TV programs poking holes in things we're doing, criticizing us for things we do wrong—and for some things we do right. The exception to the rulers—that's Amy Goodman's slogan—well, when we're "the rulers" it's a little different story. So are we really going to welcome that, in a basic sense?

Of course, particular things have to be analyzed concretely, not only in terms of what people are actually saying and doing, but also in terms of all the different priorities that you have to deal with. Are you going to let masses of people go without basic health care, for example, in order to fund all the people who may want to engage in dissent of various kinds? No. On the other hand, are you going to say, "Well, I'm sorry we can't fund any of this because people need health care"? No—that would be wrong too. Even if some aspects of health care might have to be developed a little more slowly—while we are making sure that people have the basic necessities of health care—it will be important to devote some funding to dissent—important to everything we're trying to do, strategically.

But this will not be easy. Will it be easy to have to tell people that we can't build a new clinic right away because we're devoting some funding to people who want to raise criticism and dissent?

That's not going to be easy at all. And I'm sure the masses will have some things to say about that. So, again, it will be crucial to handle these things correctly. Undoubtedly, there will be times and circumstances in which it will be necessary not to allocate funds to certain vehicles of dissent in order to meet pressing needs of the masses, but it will also be of real importance to make sure that, in an overall way, funding is provided for such means of dissent and that in general there be a conscious effort and struggle to create the kind of atmosphere in which people broadly speak out freely and make their views known on all kinds of questions.

Of course, as I have stressed many times, this does not mean that we do not need the dictatorship of the proletariat; all of what I am speaking to here, including our approach to dissent, will only be possible, and will only contribute to the struggle for the full emancipation of the masses of people, if the overthrown bourgeoisie and others who have been clearly shown to be determined to overthrow the rule of the proletariat and restore capitalism, are prevented from doing so, through the restriction and when necessary the suppression of their political activity. But, as I have also stressed many times, the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the actual exercise of this dictatorship, should not lead to confusing dissent in general with counter-revolution, and should not diminish but should underline the importance of valuing dissent in socialist society.

"Fitting" to Rule

These are the kinds of complex and often acute contradictions that we're going to have to deal with when we have state power. But think about it—are there no elements of that even now? Of course there are. Things of this kind are repeatedly posed in the work that we're doing today. They are posed somewhat differently today, but the methodology and the approach, the outlook and the ideology with which we take up these contradictions are essential, not only for building the struggle in the present but in advancing toward the future. Marx talked about the proletariat preparing (or "fitting") itself to rule. Well, this is part of what we're doing.

Why did we have an issue of the paper devoted entirely to the question of evolution? I saw a very interesting summation of a discussion with one of our supporters who was talking about what a big impression this made on him. He took the Party much more seriously because of the fact that we devoted this much attention to this issue, and the Party person talking to him about this made a very good point. The comrade said something like: "Well, yes, this is an important issue in its own right and there's all this religious fundamentalism that is misleading people; but it's also because giving people some basic understanding of things like evolution, and of the means and methodology for getting into questions like this, is part of preparing the proletariat to rule." That's another example in the present conditions of the principles I'm talking about.

Even now—even before revolutionary state power has been seized and consolidated, and as a key part of advancing toward that goal—the methodology and the means for recognizing and dealing with necessity, of correctly understanding objective reality, and transforming it, is the same, in essence, even though the particularities may be greatly different than when we have state power. Even now, there is the decisive question of bringing forward the masses and not only leading them in resisting their oppression today but preparing them for the future, preparing them to rule and revolutionize society.

As Lenin pointed out, there are masses and masses—what is meant by "masses" depends on the times and circumstances. In certain situations, masses may mean thousands or even just hundreds, while in other contexts it may mean tens or hundreds of thousands, and when society is convulsed in massive upheaval and a revolutionary situation approaches and ripens, masses will mean millions, even tens of millions. But whatever the context and whatever the numbers, there remains the fundamental necessity and principle of bringing forward the masses to increasingly take up all these different spheres of society and the struggle over the direction of society. This is important now and

obviously will be all the more so once state power has been won.

Part 7: Understanding and Changing the World: A Question of Outlook and Method

With the preceding parts of this talk as a basic foundation and framework, the question I want to turn to now is the role and responsibility of leadership, our outlook and methods in general and methods of leadership in particular. In the section of *Grasp Revolution, Promote Production* on methods of leadership a number of contradictions are spoken to, including the contradiction between practice and theory and correctly handling the dialectical relationship between them. This relates to something that's in our Party's Draft Programme, where it talks about science and art, and it emphasizes this point: "Our proletarian ideology leads us to appreciate the importance of science and other intellectual and artistic work that more directly serves the ongoing struggle of the proletariat, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, to appreciate scientific inquiry and intellectual engagement and artistic experimentation that is not tied in such a direct way—and certainly not in a pragmatic, "instrumentalist" way—to the policy and more immediate aims of the proletarian party at any given time." (See the Appendix "Art, Science, Education, Sports, and the Challenge of Creating a Whole New Superstructure in Socialist Society.")

What is said there, in the Draft Programme, concentrates something of great importance in terms of the masses of people, as well as the party, having a correct understanding and orientation toward these spheres, and being able to correctly engage them, as well as in terms of humanity's advancing in its ability to understand and transform reality overall. And there is an importance to understanding the world "in its own right," even though ultimately that can't be divorced from the question of social practice because, first of all, reality cannot be correctly understood apart from practice. It can't be understood without correctly handling the dialectical relation between practice and theory, in which, in an overall and ultimate sense, practice is primary, is the point of departure and ultimate point of determination of theory. And understanding the world cannot be divorced from the question of social relations, because there is not only the question of how theory is developed and truth ultimately determined but also, and very much interconnected with that, there is the question of "for whom and for what" theory and knowledge in general is developed. But, with all that, there is an importance to understanding the world "in its own right"—that is, apart from any immediate use, any particular practical application, of such understanding.

In a way, we could say that this is similar to the fact that there is importance to things like play. That's one of the things that's important to humanity—it's one of the things that characterizes the human species. Many people think that we communists don't know that—and there have been certain tendencies in the history of our movement not to correctly grasp this, in part because we have such very serious things we're trying to do. This is not a game. But there is a role for games. That's part of what we're trying to do and part of the world we're trying to create. A lot of times the reason people think we communists don't know about play is because we have so many important things we're trying to do—and it's not just that we decided to cook up a bunch of things so we could feel important. These are world-historic things weighing on masses of people, as spoken to at the beginning of this talk. Yet, we can't lose sight of the importance of play.

THE MASS LINE

All of this is part of being what we are; it's also part of leading. It's part of correctly applying the mass line—drawing from the ideas of the masses, applying MLM to synthesize and concentrate what is correct in those ideas, developing this into lines and policies, and then uniting and persevering together with the masses to carry out these lines and policies...and learning through this. This is an ongoing process, which proceeds through cycles, or spirals, combining learning and leading, in a way

that is closely related to the dialectical process of practice-theory-practice.

There's a lot that goes into all this. There is the question of knowing the masses and knowing them well. From our standpoint, this is principally a matter of carrying out political work among the masses. But it also involves hanging out with them and getting to know them in that way, seeing how they feel about many different things, what they have to say about these things when they're "letting down their hair" because they're getting to know you better too. All these kinds of things are both what we have to be about politically and also are part of the kind of world we're trying to bring into being.

We have to bring into being the shoots and elements of that future even now, even though we can't bring it into being in a qualitative way until we make revolution. And we can't ourselves fall into illusions or spread illusions among others that we can sort of piecemeal bring the future into being. In the process of building the movement, building resistance to all the various outrages and injustices of this system, there is much that is really great and represents seeds of the future. We should cherish that; we should nurture it. But we can't think that we're going to sort of quantitatively build that up and somehow have a different society and a different world, without overturning and uprooting the system that now dominates the world. This goes back to all the points I was speaking to at the start of this talk: without overthrowing and transforming, none of these positive things, these seeds of the future, can be nurtured and developed, in the final analysis.

There is the question of mass line within the party as well as among the broader masses. This involves all the aspects I've been talking about, including the importance of knowing comrades well when you're in a position of leadership. Mao talked about how, in the Chinese revolution, in the conditions where they were based in the countryside, different comrades could hear the rooster crowing in their neighbor's yard, they lived that close, but they never visited with each other and talked to each other outside of meetings. Well, although our Party is in different conditions, from what I understand the same kind of phenomenon exists and the same principles should be applied. Everyone is very busy, and it's not like there are arbitrary reasons why people don't do these kind of things—visiting with each other, getting together and talking outside of formal meetings, and so on. But this is an important part of getting to know the masses, including the masses you may be leading within the Party, as well as the masses outside the Party.

Now, again, a number of these points were spoken to in *Grasp Revolution, Promote Production*, so I'm not going to dwell on them at length here. But I did want to highlight these points concerning the practice-theory-practice dialectic and the mass line, both within the Party as well as among broader masses, and the importance of correctly handling these dialectical relations.

PROBLEMS OF *A PRIORISM* AND PRAGMATISM

You can err in two directions also with regard to the practice and theory relation. You can be dogmatic—and, to use philosophical terms, *a priorist*, in other words, you have a conception of reality in advance (which is what *a priori*means) and then you try to impose that on reality. There's a lot of that in the world. And there's been a lot of that in the history of our movement, because communists do not exist in a vacuum, we're not "sealed off" from the rest of the world—nor could we do what we are setting out to do if we were somehow isolated like that—and so the conditions and conceptions that have influence in society generally also have an influence on us. The difference is that we have an outlook and methodology that enables us to recognize this and to struggle for a more correct approach to engaging and transforming reality. But, again, it is not that we aren't influenced by subjective ways of approaching things, including *a priorism*—we are not immune from this tendency of wanting things to be a certain way so badly that you try to impose your subjective wishes and aims on reality, instead of confronting reality as it actually is and transforming it in accordance with how it really is and how it is actually moving and changing.

To give a particularly gross example of this kind of subjectivism and *a priorism*, I remember when I was first involved in the movement, back in the mid-1960s, I knew some people in Berkeley who were in PLP (Progressive Labor Party) and at one point there was an article in the *New York Times*quoting one of them as saying: "We have ten thousand members in Harlem." So a bunch of us were talking with this guy and we said: "What the fuck is that? What are you talking about? You don't have any ten thousand members in Harlem or anywhere else. What the hell is that?" And the guy's defense was: "Well, it's true that we don't have that right now, but if we *say*we do then that will help build us up and then we'll get ten thousand members." Well, it's fairly easy to see that that's not any kind of scientific methodology, let alone a genuinely communist methodology. But that's an example of a kind of *a priorism* that's akin to dogmatism as well as pragmatism.

Here's another example of dogmatism—of theory divorced from practice. In the early days of the *RU*[15], there was a guy who was with us for a little while—he was one of these people who read constantly, read theory constantly, which is good, very good. But one day I ran into him and I said, "Hey Mike, what are you up to?" And he answered: "Volume 40." He'd been reading all of Lenin's Collected Works, beginning with the first volume, and he'd almost completed that—he'd gotten all the way up to Volume 40. That's good, I'm not going to put it down. Theory is important, very important. But his approach did not reflect a correct grasp of the relation of theory to practice—it was theory almost completely divorced from practice. So what did it mean? He ended up quitting the RU pretty soon after that. I don't know what he's into now, but I'm sure it isn't MLM. So there is a real problem with theory that is divorced from practice.

On the other hand, the bigger tendency and much greater problem in a country like the U.S., in particular, is the tendency to pragmatism—which in effect denies there is objective truth and defines truth by whatever is useful to this or that individual or group at a given time. In terms of the communist movement, the tendency to pragmatism takes different forms but they all amount to not recognizing what Lenin emphasized: without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement. Even many people who have all kinds of theories claim to be anti-theoretical because that's so much the currency, especially (although not only) in the U.S.

There are many who say things like: "We don't want to have a whole worked out theory because that would be too `totalizing.' " This is connected with all kinds of political tendencies, like, for example, the Zapatistas, whose position is that you don't want to have a whole integrated theory, and you don't want to have state power. And those two things go together—in an ironic and upside-down way, this does reflect reality. If you don't have a comprehensive revolutionary theory and you aren't grappling with theory, you won't ever get to the point of seizing state power either. So the Zapatistas don't need to worry about that, because they openly proclaim that they are not aiming for state power. But we need to worry about it. We need the correct dynamic, or dialectic, of practice-theory-practice. And, once again, the U.S. in particular is rife with anti-theoretical, anti-intellectual tendencies, and crude know-nothingism, all of which is so widely promoted and fostered by the American bourgeoisie, with its pragmatic philosophy. And this does find its way into the movement of opposition, because again people are living and breathing this—taking in the air and atmosphere, so to speak, of this kind of outlook.

FLYING WITHOUT A SAFETY NET—GRAPPLING WITH THEORY

So, we need to struggle to come to the correct appreciation of theory, as well as practice, and the

[15] The RU (Revolutionary Union) was a communist organization that was formed in the late 1960s by Bob Avakian and a few others in the Bay Area, and it developed into a national organization by the early 1970s. From the beginning, the RU took up the task of building toward a new, revolutionary communist party in the U.S., and it was the main force leading to the formation of the RCP,USA in 1975.

correct handling of the practice-theory-practice dialectic. Everybody who wants to change the world, and certainly every communist, has to grapple with theory. This has to do with the basic orientation we all must have of "flying without a safety net." Even when you're not in a top leadership position in the Party, you should try to operate without a safety net in terms of your orientation. In other words, you should grapple with theory, with line, and you should do as much as you can do, individually and as part of the overall Party collective, to contribute to the understanding and the line of the Party as a whole. We don't want a division like they had in the old Communist Party, even before it fully degenerated into revisionism, where there were the "thinkers" and the "doers"—a great separation between those who developed line and those who carried it out. This is something we definitely don't want.

Everybody has to take responsibility for grappling with theory and developing line. It doesn't matter what your particular assignment is at a given time, what your particular role or position in the Party is at a given time—everybody should grapple with theory, everybody should seek to carry forward the practice- theory-practice dialectic—overwhelmingly as part of a collective, but also individually. Take initiative and think about things and raise questions that occur to you. Don't assume that somebody else in the Party is going to pay attention to this. Maybe they will, but maybe they don't have time, or maybe they haven't thought about something you've thought about. Maybe there's a question you've run into in carrying out mass work, or a theoretical problem you've been grappling with; maybe, in the course of your work among the masses, people have raised things which, as far as you know, nobody else is thinking about—or you're not sure anyone else is thinking about this. Well, the Party leadership needs to know about this—and you need to continue grappling with this yourself while also making that part of the collective life of the Party—that's very important, no matter what your particular position and role is in the Party at any given time. It's important for the life, the vitality of the Party, and it's important for the collectivity of the Party, it's important to really make the channels of the Party a chain of knowledge as well as a chain of command. There is all kinds of lively shit going on out there, all kinds of different trends in the movements of opposition, there are all kinds of opinions that masses of people have.

Sometimes I read these reports, and I just howl hysterically at some of the backward shit the masses come up with—I have to say it's often very creative and even very entertaining! But there are also a lot of insights they have. And both are valuable and important to know about—both their advanced ideas and sentiments and the backward shit they get pulled into. All this has to be part of the living dynamic of the Party's development of line and policy and of carrying this out in practice. So in that sense we all have to fly without a safety net. It's not somebody else's responsibility to develop the line. Yes, we have a structure to the Party, we have a chain of knowledge and chain of command. I'm not encouraging people to just come up with their own theory and line, all off by themselves, and then to carry this into practice. But everybody is responsible for grappling with theory and developing the line in the correct way, through the correct channels. This, too, is an important aspect of applying the mass line inside the Party as well as more broadly among the masses.

Part 8: Taking Responsibility, Taking Initiative, and Not Being Paralyzed by Mistakes

I want to talk a little bit about "what it takes," that is, what is required to rise to the responsibility of leading, being a part of the vanguard and even being part of the leadership of the Party. In the Constitution of our Party it makes the point that Party members should be prepared to take any post and fulfill any task that is required to carry out our responsibility to the international proletariat. That's a very serious challenge for us. Now, it is important to make an honest assessment of what you are capable of contributing at any given point—if you're called on to do something you're not really capable of doing, you should say so. That's part of objectively analyzing reality, as well. But that shouldn't become a sort of rationalization for not rising to challenges when they're presented. We have to have an orientation of wanting the ball, an orientation of rising to the responsibilities and the challenges we face—those that are brought forward by the objective development of things, and those that result from what the Party, through its collectivity, its channels and its leadership, calls on us to do.

We should not take this up uncritically, unthinkingly, but we have to have that orientation of taking up any post and any responsibility we are called on to assume. We have to have a conquering spirit, not in some sort of quasi-religious sense, but grounded in materialism and guided by dialectics. And this means not being intimidated or overawed by things. This is an important aspect of being able to lead and to take responsibility on whatever level you're called on to do it. Of course, we should all realize that the stakes of things these days are very great, and are constantly being raised. If we make mistakes they have real consequences. We don't have state power to lose, unfortunately, but we could lose a lot if we make serious mistakes. So that can be intimidating, that can be paralyzing. But that's why we have collectivity, and why we have a structure to the Party and leadership, why we have guidelines, why we have various documents as well as the *Revolutionary Worker*to orient people. But, within that framework, we need people to take initiative. And we need people not to be intimidated or overawed.

We have to handle a very acute contradiction between, on the one hand, the fact that if we make a serious mistake we could really screw things up, and on the other hand, needing an attitude on a certain level of: if you make mistakes, so what? That's another unity of opposites. You have to handle that correctly. You can't have either just one or the other. "Oh, if I make a mistake, so what—so I caused a real setback—that's OK." Well, it's not OK. On the other hand, if for fear of that you don't take initiative, you are always waiting for people to tell you what to do about every aspect of things—or even when they do tell you what you should do, when they give you basic orientation and guidance, you don't do it because you're afraid of making mistakes, you're afraid of your own shadow, you're paralyzed by fear of causing dire consequences. Clearly, that won't lead anywhere positive either. We have to take responsibility for everything, including what we do and our own mistakes. And taking responsibility for that means being willing, on the one hand, to risk things in the framework in which we should—which is ultimately and fundamentally determined collectively, but also has an individual component, an aspect in which individual initiative, on the basis of the common line and policy, is very important. It also means taking responsibility for recognizing and correcting our errors and openly discussing them with others and helping others as well as ourselves to learn from them when we make them, and doing our best not to repeat errors.

At the same time, let me emphasize it again: it is of decisive importance not to be paralyzed by our mistakes, or by the fear of making mistakes—there is an aspect in which it is correct to say "so what?" with regard to mistakes that we may make. In this regard, it is worth looking at the document *Revisionists Are Revisionists...and Revolutionaries*

Are Revolutionaries..., which was written as part of the struggle within our Party over what stand to take toward the revisionist coup in China following Mao's death in 1976.[16]

"Revisionists/Revolutionaries" is full of "so what's": the Chinese leadership, after they overthrew the "gang of four," they had a big demonstration and millions of people denounced the gang of four...so what? It's full of a lot of "so what's" like that, and those "so what's" have meaning. It's not just being oblivious to reality and going blithely along—ignorance is bliss. It's saying, "Look, let's keep our eye on the big things, on the essential questions here." As it points out, anybody can organize a demonstration of a lot people if they have state power. That's not so hard to do, at least in the short run. That doesn't answer the question of what line different forces represent and what road this or that program will take people on.

So, it's important to have an orientation of, on the one hand, taking all this very seriously, and taking responsibility for all that we do, including our mistakes; but, on the other hand—and correctly understood—we need that "so what" orientation of being unafraid, including being unafraid to make mistakes, even while working very hard to minimize mistakes as much as possible, and to learn from them as much as possible when mistakes are made.

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[16] "Revisionists Are Revisionists and Must Not Be Supported; Revolutionaries Are Revolutionaries and Must be Supported" was written by Bob Avakian and played a key role in uniting the majority of the RCP around the line of exposing and opposing the revisionist coup and the restoration of capitalism in China and in defeating a line within the RCP that would have supported and mirrored the line of the revisionists in China who came to power through the coup. This document and other key documents, on both sides of the struggle within the RCP over this decisive question, are reproduced in the book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1978).

Part 9: Flying Without a Safety Net, And the Relation Between Reverence and Irreverence

A lot of times, especially when you're newer to things, you have a certain level of responsibility, but not the highest level of responsibility, and you're doing something and you say, "Well, that's good enough—because I know that, if it's not really good enough, somebody else is going to clean it up for me somewhere up the chain; it's going to get to somebody who knows how to straighten out this shit." This is a tendency everybody has—and just about everybody has wished, at one time or another, that there were actually a god. Especially if it would actually help you win basketball games and do your work right and everything. But there isn't—that's the reality of it. Yet everybody kind of has these tendencies in one form or another—you want somebody to step in and clean up your shit or figure out things you can't figure out. And believe me, for everyone, on every level, there are many things we haven't figured out.

So everybody feels inadequate in certain ways—feels frustrated that there are problems they are having a hard time solving, or don't yet know how to solve—but we have to have the orientation of flying without a safety net. If you're not on the top leadership of the Party, you don't have the same responsibility as those who are, but you do have real responsibilities and you do have to take real initiative. And you have to have the orientation of contributing everything you can and not thinking: "Well, somebody will clean up my mistakes." It is true that, whatever level of the Party you're on, what you do, including things that you're incapable of resolving all by yourself, has to become part of the larger collectivity of the Party and its development of line and practice. But what is your orientation toward that? Is it that you're going to contribute as much as you possibly can and be part of that process—and take as much initiative as you can—or are you just going to kind of go through the motions and let somebody else worry about resolving things and figuring everything out? There is a very important difference in orientation there.

Related to this, I want to talk about the relation between reverence and irreverence. These things are contradictory, they form a contradiction with each other (a unity of opposites). For example, reverence—if it means, as it sometimes does, worshipping someone or something, then obviously that has no part in what we're all about and is something we have to work to overcome. So that's on the one hand—we don't want reverence in that sense. On the other hand, to really revere someone or something, to respect them for things they've done and what they represent, *is* a part of what we're about and should be part of how we're leading the masses—to respect people who have made contributions, to respect the Party for what it represents, to revere it in a certain sense—yes, we do need that. Not only is that not wrong, that's important, that's a positive thing. So there's a fine line there between uncritically following, on the one hand, and on other hand following with your mental faculties working. Reverence, correctly understood, is a question of respecting, even revering, but not worshipping, those people and things that are deserving of this. Those things that deserve to be respected should be respected. Those things that don't deserve to be respected should not be. But nothing should be worshipped. Nothing should be uncritically followed. Nothing should be blindly carried out.

If irreverence means, as I was just saying, that you don't worship things, that you don't blindly follow people, that you critically think about everything, that you challenge anything or anyone if you think they're wrong—whether you have a developed basis for thinking that, or even if it's just your impression—irreverence in that sense is very necessary and vital for what we're all about. To defer to people simply because they have more experience, or because in an overall sense they may actually know more than you, or because they've made more contributions than you—to just blindly defer to people for those reasons—that's wrong and can be very harmful.

There is that line from (actually the title of) the Springsteen song: "prove it all night." We have to prove it all night in what we're doing. You could be right a thousand times, but the next time there's still truth, there's still reality, and there's still what's right and wrong. And you have to be right every time. Not that anybody ever will be, but you have to strive to be right every time. And if you think somebody's not right, it doesn't matter who they are. In the correct way and the correct spirit, you have to challenge them, you have to raise what your thinking is, you have to raise what you think is incorrect. That's essential in what we're trying to do, in terms of getting to the point of seizing power and transforming society, and it's essential to what we're doing it all for and what we're all about, the kind of society and world we are struggling to bring into being. So we do need irreverence in that sense. We don't need irreverence "for its own sake"—we don't need people to just challenge others simply because they're in authority, without analyzing the content of their authority and how they exercise that authority.

It's good to challenge authority, but it's not good to do it for its own sake or just because people have authority or leadership roles. And it's not good, just because you may have certain questions or disagreements, to not have a dialectical view of that and not to recognize the contributions that people have made and what they represent if they do represent positive things, whether individuals or the Party collectively. There is a fine line there, but it is an important distinction. So, here again, we have to strive for the correct synthesis of these contradictory aspects of reverence and irreverence.

The Relation Between Basic Principles and Creatively Applying Them

This is similar to the principle that's stressed in the Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) where it says that you have to handle correctly the relation between standing on our basic principles and at the same time creatively applying them. And creatively applying includes being open to understanding that things you may hold to be very dear and very crucial may not be entirely correct, or may even be wrong, may be proven to be wrong or to be no longer applicable. So there's a unity of opposites there too. And it's the same with reverence and irreverence. The point that's made in the RIM declaration is that if you don't stand on the basic principles, then any creative application you do is going to land you in the swamp. We have plenty of experience of things like Khrushchevite creative development of Marxism-Leninism—that is, revisionism. On the other hand, on the basis of firmly grounding yourself in basic principles, if you just blindly apply that, it's going to turn into its opposite. And it's the same with reverence and irreverence. It's because we have tremendous reverence, in the sense in which I talked about it, for the leaders of our class historically and for our comrades internationally—it's because we stand on that, that we also have a certain irreverence. Our irreverence is dialectically related to, and ultimately grounded in, our reverence, in that sense. And, so to speak, if we were to "unhinge" our irreverence from that reverence, then we would turn into just bourgeois critics and take up the bourgeois point of view.

Let me give you an example. *Conquer the World*[17] was and is extremely controversial (in case that isn't obvious). Some people have said, for example, that in "Conquer the World" I attacked everything and everybody we should hold dear—all the great leaders of our class and all of our accomplishments—that I've reduced them all to sort of a tattered banner. In one sense, they're right. In other words, in "Conquer the World" much of the historical experience of the proletarian revolution and the roles of the great leaders of this cause are subjected to a lot of critical analysis. And this should be done. Otherwise, what are we about? On the other hand, those who say this are fundamentally wrong: it isn't a matter of attacks. I did attempt to make a critical analysis and some synthesis of some crucial experience of the history of the international communist movement, including the role of its

[17] "Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will," by Bob Avakian, appeared in *Revolution* magazine, Issue #50, December 1981. Available online at revcom.us

main leaders, beginning with Marx and Engels (and not just Stalin, for example). But here again it's a matter of irreverence and reverence and the correct dialectical relationship between them. I didn't say—and I don't believe—that we have a tattered banner. I didn't say, "All these people ever did was mess up." What I said was that there are decisive lessons we should be learning. We should have a critical attitude toward everything, including the history of our movement and the contributions of its leaders, even the greatest of them. This, too, is a contradiction that is very important to handle correctly, dialectically and on a materialist basis.

Part 10: Communist Methods—In Opposition to Bourgeois-Bureaucratic Methods

Communist leadership is, in essence, a matter of line. This is opposed to the bureaucratic, bourgeois method and in general top-down methods of leadership and the sense that leadership is essentially issuing orders—cooking up "brilliant ideas" all by yourself and then imposing them on other people, and insisting on your way when there are problems. That is not our method of leadership. Our methods of leadership, and the essence of our leadership, is essentially leadership on the basis of line. Leadership is concentrated in line, and line is concentrated leadership. We lead people through line. We lead them by examining the contradictions that we're up against and working together with them to provide a means for dealing with these contradictions and putting that in the context of the larger reality we're dealing with. That's what is meant by line, and that's essentially how we lead—as opposed to cooking up fanciful ideas and imposing them on people.

Mao said that working out ideas and using cadre well is the essence of leadership. But he didn't mean that in an idealist or commandist sense. He meant applying the mass line, inside the party as well as more broadly—drawing from the ideas of the masses and then systematizing those ideas by applying our scientific ideology of MLM, concentrating what is correct, and then uniting with, persevering together with, and leading people to carry out lines and policies that are developed on that basis. And using cadre well means unleashing them—it doesn't mean "using" them in a bourgeois sense—it means unleashing them and enabling them to take initiative.

Now, in relation to the aspect of working out ideas, I want to refer to something that was touched on in the article *Working With Ideas* which was written by Ardea Skybreak as food for thought and to stimulate grappling with what it was raising. Skybreak emphasizes that working with ideas, working in the realm of ideas, is something that has its own "laws," or dynamics. It is something that has to be taken up in its own right, while at the same time, its ultimate source and point of determination—and the proof of ideas, to put it that way—is practice. So there's another dialectical relation, another expression of the relation between theory and practice. And in order to be able to lead a revolutionary movement, you have to be able to deal in the realm of ideas—and not just one to one with practical problems of the movement, although that's extremely important. You have to be able to range over a broad variety of different subjects and be thinking about all kinds of things.

This goes back to the principle that is stressed in our Party's *Draft Programme*[18]: there is importance to things, in the realm of ideas and theory, that don't have any direct relation to immediate political and practical tasks, while at the same time you have to have a profound sense of the practical movement and you have to be carrying forward the practice/theory/practice dialectic. Theory is not, and should not be reduced to, only theory that is immediately and directly related to practice and practical problems at any given time.

Working With Ideas

Mao talked about having a poetic spirit. This applies in many ways, and in a broad sense, including to how working with ideas should be approached. It is important to be ranging broadly. There are certain dynamics and there is a certain process to working with ideas.

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[18] "Our proletarian ideology leads us to appreciate the importance of science and other intellectual and artistic work that more directly serves the ongoing struggle of the proletariat, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, to appreciate scientific inquiry and intellectual engagement and artistic experimentation that is not tied in such a direct way—and certainly not in a pragmatic, 'instrumentalist' way—to the policy and more immediate aims of the proletarian party at any given time." (Draft Programme, p. 109)

One of the profound contradictions that has to be confronted and overcome through the process of the proletarian revolution is that, in capitalist society and through thousands of years of class-divided society, with its oppressive division of labor, the masses of people have been largely locked out of this process of working with ideas. Fundamentally, overcoming this is something that can only be achieved after the proletariat has seized state power and through the revolutionary transformation of society, under the rule of the proletariat; but we cannot wait to begin breaking down this division. And in particular the vanguard of the proletariat has to be developing this facility for working with ideas among all of its members and also among the masses more broadly, particularly the more politically awakened masses at any given time. This is also part of preparing the proletariat and masses to rule and revolutionize society. This, again, is one of the main reasons why a major issue of the *Revolutionary Worker* was devoted to the question of evolution, and why there is a whole series on evolution in the RW—people need to learn the scientific method, and they need to learn how to apply dialectical materialism in a living way to all kinds of spheres, not only in order to wage the struggle now but to prepare to transform all of society in the future, once they have seized power. They have to learn to grapple with ideas.

Of course, what is discussed in the evolution series is very much related to crucial ideological and political questions and struggles, particularly though not only in the U.S. But, beyond that, there are basic methodological principles that are being applied and illustrated through this series. In this connection, I was interested to see, in a report on a conversation with a supporter of the Party—a Black professional—about this evolution series, that one of the things he indicated he really liked about it was that, other than the polemics against the creationists, these evolution articles were "not political." Reading this made me think: what did he mean by "not political" and what appealed to him about this? I believe that what he was getting at was that this series isn't one of those "instrumentalist" things where the politics is determining the science, but instead these articles on evolution are proceeding from reality and using the scientific method to analyze an important aspect of reality, namely the question of evolution and evolution vs. creationism. And perhaps he also meant that the article did not attempt to "force in" a separate discussion of how Marxism applies to this subject; instead the series as a whole is *a living application* of the Marxist outlook and method to the subject of evolution and an illustration of how to apply that outlook and method in general. Doing this is part of what's necessary in order to be able to lead. You have to be able to deal not just with communist political theory, or Marxist political economy, and so on—as important as that is. You have to be able to work with ideas in a more overall sense. You have to develop the flexibility of thinking that is necessary to be able to think creatively about all kinds of things—including the political questions that present themselves, but not just those questions.

But, again, there is the profound contradiction that this whole realm of working with ideas is something that the masses of people have been largely locked out of—and in fact are discouraged from taking up—by the oppressive division of labor and the overall functioning of capitalist society and their role within that. They are not only discouraged from thinking about important political, social, cultural, and scientific questions—they are discouraged from thinking about thinking, to put it that way. But we want and we need people to be thinking about thinking as well as grappling with all kinds of questions in all kinds of spheres. And, as much as the "normal functioning" of the capitalist system, along with the conscious policy of its ruling class, discourages and even suppresses critical and creative thinking among the basic masses in particular, there are continually ways in which people raise their heads and break through some of this. There are many experiences in our Party's work, as well as more generally in society, where among the basic masses people grapple with all kinds of big and deep questions, having to do with not only politics but philosophy, culture, science, and so on. And when questions of this kind are put forward to people in a way that, yes, challenges them—because all this is not easy and cannot be

reduced to simple formulas—but at the same time is made accessible to them, more than a few people take this up very hungrily and enthusiastically.

Again referring to the evolution series in the *RW*, I have seen a number of reports indicating how popular this series is among youth—including college students but not limited to them—as well as how this series is being engaged by some prisoners and other basic people. I read a report about a conversation with an immigrant worker who started out saying: "Well, I don't want to believe in evolution, because if I believed in that then I wouldn't think there would be any purpose to life." This led to a whole discussion about evolution, at the end of which the person began to have a very different viewpoint on this. They had been conditioned by religious tradition and indoctrination to believe that there had to be some overarching, transcendental, beyond-human, god-ordained purpose to life. Well, is there a purpose to life? Yes. But only a purpose—or, in fact, different and even conflicting purposes—that we human beings ourselves give to life. There isn't any transcendental, metaphysical, god-imposed purpose to life. There's a purpose, or differing purposes, which human beings determine. There are conflicting ideas and struggle about what those purposes are and should be—all of which ultimately reflects the different interests and viewpoints of different classes and groups in society. And there is plenty that is living and vital in all that.

As much as the masses are discouraged, in a thousand ways, from engaging and wrestling with these kinds of questions, there are continually shoots that break through this suppression, there are repeatedly instances where basic people raise and grapple with big questions, and there is a definite gravitation toward and enthusiasm for this kind of wrangling with big questions, whenever they are presented to people in a way that is accessible to them and that captures their imagination. You'll find that some of the most "down" gang members, for example, will sometimes step aside from what they're normally into and get into all kinds of big questions, not just about their own experience or society more generally but about questions like why reality is the way it is. This is suffocated continually, but it also repeatedly breaks through. And this we want to nurture and encourage and develop, not only because of its importance now but especially looking to the future. In terms of leading, this is essential.

All this relates to the principle that working with ideas, in the broadest sense, is an essential aspect of what we're all about and how we have to lead people, and enable increasing numbers of people to themselves become conscious revolutionary activists and leaders. And an important part of this is the orientation that, even while we're deeply immersed in the ongoing struggle and have a profound grasp of the practical movement, we have to also take the time—or "carve out" the time—to pay attention to and to grapple with all kinds of questions. It's important to be paying attention to big strategic questions, even while being intensely involved in mass work and struggles and all the contradictions that have to be addressed in that context. It's important to be stepping back from the daily routine, no matter how important it may be and how much attention it may actually require, so that first of all, routine does not become rut. And so that strategic questions do not get lost and the link become severed between whatever is being taken up and focused on today and those larger strategic questions and interests. And it is important to be engaging not just the larger political questions, as important as those are, but big questions like the role of art in society, or the nature of the universe and why does the universe exist the way it does. Now you can get "trippy" with that in a bad way—actually get divorced from any materialist foundation—but you can also get trippy with that in a *good*way, and you can be materialist about this even while you're "tripping out."

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Another important aspect of our methods is something I stressed in *Grasp Revolution, Promote Production*: We should be constantly "interrogating" ourselves, as well as listening to the criticisms of others and seeking to learn from the ideas and insights of others. Marx said that the

proletarian revolution goes forward by picking itself up and learning from its mistakes. And there's that old saying: "defeated armies learn well." We have to apply that, in a broad sense, but we also have to apply the principle that *victorious* armies should learn well (of course, this applies metaphorically and broadly, and not just literally to armies).

We shouldn't only learn when we're messing up, though that's a good time to learn. We also need to learn when we're doing well. Even then we shouldn't just go along with spontaneity or be on "automatic pilot." When we're doing well with something, we should still look for shortcomings and seek to correct and overcome them, without losing sight of the advances that are being made and the importance of building on them. And we should always listen to people who think we're not doing right. We shouldn't agree with them if we don't agree with them—if they don't convince us, we shouldn't embrace their criticism as such—but we should never fail to listen to people who think we're not doing right, even when we are doing well. That's a very important principle. This relates to the principle that is emphasized in the Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) about the importance of standing on and applying our basic principles but creatively applying them and being open. We need to have that orientation of being willing to learn and anxious to learn at all times, even when we're doing well—listening, with an open mind, to the "interrogation" of others, and also interrogating ourselves.

None of the qualities which are required for leadership, or to be a communist in general—none of this is innate. Nor is it genetic. All these qualities are things that are learned, even though they are not, and they cannot be, learned all at once. Developing as a communist, like everything else, is a process and it proceeds through waves or spirals. And it is marked by being repeatedly confronted with the need to make leaps and ruptures at critical junctures when the challenges become particularly acute. Different people have different particular experiences—both personal experiences and the larger social experiences in which these personal experiences occur—and this leads to different people having different strengths and weaknesses. What our orientation should be, both in terms of leadership and in terms of the broader Party and the broader masses, is one of combining all positive factors, as Mao put it—helping people to build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses, even while recognizing that not all people are going to have the same strengths or the same weaknesses. Nor would it be possible or desirable to live in a world where everybody had exactly the same strengths and the same weaknesses. That would, in fact, be impossible—and it would be an awful world if it were possible.

Part 11: Being Bold, Being "First String," Actually Being the Vanguard

Taking on the responsibility of being the vanguard means facing up to what's really involved in this and what will come at you, both from the enemy and even from among the people. And, while we should listen to and seek to learn whatever can be learned from criticism, even when it is raised in a nasty spirit, we can't allow ourselves to get distracted or thrown off by notions which actually represent other class viewpoints, including notions about what leadership is and ought to be. Nor should we in any way be defensive about the vanguard—about the need for a vanguard, about the fact that our Party is the vanguard, in the way that we should correctly understand that. We should base ourselves on, and popularize, the criteria and principles of communist leadership—that leadership is represented by line and the demonstrated ability to grasp and apply line—and the fact that our Party meets those criteria and standards and is in fact the vanguard.

If we are going to do what needs to be done, if we are going to assume the responsibility that is required of a vanguard, we have to be prepared and ready to take on what has to be faced in persevering on the revolutionary road and not giving up or giving in. We have to be prepared for whatever the enemy may throw at us. But in some ways an even harder thing is what will come up at times from friends, from among the people, broadly speaking. One of the hardest things is dealing with contradictions among the people, including ways in which the people—the masses of people, or sections of them—don't want to do, or don't yet see the need to do, what needs to be done to bring about the necessary changes and ultimately to emancipate themselves. Sometimes it can even seem like, here you are doing everything you can to serve the fundamental interests of the masses, and yet they come up with a lot of backward bullshit. The fact is, people live in this fucked-up society. We are not "perfect"—even though we strive to apply a radically different ideology, we are not entirely free of the influences of this society and its dominant relations and ways of thinking, and certainly the masses of people aren't spontaneously free of this either. And there are other trends out there in the movement, which represent different programs and are following different ideologies.

I remember Mao said that, as things were coming to a head with Lin Biao, who had been a close comrade of Mao's, one of the most painful things was to feel the arrow in your back and to look around and see your friend smirking at you. This happens. It even happens at times within the communist movement, but especially it happens in the broader movement and in society generally. Well, how do you deal with those things? Do you deal with them in a subjective way, in a manner of taking them personally? Or do you deal with them correctly by recognizing and distinguishing what Mao identified as the two different types of contradictions: contradictions among the people and contradictions, of a qualitatively different kind, between the people and the enemy. How do we handle contradictions which are among the people, no matter how acute they may be in a particular case—how do we distinguish them and handle them differently from contradictions which are with the enemy?

Sometimes the hardest thing is the shit that goes on among the people. And sometimes the hardest thing is to see people who proclaim themselves to be, or even in a certain sense are, trying to make a better world actually falling into some crap that you would expect to see from the enemy. But how do you deal with that? With what orientation? With what method? In what overall context do you put this and evaluate it? Mao said that one of the most difficult things in the high point of the Cultural Revolution was that the two different kinds of contradictions became very intensely intertwined—contradictions among the people often became intensely and acutely intertwined with contradictions between the people and the enemy. It was very difficult to sort that out. A lot of these anecdotal personal grievance accounts we hear

about the Cultural Revolution are an expression of that, even while many of them also involve considerable subjectivity and distortion.

We should always listen and consider things when people express disagreements with us, but at the same time we should maintain our bearings and stick firmly to basic principles. If their criticisms are wrong, then frankly we shouldn't agree with them. We shouldn't be thrown off or get defensive in the face of things that don't in fact reflect objective reality and represent instead the misconceptions and biases that are characteristic of the bourgeois or petit bourgeois outlook. Why should we be defensive in the face of that? Now, to be clear, this doesn't mean that whenever somebody says something we don't agree with, we should start going off with, "Oh, that's just that same old petit bourgeois shit." We have to discuss the substance of things with people and not throw labels on people, either inside the Party or outside the Party. That doesn't do any good.

Like Mao said, the method of striking a pose to intimidate is no good. It doesn't work with the enemy and it does great harm among the people. We should keep that in mind. The bourgeoisie will not be intimidated out of power. And among the people, striking a pose to intimidate does a great deal of harm. And so does putting labels on people rather than dealing with the substance of things. We should discuss the substance of things with people in real terms, breaking our line down for people in a way that they're capable of grasping it, to the best of our ability, and then learning from that experience. But we shouldn't be defensive in the face of things that are objectively other class viewpoints and are wrong. Nor should we be in any way hesitant about putting forward our Party and its leadership, as the leadership that is necessary for this revolution and that is willing and able to play the role of leadership of this revolution.

Standards of Leadership

We should maintain a lofty, but not arrogant, stance in the face of any kind of petty accusation and false standard. To speak for a moment to what appears to be (but fundamentally is not) a personal dimension to this, there is a fair amount of this kind of stuff that is directed against me—talk about being a "white chairman" and even more "low road" stuff. Well, first of all, I am not a "white" chairman—I don't seek to represent "white people" but the revolutionary interests of the proletariat and masses of people, of all nationalities, and not just in the U.S. but throughout the world. And second of all, it's just the wrong criterion. It doesn't have anything to do with what we're about and what we need to be about. And we shouldn't get thrown off by that kind of stuff. We should discuss the substance with people of what is involved here, what is the problem, what is the solution, what do the masses of people really need, where do their fundamental interests lie, how do you go about actually doing what needs to be done, and what are the criteria and standards, principles and methods that have to be applied in order to do that? We should struggle with people about *that*.It's not that we shouldn't listen to them or just wave away their questions or disagreements or even their accusations. But we should stick to the essence of what's involved here and not get thrown off by these things or dragged down into petty bullshit.

Mao said we should "toughen our skin." He meant it is necessary to listen to criticism, even when it is not raised in a good spirit. We should sift through and see if somebody has a point, even when they raise really raunchy shit. But we shouldn't get thrown off by it. We should stick to principle and stick to the essence of things, and stick to the criteria and standards that conform to what we're all about and need to be all about.

Now, as I've said before, there is a real need to continue to develop leaders, and people on all levels in the Party, from among the oppressed nationalities, from among proletarians as a whole, women as well as men. There is a need to win to revolution and communism and to train and to develop as revolutionary communist leaders many, many more proletarians, including many from the oppressed nationalities. And this is particularly important in terms of people from the new generations. This is an objective we should willingly and eagerly take up. We should bring

forward people from among those who have the most fundamental interest in the proletarian revolution. We should bring MLM home and bring people forward on that basis. We should also win revolutionary-minded intellectuals and people from all parts of society to MLM and recruit them into the Party. But, at the same time, it is really crucial to grasp that this must be done and can only be done on the correct basis, on the basis of winning people to communism and developing them as communists, and not on the basis of various trends—nationalism or other outlooks—which fall short of correctly analyzing reality and correctly identifying the problem and the solution. It can be done and must be done on the basis of MLM and MLM criteria and methods of leadership—and no others. Or else, what are we doing this for and for whom are we doing it?

In this connection, I wanted to refer back to the interview I did with Carl Dix, in particular the section *Leadership, the Right and the Wrong Standards and Criteria*.

> ***Carl Dix***: "What about moving on to this viewpoint that a yardstick, in fact the crucial yardstick against which revolutionary organization should be measured, is whether its leadership is predominantly people of color? And that if its leadership isn't predominantly people of color, then it's not going to be able to stay on the revolutionary road—that it's going to conciliate with the system and the white supremacy that this system is based on."
>
> ***Bob Avakian***: "Well, I think one thing that we have to face up to, just to come at it in a certain angle and be a bit provocative, if you want to put it this way: Anybody can sell out to the system who wants to. I don't care who you are, if you want to sell out, they'll find a way very quickly to enable you to sell out. So being of any particular nationality is not any guarantee against selling out. And also there are pressures on people and pulls on people to seek easy ways out which amount to giving up on the struggle, and this is going to true for any leadership, whatever its nationality, its gender, whatever.

That's one point, but...it's true that in the U.S.—and this is a general principle—that any revolution, as we've been talking about, has to bring forward as its backbone and driving force that class and those groups closely allied with it that have the most interest in and have the most strategic position for making such a revolution. In the U.S., that obviously involves a lot of people from the oppressed nationalities in the proletariat and people from other strata within the oppressed nationalities. That should be reflected in the vanguard party itself, including in its leadership, over any period of time. That is a basic truth. But, with all that, the essential thing is going to be—again it goes back to what's the line of the party, what is its analysis of objective reality? And I keep using this phrase—I heard somewhere or read somewhere that someone said if you go around using the phrase "objective reality" that in many circles you are immediately identified with the party. Because we do believe that there is such a thing as objective reality and that you have to base yourself on objective reality—not in a static way, but on what it is but also how it is changing, what is its motion and development. But if you don't begin from objective reality, then you are bound to go off the track somewhere.

If you are out of line with really understanding what's really going on in the world, what the real problem is and therefore what the real solution is, you are bound to get off the track and not be a real vanguard and not lead people to where they need to go, regardless of your gender or nationality or whatever. So, the most important thing is *line*—do you have a correct outlook and methodology for understanding the world and do you correctly apply it to come up with an actual analysis and programme that can lead to the solution to all this and can actually lead people in making revolution? And that takes revolutionaries drawn from anywhere—whether they're intellectuals, whether they're people from the proletariat, whatever, who take up the world outlook and methodology and line of the proletariat and apply it concretely to making

revolution as part of the overall world revolution, because we are part of a world revolution which involves people, nations and countries all over the world.

We need revolutionaries, all revolutionaries—of whatever nationality in particular, speaking to the nationality question—who take up and unite around that proletarian world outlook and method and apply it to develop that political line that corresponds to and leads forward to that kind of revolution. So, that's the decisive question: Is your leadership actually united on the basis of a correct line—understanding that not in some absolute metaphysical sense, that you develop a line and that is the end of it and you have nothing more to learn. It's not like that. Life is always changing, you are always learning more, there is always a contradiction between ignorance and knowledge, between what you understand and what you still have to learn. Conditions change. I mean, in an essential sense, in a basic sense, is your line correct and have you united revolutionaries as a vanguard force around that correct line? That's the essential question. And, on the basis of that line you should bring forward people from among the proletariat and among the oppressed nationalities in increasing numbers, and that's what our party is working to do and that's what we're doing."

Being First String

This leads me to, and lays a foundation for, another important point of orientation I want to speak to here. I think you've heard this phrase a number of times: "being first string" (as opposed to being "second string"). This is another metaphor drawn from sports of course. But it has great relevance to what we're all about.

As I was saying earlier, we need some of that old spirit of the Black Panther Party, with their challenge to "relate to vanguard," although we do need to understand and apply that not in a sectarian way but as part of actually *being* the vanguard in the correct sense—taking responsibility for everything that is required in order to wage and win the struggle through which the masses of people emancipate themselves. Certainly there are positive aspects of this BPP orientation that we need to also apply, boldly. We need to be first string. This is not a matter of going around with your chest puffed out and trying to gangster people into following you, or whatever. But, once again, it's a matter of objective reality: this is what we objectively are, the vanguard party of proletarian revolution in the U.S. And we're not going to be anything less, because this is what's needed and this is the responsibility that we need to assume.

Now, there was a negative aspect in how the BPP at times put forward "relate to the vanguard." There was an aspect in which that did get applied to mean essentially: "We're it, and you've got to follow us, whatever we say." We have to learn from that, but as a negative example. We don't want to fall into that, for all the reasons that I've been talking about. But we do need an understanding on our own part—and we do need to convey it, in the correct way, to particularly the advanced masses, but also more broadly—that this is the vanguard, this is the leadership, this is the program, this is the line. And, yes, there are a lot of things we don't know, including some very important things about how to actually make revolution. So we have a lot of work to do and a lot to learn from a lot of people and a lot of experience. But objectively we are the vanguard—and we need to assume the responsibility that implies, in the fullest sense. That's what it means to be first string.

We need the correct side of that BPP orientation. We need some of that spirit that they had, which was very infectious, in a good way. Yes, especially advanced revolutionary-minded people should "relate to the vanguard"—we should work in the correct way to bring them forward, to develop their partisanship for our Party and to bring them into the Party. If we don't do that, then what are we doing? And what are we doing everything for? It's not that we can turn aside from all the other struggles and immediate tasks and just concentrate on building the Party. But if we don't pay attention to that in its own right, and if we don't in the correct way integrate it into everything we're doing, then we've forgotten our fundamental objectives and our whole reason for being. We should be very bold about

putting forward the Party and building it as the vanguard, because that is what is required—that conforms to the fundamental needs and interests of the masses of people.

Now, some people say, in response to this (or just in general), that our Party is after all small, it doesn't have that much of a following and influence. This, too, was spoken to in the interview with Carl Dix, where it discusses what influencing and leading "masses" means in different situations—in a non-revolutionary situation, it may mean influencing and leading thousands; while in a revolutionary situation, it involves millions, even tens of millions—and what are the correct criteria for evaluating whether a party is actually a vanguard. And applying the criteria in that interview, at every point we should be straining against the limits in building the ranks of the Party as well as developing the struggle overall with our strategic revolutionary objectives as our fundamental guidepost.

We should never be complacent. First of all, there's not that much reason for us to be complacent: there are great challenges before us, great obstacles to be overcome, much work to be done and struggle waged to make the "impossible" possible—revolution right within the most powerful and murderous imperialist power. And second of all, even if there were more reason, we still shouldn't be complacent. Mao said that, even when China objectively becomes a great power, we should never have great power chauvinism. Well, no matter what gains are made, and especially when in the future the revolutionary movement has made great advances and the seizure of power has become the order of the day, complacency is the last thing that is needed! We should never adopt bourgeois methods or the bourgeois world outlook of seeking to turn anything and everything into capital, even the gains of the revolutionary struggle.

Our orientation must always be one of contributing all we can to the emancipation of the masses of people, not just in the U.S. but worldwide. As Mao said, "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently." That's definitely true today, including in terms of building the Party and expanding its influence as well as its organized ties among the masses of many different strata. But, again, the point of all this is to enable us to continually strengthen our ability to fulfill our responsibilities as the vanguard, to lead the masses to liberate themselves through increasingly conscious revolutionary struggle.

Now, it is very important to grasp what a struggle it has taken to maintain this Party as a living force persevering on the revolutionary road and persevering in our strategic orientation of bringing forward the proletariat as the backbone of the revolution and building the united front under the leadership of the proletariat. Sometimes we can lose sight of that, because there are so many things that cry out to be done, and so many shortcomings we do have that we have to strive to overcome. But let's step back for a second and look at it objectively. It is tremendously important that there is our Party in the U.S. at this time—that it has not just been preserved but that it has persevered on the revolutionary road. There were a lot of MLM forces (or things approximating that) which came out of the '60s. And none of them except our Party persevered on the revolutionary road and continued to advance on that road—even with twists and turns and even with setbacks. That is hardly insignificant. We should not underestimate the significance of that and what it has taken to do that. That's not a minor achievement for our class and our cause. Of course, if we don't do anything with it, then it doesn't mean anything. But we ourselves should not fail to recognize the importance of such a Party, with such an orientation—a Party that has accumulated valuable experience and summed up crucial lessons, a Party that is carrying out active work among the proletariat and basic masses as well as other sections of the people, based on that line and orientation.

The fact that this Party exists and is working in this way, with this orientation and these revolutionary objectives, right within the belly of the beast itself—right within "the world's only superpower"—this is a great thing for the people of the world. And, again, this is not a matter of being complacent or turning this into capital or anything like that—this

is objective reality, this is part of objective reality that we should recognize, in the correct way, with the correct orientation and objectives. Otherwise, we're not going to build on it and we're not going to make leaps and advances that are urgently needed. We should grasp the potential not only for the revolutionary movement to grow in a general sense but the potential for it to grow by leaps and bounds at critical junctures, and for the number of people brought forward by the Party and the Party itself to make qualitative leaps, to even increase geometrically with the intensification of and qualitative leaps in the objective situation, combined with our work to maximize our gains and wrench the most freedom for our side out of this whole tumultuous situation. All of this, of course, is highlighted very sharply now with the whole imperialist juggernaut of war and repression with which we are confronted.

And if, as a matter of fact, our Party is not as big as it should be, even now, and if our influence and our organized ties are not as extensive as they should be —which they are not—the answer is to go out and actively work to build our Party, as a decisive part of our work to build the all-around struggle with our strategic revolutionary objectives in mind. Or again, what are we doing all this for? What are we motivated by? What are we guided by? We have to set our sights high in this crucial aspect too. To use a phrase from Mao that I have cited a number of times, we should strive for greatness in this, not of course for ourselves or for our Party in a narrow sectarian sense, but yes for the Party as the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle in the U.S. and for the world revolution. We must do this in a systematic and bold way, step by step, but also through leaps, particularly in those times when contradictions become concentrated and greater numbers of people are being called into political life, where many are questioning and growing numbers are feeling compelled to act in opposition to the whole direction of things. And of course our all- around work, including systematically and boldly bringing forward our Party's revolutionary program and building our Party, can not only "swim within that growing sea" of people but can contribute to the expansion of that sea and to its positive turbulence, to put it that way.

Keeping Our Sights High

It is crucial to grasp all this firmly and to recognize and rise to the challenges and responsibilities that are involved, including the challenge of not just being an activist or even a leader among the masses, as important as that is; and not just being a dedicated active Party member, as important as that is; but contributing as much as possible in the realm of theory as well as practice and daring to develop as a Party leader as well. This is important for all comrades, but it has particular importance in terms of revolutionaries from the newer generations. And there is a daring involved. Harking back to what was said earlier, the ability to lead, and in particular to meet the challenge of providing all-around leadership to the vanguard, to be a Party leader, is something that is not innate, certainly not genetic, nor something that only some people are constitutionally or genetically able to do, or more capable of doing than others. Notions of that kind are a reflection of the bourgeois world outlook. Everyone's orientation should be to contribute as much as they can and to continue struggling to develop the ability to contribute more and to develop as communist leaders among the masses and leaders of the Party.

Not all leaders will be or are the same in their individual experiences, and the social context in which those experiences take place varies; and they're not all going to be the same in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. And, it wouldn't be good if they were all the same. We'd be like they portray us—a bunch of automatons who are cut out of a cookie mold—everyone acts exactly the same. I read a report recently which recounted how someone said to one of our people: "You guys always say the same thing." Well, in one sense that's true, because we have a unified line. We should explain that to people openly. This is why, in one sense, we "all say the same thing." On the other hand, it better not be true that we all literally say the same thing. We shouldn't be interchangeable, so that, if you go and talk to any Party member about anything, you get exactly the same answer. That

would be a real problem. Of course, it would be difficult, not to say impossible, to make that happen, but it would also be very undesirable if it were possible. And we don't even want tendencies in that direction. We want living people who, yes, carry out the Party's unified line in a fundamental and overall sense, but who also take a lot of initiative and are immersed among the masses of people, explaining things to people and learning from people in a living way, according to the actual dynamics of how that happens, with many individuals contributing on all kinds of levels and in all kinds of different ways. But with all of our individual qualities and different strengths and weaknesses, we should all strive to keep developing, we all need to keep advancing and learning more from each other, and from others broadly, and struggling in a good way within the Party and with others we are working with in building the struggle.

Again, as Marx said, we have to pick ourselves up when we make mistakes and learn from our mistakes, rise from the dust, brush it off and go forward again—even from devastating defeats like the reversal of the revolution and the restoration of capitalism in China, as well as lesser setbacks. We also have to build on our strengths and achievements and go forward.

And, when people raise criticism of us, we have to toughen our skin, because after all this is not about us personally. When people criticize us, or even when they wildly attack us—attack our Party or leaders of our Party—this is not a personal matter. Such attacks are not fundamentally directed at us for particular personal qualities we have (or don't have); they are motivated by political and ideological concerns and are an expression of a political and ideological line that is different from and in some cases fundamentally opposed to the communist world outlook and the communist revolution. And, in dealing with all this, we have to strive to continually maintain a largeness of mind, to be guided by a profound sense of the needs and interests of the masses of people, throughout the world, and the revolutionary cause that corresponds to those needs and interests.

We have to train the masses to set their sights high too. All this tabloid shit that is promoted everywhere—the "tabloidization" of "popular culture" and the mass media—that's designed to drag the masses down in the mud. And, very significantly, there is a definite correlation: generally speaking, the tabloid media that are the most scandal-mongering are also the most overtly reactionary. What they're going after and how they go after it—it's often very overtly reactionary. And that's useful, because it shows the connection.

All this drags the masses down and makes them believe that they're all degraded and debased—or maybe you're a little bit better than the other one, so you can point your finger and shout at them and get into acting like a virtual lynch mob. This is meant to degrade people in many ways. We have to help the masses raise themselves above this shit, just as we ourselves must continue to approach things from a high plane, even while we're toughening our skin and listening to not only friendly criticism but whatever shit is thrown at us—to sift through it and find out if there are any nuggets amidst all the shit, as unpleasant as that may be. We have to do that in order to actually carry out our responsibilities as the vanguard. At the same time, strategically we have to remain above the mud and the shit, and we have to help the masses rise up above all that the ruling class tries to drag them down into. That is part of the proletariat fitting itself to rule, part of the vanguard fitting itself to carry out its responsibilities as the vanguard—to keep our eyes on the prize, keep our sights raised up, and to raise others' sights to a vision of a radically different and better world and to the revolutionary struggle to make that a reality.

To conclude on the basic point here—and to underline what is actually at stake in whether or not the masses have a vanguard party, and in how that party carries out its revolutionary responsibilities—I want to refer to the following principle I stressed in the interview with Carl Dix:

> "There are these divisions that the historical development of society has brought into being and which capitalism reinforces, not

only spontaneously but also by the operation of the ruling class and the institutions of power. These divisions can only be overcome through the advanced forces who have a fundamental understanding of the nature of the problem, and the solution, uniting together as a vanguard force to go out among the masses and bring them forward around this line and programme. Without that, there may be other people who are capable of developing other theories but there will be no revolution, and whatever changes in society are in fact brought about, the masses of people will be left out of it. And you can speak in the name of the masses of people all day long and rail against leadership all day long in the name of the masses, or in the name of some other principle, but if you don't actually recognize the need for leadership, and the fact that it flows out of the very contradictions of the society you're seeking to overturn and transform, then you're going to leave the masses entirely out of the equation and there's not going to be a revolution and certainly not one that leads to the emancipation of the broad masses of people."

Part 12: Going Against the Tide—Knowing Which Tide to Go Against

One of the last points I want to speak to is the question of going against the tide. This is another thing that can involve complex contradictions. In the course of the Cultural Revolution in China, and particularly in the last great battle Mao led against the revisionists who were taking the capitalist road, it was popularized that "going against the tide is a Marxist principle." Well, that's true. And, unfortunately, this stood out when that last great battle was lost, shortly after Mao died, and the revisionists succeeded in pulling off a coup and restoring capitalism in China. This put communists everywhere to a real test—especially those who had looked to Mao's leadership for inspiration—and confronted us with the necessity of "going against the tide"—refusing to be taken in by and to go along with those revisionists, who for a time were pretending to be upholding Mao's line and continuing on the socialist road.

I have told the story before about how the *Guardian* newspaper in the U.S. related to this. The *Guardian* was sort of the "left flank" of the revisionists in the U.S. during the upsurge of the 1960s and into the '70s. (You know how sometimes a motorcycle has a sidecar on it; well, the *Guardian* was more or less the "left sidecar" of the revisionist motorcycle, and its role was to "sweep along" those who were repulsed by the rank revisionism of the CP, USA but had not ruptured with the same sort of politics and ideology.) The *Guardian* wrote basically gleeful articles when China went revisionist. And when our Party did not come out in support of the revisionist coup in China, the *Guardian* wrote snotty articles about how we had been snubbed by the new Chinese leadership, and that's why we weren't supporting this new leadership. The truth (and the "chain of events") was exactly the opposite of that.

The truth was that, from the time this coup happened, while some others were rushing to embrace it—and were therefore being invited to China and shown in publications from China expressing their support for the revisionists—our Party recognized that this was a momentous development that required us to involve the whole Party in studying and grappling deeply with what was going on in China, what was represented by the different forces—those who had won out and seized control of the government, and those whom they had crushed and were denouncing as "the gang of four and their followers"—and what the implications were, for the masses of people in China and throughout the world, of what was happening in China. And it was because we did not rush to embrace what was happening in China that we quickly got on the "shit list" of the new rulers there.

The Coup in China

Now, at the very beginning, right after the coup, the general feeling in the leadership of our Party was that what was happening in China was very bad, that it represented the triumph of the revisionists and the defeat of the revolutionaries in the Chinese leadership and would result in the reversal of the revolution, the destruction of socialism and the restoration of capitalism. But, after a little while, when it became clear that those we had all identified as revisionists were consolidating their hold on power and that "the gang of four and their followers" had been decisively defeated, a group within the leadership of our Party started expressing support for those who had won out. (We later dubbed this group within our Party "Mensheviks," because their outlook, position, and methods were similar to the grouping by that name in Russia who opposed the socialist revolution led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks).

These Mensheviks in our Party took this position for essentially two reasons: First, they adopted the classical pragmatic approach and method that is a hallmark of the American bourgeoisie in particular—in essence, their reasoning came down to: these people won, so they must be right, and the "gang of four" lost, so they must be wrong. And, secondly, it turned out that, as it became more and more clear that the revisionists, now that they had seized

power, were abandoning and trashing the revolutionary line and policies that had been developed under Mao's leadership to build socialism in China, and were replacing this with policies that amounted to adopting capitalist methods and encouraging foreign capitalist investment—and everything that goes along with that—these Mensheviks within our Party found this to their liking, they upheld it as the more "practical" course. (They could recognize in Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the revisionists, a kindred spirit—after all it was Deng Xiaoping who had declared, with regard to developing China's economy, that it didn't matter by what means, socialist or capitalist, this was done—it doesn't matter whether a cat is a white cat or a black cat, he insisted, as long as it catches mice.) So a major struggle developed within our Party—which was concentrated in the Party leadership—which finally resulted in the defeat of this Menshevik/revisionist line and in our Party publicly coming out in opposition to the revisionist coup and capitalist restoration in China.

Now, as I said, those of us who were strongly inclined to believe, from the first, that the "smashing of the gang of four and their followers" represented nothing less than a revisionist coup, also recognized that this was a very momentous development, and that it was necessary to develop a whole process in which these questions would be deeply investigated, studied, and wrangled with on all levels of our Party. And, as part of this process, we did have a delegation go over to China, shortly after the coup. But how we approached this didn't please the revisionists, because the assignment of this delegation was to go and investigate and learn —not take a position one way or the other, not get drawn into supporting or opposing what was going on, because our Party hadn't resolved this yet, and this delegation's role was part of the process that would lead to that resolution, to our drawing conclusions and taking a position. And there is something very valuable, in terms of principles and methods, that can be learned from how the comrade who was leading this delegation handled things—the trip as a whole and the interaction with Chinese officials.

I remember this comrade recounting how, after the Chinese officials had taken them to various places and tried to show them how everything was very stable and everybody was following the new leadership and its policies, a dinner was held at the end of the visit. And during this dinner, one of these Central Committee members of the Chinese Party stands up and says, to the head of our delegation: "Well, you've been to many places around China. All the foreign press is saying how much tumult and turmoil and upheaval there is in China, that there's no stability. What is your opinion?" And the leader of our delegation replied: "Well, everywhere you've taken us, everything seems to be very stable." And the more you think about that, the more you'll recognize the brilliance of that answer, especially in the context where the delegation had the assignment not to take a position one way or the other but to investigate, and where there was obviously a tremendous amount of pressure to go along with and express support for the revisionists (and there were members of our Party on that delegation who supported the position of the Mensheviks in our leadership, who were factionalizing and pushing that the delegation should come out in support of the new leaders of China).

Because of the principles and methods we applied and the approach we took, that was the last time our Party was invited to send a delegation to China. But we didn't base our stand on whether we got invited there or not. We based it on our analysis of what was represented by the opposing forces and their lines and programs, and what this meant for the masses of people and the revolutionary struggle not just in China, or in the U.S., but throughout the world. And we got "disinvited" to China because of this approach and because of the position we ended up taking on the basis of this approach. But that didn't bother people like the editors of the *Guardian,*because to them—as to the Mensheviks who had been in our own Party, and to opportunists in general—truth is not really important. In his great philosophical work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin criticized the notion of "truth as an organizing principle." This is a notion closely akin to pragmatism—it says in essence that truth is what is useful to you, and that you declare something to

be true in order to make certain things happen which are desirable to you. In other words, this is the opposite of the scientific understanding that truth is the correct reflection of objective reality, and the opposite of the scientific method of seeking to determine what is and what is not objectively true, what does and does not accurately reflect objective reality. Notions of this kind—"truth as an organizing principle" and related subjectivist and pragmatic approaches and methodologies—cannot lead to determining what is actually true; and, especially when confronted with momentous events, which have profound effects and implications, applying such a methodology and approach can only lead to disastrous results. And the danger posed by such a methodology and approach is all the greater when there are strong pulls and powerful pressures to go along with something because it has won out (at least in the short run) and can point to its victory as proof that it represents what is true and what is good.

So, going against a tide of that kind is extremely important. It was obviously important for our Party to take the stand we did in opposition to the revisionist coup and capitalist restoration in China. That our Party took this stand—along with some other groups and parties in various parts of the world—was of crucial importance for the international movement, which was frankly in a great deal of disarray at the time, splintering in all kinds of directions in the face of what was objectively a devastating setback. It is only on the basis of taking that basic stand and decisively drawing the line of demarcation between revolution and counter-revolution, between Marxism and revisionism, that it has been possible to maintain, and to rally forces to, the communist standard, to undertake and to make important advances in regrouping and building the unity of genuine communist forces throughout the world, to unite the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and to continue the struggle to win other forces to this banner.

Going Against the Tide and Making Mistakes

The question of going against the tide can also be very complicated and tricky. This is something the revolutionaries in the Chinese Communist Party also pointed out: going against the tide is a Marxist principle, but first of all you have to be correct in knowing what a tide represents, and whether you should swim with it or against it. And it is a fact that, in the history of our Party, and before that in the struggle to form the Party, there have been important instances of correctly going against the tide. The stand we took on China—and the process and methods through which our Party arrived at that position—is one example. And, before that, the way in which, particularly during the early 1970s, we struggled against nationalist tendencies within the communist movement—correctly distinguishing between even the most radical or revolutionary form of nationalism and the internationalist ideology of communism, and distinguishing between forms of nationalism that could play a positive role and be united with in the mass movement overall and what was necessary as the basis of unity for a communist vanguard—was decisive in being able to form a Party that was truly founded on communist principles and could actually represent and lead the proletariat and masses of people in accordance with their fundamental revolutionary interests. But this was not easy and was accomplished only through very difficult and wrenching struggle: nationalist tendencies within the communist movement, broadly defined, represented at that time a very powerful tide that was not easy to go against but was crucial to go against in order to forge a communist vanguard out of all the revolutionary upheaval of that period.

But it is also objectively true that we have not been correct in every instance in which we have gone against a tide. For a long time, in the face of a lot of opposition and criticism, our Party clung to a line on the homosexuality question which we have now summed up was incorrect. And, believe me, we didn't stick to this for opportunist reasons—because it was making things easier for us. We didn't win a lot of favor among a lot of people for sticking to

that position. So we were going against the tide—and, in this case, we were wrong. Now, in fact, some aspects of the tide we were going against were also wrong, and particularly as we developed and made some changes in our line on this (even while it was not yet fundamentally changed), some of what we were identifying as pivotal in evaluating this question was more correct than the way others were approaching it. Most importantly, our understanding that the woman question (the role of women in society, and the struggle to uproot their oppression and bring about their full emancipation) must be put at the center of any analysis of intimate relations—this was and remains a very crucial point of orientation. And it must be said that some criticisms of our position involved significant distortion of what that position actually was. But, even so, for some time our position, despite some important positive elements, was not essentially correct, and many of the criticisms raised were valid.[19]

This is an illustration of the fact that the question of going against the tide can be complicated. It's important to go against the tide, but most important, once again, is what is objective reality, what's true, what's right and what's wrong. What's the correct line? What is the correct understanding of reality and how to transform it in line with the interests of the proletariat and the masses of people? Going against the tide can be a very important thing, a very good thing. But if the tide you're going against is more correct than you are, that's obviously not good.

Sometimes it's not easy to determine this. In some cases it takes time to sort these things out. And sometimes it takes longer than it should—for objective and some subjective reasons. Mistakes that you're making in approach and methodology may keep you from recognizing that your position on something is erroneous. You know, sometimes you can't win for losing—you're persisting in a mistake that you don't realize is a mistake and it kind of goes around in a circle and maintains itself. You should realize it, but until certain things develop you don't realize it. And what do you do when you recognize that you have been wrong? Do you hang your head and say, "Well, now we can't be a vanguard because we made this mistake?" No. That would be compounding a mistake with an even greater mistake. That might make some people happy but, to use that phrase, it would not make the proletariat and the masses of people in the world happy if we were to do that. If we were to fold up our tents because we made mistakes, even serious mistakes, and say, "we're not capable of being a vanguard," that would make the bourgeoisie and reactionaries (and perhaps some other people) very happy, and it might make some people relieved, but it would be a terrible thing for the proletariat and masses of people.

This is really the point: if we make a mistake, including a big mistake, we should confront it honestly. This is why I have stressed that we need to keep listening to the criticisms and the "interrogation" of others, and we need to keep interrogating ourselves so we don't repeat mistakes, so we learn from mistakes we've made, whether big or small, and find the means for avoiding those mistakes or minimizing them. Because we're not going to be able to avoid mistakes altogether, even some serious mistakes. There is another unity of opposites. You could say: "Well, we can't avoid mistakes, so what's the big deal?" You could use that as a rationalization for doing anything and not taking responsibility for it. "Well, you know, it's an historical law—you're going to make mistakes, people aren't perfect, vanguards aren't perfect. So what's the big deal?" No—that is just a cop-out. On the other hand, once again, we can't be paralyzed by our mistakes and we can't be paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes. But if we become good at interrogating ourselves and listening to the interrogation and criticism of others, if we learn

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[19] See "On the Position on Homosexuality in the New Draft Programme," as well as the section in the Draft Programme itself (pp. 21-22) and the appendices "The Proletarian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women (pp. 103-107) and "Proletarian Morality—A Radical Rupture with Tradition's Chains" (pp. 134-140, especially pp. 138-39). Available at rwor.org or from Revolution Books stores and outlets.

from our mistakes—not only the particular content of a particular mistake, but what went into that mistake, the methodology, the ideological errors—if we're willing to take responsibility for everything, even in that sense, then we can minimize our mistakes on the one hand, and we can correct them more readily and enable everyone else to learn from our mistakes as well—which is also part of our responsibility.

We don't do self-criticism as a gimmick or meaningless ritual. Whenever we make mistakes, people suffer. Whenever anybody who influences other people makes mistakes, people suffer from those mistakes. There's no getting around that. If you are a party that's seeking to do what we're seeking to do and trying to have as much influence as we can have, if you make mistakes people suffer. That's a reality. Do we feel bad about that? Of course. Do we wish it weren't the case that we made those mistakes? Yes, without question. We should learn very deeply from our mistakes and do our very best to minimize our mistakes, to not repeat them, and to learn—and help others to learn—as much as possible from mistakes we do make.

We should continue interrogating ourselves, even when we think we're doing very well, and listen with an open mind when people tell us we're not doing right, even if we're pretty damn sure that they're wrong. There have been occasions when we have been pretty sure we were right about something, and we've been proven wrong, and then there are a lot of times we've been pretty sure we were right about something and we *were* right, even when everybody was carping at us and taking snipe shots at us. But that's the key question: are you right or not? Or are there aspects of something that you should change even while you're essentially right? Or are you essentially wrong about something? Or were you right but then things have changed, and if you cling to something, you will go from being right to being wrong?

We cannot be complacent and have a passive, "everything is everything" approach—"it's all good"—"it's all part of the experience," as the Chevy Chase character said in the movie *Christmas Vacation*, when his daughter was freezing because he had dragged the family out in the snowy wilderness to cut down a Christmas tree. We can't have that attitude: people suffer because of what we do—"no big thing, it's all part of the experience." No. But, in another sense, it is all part of the process. We are going to make mistakes, and we can't be paralyzed by fear of making mistakes, or even the fact that inevitably if we make mistakes people will suffer because of that. And we definitely cannot cease to be the vanguard, and to rise to the responsibility that requires, just because we've made mistakes that people have suffered from. Again, as Mao said, the important thing is to be good at learning—learning from our mistakes, as well as what we do right, and learning from the criticism of others, having an open mind and assimilating whatever we can recognize as correct in their criticisms. That is an essential part of being a vanguard.

Part 13/Conclusion: The Challenges We Must Take Up

In moving to a conclusion, there are some challenges that we face, to which I want to call particular attention. First is the very basic challenge of how to actually make revolution in a country like the U.S.—how to give the fullest expression to the desire of millions and millions of people for another world, especially when that becomes manifest in determined militant uprising against the system—how to enable them to make the leap to becoming a conscious, organized, revolutionary force that is capable not only of resisting the powerful and vicious suppression that the ruling class will unleash against it, but of actually defeating and breaking the power of that ruling class and its machinery of bloody suppression. Meeting this challenge will require not just relying on the same "usual suspects" to figure things out but also bringing forward whole new layers of people, including from among the younger generations, to take responsibility for this as well.

There is a need for people to take up the challenge of studying and grappling with this question in the realm of theory—because that's where things are at, at this point. There is a need for new insights and new thinking, as well as for building on what has already been learned or grappled with.

Anybody who thinks for ten seconds about making revolution in a country like the U.S. knows that it is a daunting task, given the whole history of aggression and suppression that the imperialist ruling class has written in the blood of others. And, frankly, most people who have confronted this have given up. I'm not exaggerating. But there is a need not to give up—the masses, throughout the world and, yes, within the U.S. itself, need this. So we must not only *not* give up, we have to break through on this contradiction. And we can't do it without the masses of people. We can't do it until we have a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary people. But when there is such a situation, when masses of people are in motion, waging determined struggle and demanding a new and different world, they must not be left to the mercy of this ruling class, and they must not be left without a way to win. So that, obviously, is one big challenge.

And another, closely related, big challenge is how to build not just our Party but the movement of opposition as a whole in such a way that it is not crushed by the increasingly repressive actions of the ruling class, even before things get to the point where a complete, radical change in society becomes possible—so that resistance to the policies, and to the repression, of the ruling class is able to continue, even in the face of heightening repression, and so that the revolutionary trend is able to gain strength and momentum through all this.

Rising to the Challenges

I was recently reading an article by Jonathan Turley. He is a constitutional law professor who, as a matter of fact, is on the conservative side of things. He wrote this really heavy article, which I believe first appeared on the *L.A. Times* website (and which has been extensively quoted in the *RW*).

Turley's article was a real broadside against Ashcroft. He spoke to the fact that Ashcroft has come up with this plan for designating not only foreign residents, but citizens of the U.S. as well, enemy combatants and putting them in concentration camps, essentially. Turley was clearly upset that this has been little talked about—his feeling was that this should be creating a furor and it hasn't. And he said: Al-Qaida is a threat to our life and security, but Ashcroft is a threat to our freedoms. This is a pretty heavy thing coming from a bourgeois constitutional lawyer of conservative bent. What he's pointing to is heavy—what Ashcroft and the whole political leadership of the ruling class, as concentrated in the Bush administration now, has on its agenda—and what's also heavy is the way Turley is calling this out and saying there are times in history when people have to stand up for principle and for freedom, and this is one of those times.

Beyond Turley himself, obviously this reflects something very big. If you think about that and the

implications of it, this clearly underlines the challenges that are going to be faced by our Party—and more broadly in terms of building the movement of resistance, in the context of this whole juggernaut of war and repression that has been unleashed by Bush, Ashcroft, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice and the rest. This poses a truly profound challenge for us. And this, in turn, is dialectically related to enabling the resistance movement as a whole to not only withstand repression but to grow and become stronger even in the face of this repression and to draw ever broader layers of society into active and determined resistance to the whole direction in which the ruling class, and its dominant core now, is taking society and the world.

These are not abstract or "academic" questions. And, once again, we are not going to solve this with just the same old "usual suspects" working on it. We need the leadership of the "usual suspects," but we need many more people from the Party—and, in various ways, people more broadly—to help solve this contradiction and to be able to successfully wage a very crucial component of the class struggle—to resist this repression and not just to survive it but to advance in the face of it, to broaden and deepen the resistance to this whole juggernaut and to develop the revolutionary struggle against the system which has given rise to it. So, here again, there is a need to draw forward new people, people from the new generations, people with new insights, people who would look at these contradictions and examine them from some different angles than the "usual suspects" would be more accustomed to doing.

This is another real challenge that's before the whole Party, but keeping in mind everything I've been speaking to, it is not just a matter for our Party. This is a matter of tremendous consequence for the proletariat, for the masses of people in this country and throughout the world. We could try to walk away from this—we still might not save our own individual asses, but if we tried to walk away from it, it would make a tremendous difference to the masses of people, in a negative way. And if we *don't* walk away from it, if we don't try to run and hide but we actually forge the means for coming through this and defeating the bourgeoisie on this front as part of developing the overall revolutionary struggle, throughout the world, that will be a tremendous thing for the proletariat and masses of people—it will bring things that much closer to revolution, right within the most monstrous imperialist beast, as well as elsewhere—it will be a tremendous thing for the people of the world.

It is with that kind of orientation and understanding—taking things that seriously, and recognizing what's on us, in that sense—that we have to rise to these challenges. I've said this before: sometimes, we feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders. And, in a real sense, it is. So this is what we have to be up for. It is on our shoulders—but not ours alone. There are the masses of people, not just in the U.S. itself but throughout the world; there is the international proletariat, there is the international communist movement, and in particular the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement. But those who have an understanding of what is at stake, who grasp the fundamental nature of the problem and the solution, have particular responsibilities that must be taken up with a sense of urgency and determination.

This is the nature of what we're seeking and setting out to do—because it needs to be done—not because it's a whim or a fancy of ours, or something that was fashionable at a time and some of us just can't give it up. This is what is demanded by the conditions of the people in the world and by the tendencies of the contradictions in the world and where they need to go and where we have to struggle to take them. We have to be up for this. This is what's on us, and we have to willingly and enthusiastically take it on. So let me just end with that. With this understanding and orientation, we should have a conquering spirit, and in this way we should be on a mission.